

BUILD UP OF CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS: AGITATIONAL POLITICS IN MALABAR

N. Sasidharan

Abstract: The objective of this paper is to explore the origins of radicalism in the politics of Kerala in the first half of the last century as forces that give support to the Communist Party of India (Marxist). This paper is based on the hypothesis that the ‘social and political radicalism’ in Kerala originated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This was due to the impact of modernisation and became what could be termed as Kerala sub- nationalism. An examination of the caste system, land relations and even the nineteenth century religious revival is necessary for a proper study of the radicalism.

Keywords: radicalism, politics of Kerala, Communist Party of India (Marxist), Kerala sub-nationalism, nineteenth century religious revival

In Malabar, the Indian National Congress was an organisation of ‘ex-Rajas’, ‘rich landlords’ and ‘rich kanamdars’ till 1930. Though the ‘Salt Satyagraha’ and ‘Civil Disobedience Movement’ activated the Congress, the large majority - the non-caste Hindus still believed that the British rule was better than the caste Hindu domination because, the Britishers did not practice casteism and untouchability. The Congress leaders like K. Kelappan and A.K. Gopalan felt the pulse of the people and decided at the Badagara Congress to start the ‘Temple Entry Movement’ and to organise the workers and peasants to broaden the mass base of the organisation. K. Kelappan, P. Krishna Pillai and A.K. Gopalan were the leading figures of the ‘Guruvayur Satyagraha’. A.K. Gopalan was the ‘volunteer captain’. By the time, the second ‘Civil Disobedience Movement’ started in 1932 all the young leaders, P. Krishna Pillai, A.K. Gopalan,

E.M.S. Namboodiripad, Moyyarth Sankaran etc., were arrested. They were true Gandhian Satyagrahis who conducted 'Satyagraha' even in jails. For them, jail was the school wherein revolutionary prisoners like K.N. Tiwari taught the primary lessons of 'Marxian Socialism'. When Gandhiji withdrew the 'Civil Disobedience Movement', the young political prisoners became disappointed and they were craving for a new method of political action, which they found in Socialism. Released from the prison, A.K. Gopalan and P. Krishna Pillai engaged in revitalising the 'Guruvayur Satyagraha'. The subsequent 'marches' made A.K. Gopalan popular throughout Kerala.

In the Cannanore jail, E.M.S. Namboodiripad, P. Krishna Pillai and others were forming a 'Socialist Group'. Already at the national level, the 'Congress Socialist Party' started working in 1934. During the 1934-'40 period, the C.S.P. unit in Kerala captured the K.P.C.C. and broadened its popular base by championing social issues and through organisation of workers and peasants. Slowly, the left controlled K.P.C.C. changed itself into the Kerala unit of the C.P.I. The economic crisis of 1929-'33 period was creating favourable climate for the growth of agitational politics of workers and peasants in Malabar. The Tenancy Act of 1930 was giving benefit only to the non-cultivating tenants.

The large majority cultivating tenants were subjected to exploitation. In 1935 they organised 'Karshaka Sangham' for collective bargain. During 1935-'39, the rural peasants of Malabar were organized behind the 'Sangham'. K.P. Gopalan, P. Krishna Pillai and A.K. Gopalan were mainly behind the organization of trade unions in Malabar. In May 1935 the C.S.P. coordinated the working of the trade unions. Later it was re-organised on industrial basis. The remarkable feature of the trade union movement of the time was, the 'peasant-worker cooperation'. Like the workers and peasants, the other working people like 'students', 'elementary school teachers', 'intellectuals' etc., were organised on class basis. Even children were organised under 'Balasanghams'. Thus by 1939, the entire left-minded people were organised by the C.S.P. as the ground work for the formation of the Communist Party of Kerala.

Early Congress Politics: Politics of Landlordism

In Malabar the Indian National Congress were not active till 1915. Even after 1915, it was not a party with mass support. It met only once in a year, passed a few resolutions and prorogued. Ex-Rajas and rich landlords were its patrons. Later

educated members of rich tenants called, 'Kanamdars' joined it, resulting in the decline of the landlord interests.¹ Still, the non-caste Hindus, most of whom were sub-tenants, agro-labourers and other workers were not attracted to the Congress activity. A statement of the General Secretary of the S.N.D.P. Yogam, Kumaran Asan makes the point clear:

Since the leadership of the Congress is with the caste-Hindus, the backward classes are reluctant to join it. The people of this land are suffering more from social oppression than from political oppression. If the caste-dominants get political power too, as popular representatives, the plight of other classes would be from 'the frying pan to the fire'. So, the workers of the Congress must make it truly a 'people's Congress'.²

The Sunday Congress of Chalappuram

The Mappila revolt of 1921 did irreparable damage to the Congress activity and to the mutual trust and love that existed between Hindus and Muslims.³ Since there was no full time working of the Party, A.K. Gopalan called it, "Sunday Congress of the lawyers of Chalappuram".⁴ The condition of the Congress was such that it could not function on its own. So it decided to form a 'Malabar United National Party'.⁵ But the boycott of the Simon Commission on its landing on 7 February 1928 gave a new agitational political atmosphere in India. In Kerala too, it gave new dynamism to the Congress. Mean while, the 'Complete Independence Resolution' was passed by the Lahore Congress in December 1929. It resulted in the nation wide observance of the 'Declaration of Independence' on 26 January 1930. Gandhiji started his historic 'Dandi March' on 1 March 1930. It awakened the people of India from Kashmir to Kanyakumari. Kerala too woke up to the clarion call.⁶

Salt Satyagraha

On 13 April 1930 the volunteers of 'Salt Satyagraha' under K. Kelappan started from Calicut by walking, reached Payyannur, and broke the Salt law. In December 1930 the Government declared the Kerala State Congress Committee illegal. Since then, the Congress agitators worked under 'Dictators'. There were six

such ‘Dictators’. At the time of the seventh Dictator, the ‘Gandhi- Irwin Pact’ was signed on 21 January 1931, one year after the beginning of the Salt-Satyagraha. The Pact gave limited freedom to the people, to ‘prepare salt’, and to ‘picket shops selling foreign goods and liquor’.⁷

Badagara Congress: ‘Temple Entry’ and ‘Trade Unions’

The Britishers could rule India because the Indian people were divided, disunited and the majority looked with suspicion on the minority. Until these factors of disunity were eradicated, India could not enjoy full freedom. The Muslims saw no difference between the British rule and the caste-Hindu domination. The non-caste Hindus considered the British rule better than the caste-Hindu domination because the former did not practice casteism and untouchability; allowed freedom of movement and education for all. During the ‘Civil Disobedience Movement’ of 1930 poor peasants of Malabar expressed this feeling. The Congress leaders like K. Kelappan realised that the Congress could get full support at the grassroot level only if it identified itself with the people and fought to redress their grievances.⁸

On 3-5 of May 1931 the K.S.C.C. was held at Badagara. It was presided by Sen Gupta. He revealed that 6000 volunteers were in jails throughout India and the ‘Gandhi – Irwin’ Pact was only a stop-gap arrangement and the Congress had to fight against the British for full freedom. It resolved to congratulate Abdul Rehman Sahib and Moidu Maulavi in making the ‘Civil Disobedience’ a success. It resolved to direct its committees to organise trade unions. The sixth resolution requested the caste-Hindus and the temple authorities to open temples to all Hindus. K. Kelappan the President of the K.S.C.C. attended the All India Congress Committee meeting in Bombay on 12 June 1931 and secured permission to start ‘Temple Entry Satyagraha’ in Kerala. On 3 August 1931 the K.S.C.C. resolved to start satyagrahas for temples to be opened to all Hindus. For that it was resolved to start satyagraha at the entrance of the Guruvayur temple on 1 November 1931.⁹

A.K. Gopalan was elected as the ‘Volunteer Captain’ of the ‘Guruvayur Satyagraha’. He explains the forces inside the Congress who opposed the agitation:

...Some Congress men did not like the idea of ‘Temple Entry’ agitation. They thought it would side track the Congress from its fight against imperialism. They viewed the ‘Harijan Movement’ as

communal. They wanted to destroy the communal organisations rather than reform it and thereby make it progressive. The 'Temple Entry' movement would make the caste-Hindus enemies of the Congress; this they thought would weaken the party. ...They did not understand that the fight against division and disunity is fight against imperialism, But, I was happy to start an agitation against conservative forces, which are difficult to be destroyed.¹⁰

A.K. Gopalan and Subrahmanian Thirumunbu went for propaganda work to north Malabar. They arranged for a public meeting at Payyannur. At a nearby place named, 'Kondoth', there was a Thiya temple. Through the adjacent road, the Harijans were not allowed to walk. It was decided to conduct a demonstration with Harijans through the road. On the way, the volunteers were cruelly beaten by the entire people of the locality. K. Keraleeyan and A.K. Gopalan fell unconscious. They were hospitalised and the condition of Keraleeyan was critical. It gave wide publicity to the 'Guruvayur Satyagraha'. Authorities reached Kondoth, erected a board declaring everyone's right to use the public road.¹¹ To start the satyagraha, a committee was constituted. A satyagraha camp was made near the temple. From the beginning, there was threat of violence against the volunteers. The so called 'nationalists' in the Congress, tore away their khadar clothes and the photograph of Mahatma Gandhi. They claimed it as their birth right to suppress the Harijans. Still, they were against foreign domination. At the same time, the entire country woke up and the poor came closer to the Satyagraha.¹²

A month before the beginning of the 'Guruvayur Satyagraha', a propaganda march of the volunteers started from Cannanore to Guruvayur. They walked all the way. Its captian was A.K. Gopalan. They belonged to all castes, from Namboodiri to Harijan. They ate and slept together. The long march and propaganda was creating a new political dynamism everywhere. At Guruvayur, the Satyagraha was inaugurated on 1 November 1931. The volunteers like A.K. Gopalan slept only two hours during the days of Satyagraha. They woke up at two a.m. At each temple gate, there were two volunteers. Every three hours, there was a shift of volunteers. The shift of Satyagrahis continued till midnight. Wearing Holy ashes on the forehead and in the appearance of a true devotee, Vishnu-bharatheeyan was reading the Bhagavat Gita and Bhagavatham and giving spiritual discourses. Volunteers were engaged in

spinning. Press started writing editorials and national leaders started visiting Guruvayur. Thus the 'Guruvayur Satyagraha' assumed national importance.¹³

When the 'Guruvayur Satyagraha' was proceeding, the national political developments compelled Gandhiji to announce the second 'Civil Disobedience Movement' on 3 January 1932. In the midnight of 4 January 1932, A.K. Gopalan, N.P. Damodaran and K. Kunjukrishnan were arrested and sent to the Cannanore jail. P. Krishna Pillai was arrested on the first day itself. E.M.S. Namboodiripad was arrested on 17 January at Calicut beach as the 'Congress Dictator'. This time, the prisoners were mostly common people with revolutionary fervour, ready to sacrifice anything for the cause.¹⁴

There was bad food, hard labour and severe torture in the jail. By wearing only a loin cloth, the prisoners were made to work under the scorching heat of the sun. Against it, P. Krishna Pillai and A.K. Gopalan organised the prisoners and agitated. On one Sunday, the two prisoners were beaten down by the police without any provocation. They fell unconscious for twelve hours, the police dragged them into a cell and shut them in. The news leaked out into the town and an angry mob rounded the prison. By the time, A.K. Gopalan and P. Krishna Pillai started 'Satyagraha' (hunger strike) in the cell. Though the jail authorities agreed for a compromise, A.K. Gopalan was secretly transferred to the notorious jail at Kadalur near Arcot. There he was shut in a cell together with lunatics.¹⁵

In the jail there were regular discussions on political events, on Gandhism, Marxism, achievements of the Russian revolution etc. Hindi classes were conducted by P. Krishna Pillai and others. There was a general feeling that the second Civil Disobedience would also be a failure. The prisoners used to read some books on socialism, smuggled into the prison. Some prisoners from outside Kerala, K.N. Tiwari, Kiran Das, Mukundlal Sarkar etc., taught the lessons of working class movements to Congressmen like, P. Krishna Pillai, E.M.S. Namboodiripad, K.P. Gopalan, A.K. Gopalan, K. Damodaran and others. On those days, E.M.S. wrote some pamphlets such as: A Brief History of Revolutions from French to the Russian, A Short History of the Egyptian Revolution, The Three Democratic Principles of Sun Yat Sen, Trotsky's History of the Russian Revolution etc.¹⁶

The 'MacDonald Award' on 16 August 1932 on communal problem in India made Gandhiji to start his 'fast unto death' on 20 September 1932 in the Yarvada jail. It resulted in the 'Poona Pact' of 26 September 1932. Subsequently, on 14 July 1933

Gandhiji called off the 'mass satyagraha'. It led to the natural death of the second 'Civil Disobedience Movement'. The Congressmen in Kerala too were released from jails. Due to severe torture, A.K. Gopalan came out as a sick man.¹⁷ With the 'Poona Pact', Gandhiji announced that he would set aside the rest of his life for the uplift of the depressed castes. The Pact caused a significant change in the subsequent policy of the Congress. After the Pact, the Government allowed Gandhiji freedom to work for the Harijans. A good number of Congress leaders like Rajaji withdrew from the Civil Disobedience. This gave the first indication of the looming shift in the political approach after the Civil Disobedience. As a result, two very clear and conflicting ideologies took shape within the Congress. The first view was that, the Congress should take only parliamentary means to achieve its objectives. The other view was that of 'leftist democracy and socialism'.¹⁸

The 'Guruvayur Satyagraha' went on at snail's pace. It created no results as far as the 'Temple Entry' was concerned. Around the temple, a fence was made, beyond it the agitators were denied movement. A.K. Gopalan and P. Krishna Pillai decided to vitalise the movement. Even for the Nayars, the 'Srikoil' of temple was unapproachable; they were denied the right to ring the bells and pray. Krishna Pillai entered the temple and started ringing the bell and praying. The temple guards, mostly, Nayars, rushed to Krishna Pillai and began beating him. Pillai said, "the courageous Nayar will ring the bells, the submissive Nayar will beat on his back". For crossing the fence erected round the temple, A.K. Gopalan was also severely beaten. He was beaten down; still the beating was not stopped. But the assault on A.K. Gopalan made the people angry. The temple guards were beaten in return. The violent people wanted to set fire to the temple. The priests and their assistants were afraid to go out. The temple was kept closed. In September K. Kelappan took an oath to fast unto death for the cause of 'Temple Entry'. Kelappan's fast created sensation throughout India. From all parts of Kerala, volunteers marched in procession to Guruvayur. But on the tenth day, Kelappan had to withdraw the fast due to the personal appeal from Gandhiji.¹⁹

A.K. Gopalan decided to make a political gain out of the popular stir created by the 'Guruvayur Satyagraha'. With twenty Satyagraha volunteers he decided to conduct a propaganda march to Cochin and Travancore. All over Cochin and Travancore, hearty welcome was given to the 'satyagrahis' under A.K. Gopalan. The Satyagrahis marched about 1000 miles. For rest, food and sleep stayed with common

people, ate their common food 'kanji', liquid food made of rice, established contact with thousands of families and spoke at five hundred meetings.²⁰ At Trivandrum a gathering of youths numbering 4000, led by Bodheswaran welcomed the volunteers. In the public meeting held, about 30,000 people gathered. There Pattom Thanu Pillai tried to speak, but he could not because the audience objected. They said, "You must not speak even a single word. Where were you during the time of picketing? We want only men of action, not speech makers". But when A.K. Gopalan said that 'he was not a good speaker, he and his friends were only forefront fighters of 'people's cause', the audience shouted "We want exactly that, we want speeches of such men". The public meeting at Trivandrum revealed how deeply common people liked A.K. Gopalan, though he was not an orator at that time. With the completion of the 'Guruvayur March', A.K. Gopalan became the loving hero of the people of Kerala.²¹

On way back from the south, A.K. Gopalan was arrested and detained in the Cannanore jail. Then he was shifted to the notorious prison at Bellari, a hell to the C class prisoners. There he was compelled to do hard labour like pulling the oil grinding roller. When he refused, they chained his whole body with 'Kol Chain'. Both legs were chained by iron rings of one inch thickness. From these chains were hung two iron rods of twenty pounds weight. Then he was shut in a solitary cell. A.K. Gopalan started 'nirahara satyagraha', ie., hunger strike, in the cell. On the seventh day Gopalan fell unconscious. He was hospitalised and afterwards shifted to the Vellor jail. This time, inside the prison, Gopalan had a through introspection of Gandhian methods of freedom struggle. He realised fully that the deprived castes were the real 'have nots'. Their interests were entirely different from the interests of the landlords and the wealthy capitalists. Even if temples were opened before the depressed, they could not go to the temples and offer prayers because their material conditions were such. So the real freedom movement appeared before A.K. Gopalan as the 'liberation of the working class'. By the end of 1933, A.K. Gopalan was released from the prison.²²

New Method of Action:

Marxian Socialism

The withdrawal of the 'Civil Disobedience Movement' in 1934 created frustration among the youths who suffered severely for the freedom struggle. They

craved for a new method of action, which ultimately led them to the ideology of Marxian Socialism. Soviet Union at that time emerged as the inspiring model in eradicating poverty, unemployment and other social and economic problems. Jawaharlal Nehru, after a visit to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in 1927, wrote a series of articles entitled, 'Wither India', in appreciation of the Soviet System. There was eagerness to study the Soviet System and to evolve a programme for India, suitable to her conditions. It was under this circumstance that the 'Congress Socialist Party' was formed in May 1934.²³

As in other parts of India, in Kerala too, the main stream of the 'Civil Disobedience Movement' was the youths of lower middle class - elementary school teachers, students, clerks, lawyers, small merchants etc. In Kerala, there was a rush of young men of partitioned Nayar joint families to the freedom struggle. At the same time, poor peasants and people of lower classes were not attracted toward the Congress. The Congress leadership failed to keep up the fighting fervour of the thousands of young men who sacrificed everything and rushed to the forefront of the agitation by the call of the Congress.²⁴

P. Krishna Pillai, K.P. Gopalan, E.M.S. Namboodiripad, K. Damodaran and other left oriented Congressman formed a socialist group when they were in the Cannanore jail. To E.M.S.:

...It was K.N. Tiwari, one of the youngest of the accused in the Lahore Conspiracy Case, who was convicted for life sentence, responsible for laying the seeds of left-wing Congress in Kerala, while in the Cannanore jail.²⁵

E.M.S. continues' "... Krishna Pillai was the acknowledged leader of the extremist group. I also happened to be in that group." The biographer of P. Krishna Pillai says that Krishna Pillai and K.P. Gopalan became members of the Bengal terrorist movement called, 'Anuseelan Samiti', and when they went out of jail, they started a branch of it in Malabar.²⁶

Formation of the Congress Socialist Party

At the national level, patriots released from jails met at Patna in May 1934, on a call from Jayaprakash Narayan and Acharya Narendradev. The delegate from Kerala was E.M.S. Namboodiripad. It was followed by the first National Conference

of the Congress Socialist Party in Bombay. It lasted from 21-24 October 1934. The two delegates from Kerala were, E.M.S. Namboodiripad and P. Krishna Pillai. But even before the Bombay Conference, a C.S.P. unit was formed in Kerala. It was held in the Calicut town hall. The meeting was presided over by K. Kelappan. C.K. Govindan Nayar was elected as the President and P. Krishna Pillai as the Secretary. Later Kelappan and Govindan Nayar severed relations with the left-wing and formed a right-wing in the K.P.C.C.²⁷

As far as the study of Communism in Kerala is concerned, the politics of Malabar during 1934-40' is very much important. During the period, the C.S.P. unit broadened its popular base, captured the K.P.C.C. and slowly changed itself to the unit of the Communist Party of India. The Congress which had only a membership of 3955 in 1935, rose to 30,674 in 1937, and it was further increased to 55,031 in 1938-'39.²⁸ This broad base of the Congress was built within a short period of five years by the C.S.P. In December 1939 when the Kerala unit of the C.P.I. was formed by P. Krishna Pillai, E.M.S. Namboodiripad, K.P. Gopalan, A.K. Gopalan and other C.S.P. leaders, with no difficulty, the popular base moved with them and became 'Communists'.²⁹

With the withdrawal of the 'Civil Disobedience Movement', the K.P.C.C met in 1934 at Calicut and elected A.K. Gopalan as the adhoc Secretary, for building a popular base for the Congress.³⁰ On 28 May 1935 at Calicut, the seventh State Political Conference was held. The meeting was presided over by a socialist-the editor of the 'Bombay Chronicle' - S.A. Brelvi. The influence of the C.S.P. was evidently clear throughout the conference. But the right-wing in the K.P.C.C. made a stiff resistance against the moves of the C.S.P. Along with the Political Conference, an 'All Kerala Socialist Congress' and a 'Labour Conference' were held. The socialist conference was presided over by Mrs. Maniben Kara.³¹

In all the meetings of the conference, resolutions passed were more or less in line with the programme of the C.S.P. All the resolutions were passed after heated exchange of arguments between the left and the right wing led by C.K. Govindan Nayar.³² The following resolutions were passed: 1. Requested the Government for speedy trial or immediate release of the detenus from Bengal and to give relief to their families, 2. Requested the Government to release the sick M.N. Roy from prison, 3. Accepted the resolution of the 'National Convention' of the C.S.P. against the rulers of the 'Native States' and the call to work for the improvement of the economic

conditions of the workers and peasants and to organise the people of 'Native States' for 'Responsible Government', 4. Wanted the Congress to oppose any war effort of the British Government, 5. Demanded the K.P.C.C. to organise the poor peasants of villages and help them to redress their grievances and to consider it as an integral part of the freedom struggle, 6. Called for starting an intense propaganda to make the poor and ignorant villagers aware of their real liberation, and 7. Directed the Congress to start a 'Study Centre' for political education of its workers.³³

The K.P.C.C. Secretary, A.K. Gopalan and the C.S.P. Secretary, P. Krishnan Pillai together conducted tour to organise the party throughout Malabar, Cochin and Travancore. New members were enlisted, public meetings were held even in southern areas like Neyyattinkara and Trivandrum. But the 'radical group' leaders like N.C. Sekhar were against strengthening the Congress, which to Sekhar was a bourgeois party.³⁴ In the 1935 K.P.C.C. election, the C.S.P. leaders secured majority. E.M.S. was elected as the K.P.C.C. Secretary. During the 1935, 1938, 1939 and 1940 periods, the K.P.C.C. was controlled by the C.S.P. leaders. When the C.S.P. leaders held the K.P.C.C., the functioning of the Congress was totally changed. During that period the Congress in Kerala became a disciplined people's party.³⁵ The C.S.P. could establish network of contacts throughout Kerala within a year. It could do that with the 'Congress activity', 'trade unions', 'peasant movements', party newspaper 'Prabhatham' and distribution of a series of pamphlets. The C.S.P. groups were established in Cannanore, Kanjangad, Tellichery, Badagara, Calicut, Palghat, Trichur, Cochin and Alleppey. Its political strength was evidently shown in the annual conferences held in Cannanore by the end of 1935 and at Tellicherry in June 1936.³⁶

During 1935, 1938, 1939 and 1940 period, when the C.S.P. leaders held the K.P.C.C. office, annual 'Congress Political Conferences' were regularly held. But no such conference was held when the right-wing Congressmen held the office during the 1936-'37 period. The C.S.P. leaders held District and Taluk conventions also. By the end of the Provincial elections in 1937, the K.P.C.C. decided E.M.S. Namboodiripad to be its Organisational Secretary. He reorganised the party from the State level to the village. With the help of Taluk Secretaries mostly C.S.P. men, within a short period of two months, three hundred 'Village Sub-Committees' were organised. In 1938 its number rose to five hundred.³⁷ The K.P.C.C. made the 'Village Sub-Committees' to work efficiently by including political awareness at the grassroot level. The K.P.C.C. gave them regular directions, received periodic reports,

made them to organise libraries, night literacy classes, to erect news boards, to hold regular public meetings etc. For the 'village sub-committees', the party issued special bulletins. To make the party workers active, periodic conferences were held, at the State and at the Taluk level, for Secretaries. At the central office, Taluk Secretaries were regularly called in conference. The Village Secretaries had such conference at the Taluk Office.³⁸

In 1938-'39, the K.P.C.C. organised a 'Congress Volunteer Force'. In the same year, a Summer School was started for the political education of the full time workers of the party. In May-June 1938, Sardar Chandroth Kunhiraman Nayar gave training to thirty State level officers for one and a half months at Theekodi. Those State level officers in turn trained the 'Village Volunteers'. Within one year, the 'Village Volunteer Force' of 3000 and officers of 300 were trained. For the political education of the Partymen, a school was started in May 1939 at Mankada, Pallipuram. The curriculum included, 'World History', 'Indian History', 'Congress History', 'Economics', 'Economic Problems of India' and 'Politics'. Thus five hundred trained workers started fully engaging in the activities of the Indian National Congress. Of them, large majority were factory workers, poor peasants and elementary school teachers. The C.S.P. had full support of National Muslims like, Abdul Rehman Sahib. In 1938, Abdul Rehman Sahib was elected President of the K.P.C.C. and E.M.S. Namboodiripad its Secretary.³⁹

Economic crisis of 1929-1933

The Global economic crisis of 1929-33' badly affected the capitalist countries. But Soviet Union was the only country which was not affected. In the capitalist countries like England, France, Germany, Italy etc., economic production declined to 50% unemployment and starvation spread like an epidemic. Colonial countries like England started to impose the burden on her colonies also. Already the Indian economy was converted into the one supplying raw materials to England. That weak economic system was further ruined by the crisis of 1929-'33. The freedom struggle in India at that time (Civil Disobedience), was also a natural reaction of the Indian people to project their sufferings as the creation of Britain.⁴⁰

The economy of Kerala too suffered as a result of the 1929-'33 economic crisis. In the tea and rubber estates, of the 150,000 workers, 75,000 were retrenched.

In fourteen tea estates, working was completely stopped. About the economic condition of the peasants, the 'Depression Committee' remarked, "...of the total population of fifty lakhs, twenty-five lakhs were affected by the depression. Agrarian debt increased from rupees twenty-five crores to forty crores.⁴¹ The price of copra, coconut oil and rubber decreased by 40% and pepper by 80%. As a result, the cultivation of coconut, rubber and pepper was completely ruined. Over and above the disaster of depression, the taxation policy of the Government doubled the sufferings of the people. In Malabar, the Government doubled the sufferings of the people. There, the Government decided to increase the taxes by 18.75% in 1931. As a result, the crisis of the depression continued even after 1933. The Government gave permission to import Ceylon copra. The tariff on Ceylon copra was reduced. The former tariff was Rs.10. In 1939, it was Rs.7 ½. Compared to 1929, the import of copra increased by 4.5 times; coconut oil and coconut by 2.5 times. It severely affected the life of the peasants. Hundreds of tenants became bankrupt, sold their land to the moneylenders or wealthy landlords and degenerated to landless sub-tenants. The sub-tenants plunged to agro-labourers.⁴²

Table 6 gives a clear picture of the precarious condition of the peasants, though it was about selected villages of Cochin, it could be well applicable to Malabar also. Even 100% of crop production did not yield profit to

TABLE 6
Agricultural Income & Expense in Cochin, 1935

Village	Type of land	Production on 100%		Seed cost		Farm Expense		Tax		Income		Lease (Pattom)	
		Rs	- ps	R s	- ps	Rs	- ps	R s	- ps	Rs	- ps	R s	- ps
Anthikad	Dry land coconut	55	9			17	12	6	8	31	4	32	37
	2 crop paddy	49	8	5	0	26	10	4	8	13	5	15	0

	1 crop paddy	29	15	5	0	13	12	2	8	8	11	9	0
Choondal	Dryland Aracnut	12 1	8			64	0	6	0	51	8	5 0	0
	2 Crop Paddy	83	12	1 0	0	39	2	4	0	30	10	2 9	0
	Mundakan paddy	43	2	5	0	20	6	3	2	14	10	1 4	0
Erutembadi	2 crop paddy	71	10	7	0	31	4	1 2	2	21	4	2 4	0
	Viruppu paddy	45	3	4	0	18	2	8	1	15	0	1 8	0
	Mundak ayam paddy	38	8	3	0	14	3	8	1	13	4	1 6	0
Patachery (East)	2 crop paddy	73	15	6	0	28	11	7	0	32	4	2 8	7
	Poonthal	73	7	4	12	32	3	7	0	29	8	2 8	7
	Karinkara	50	2	2	8	18	0	5	0	24	10	2 4	6
Patachery	2 crop paddy	86	4	6	0	21	6	7	0	51	10	4 4	11
	Karinkar	61	15	3	0	16	3	5	0	37	12	3	8

(West)	a											2	
	Virippu	44	8	3	0	14	4			22	4	2 0	5

Source: Derived from, 'Survey of the Agricultural Land', Government of Cochin, In. E.M.S. Namboodiripad, Keralam the Motherland of Malayalees, Trivandrum: Kerala Grandhasala Sahakarana Sangham, 1948, pp.177-181.

The tenant, the decrease in production and crop failure due to flood or drought made him debtor and finally landless.⁴³

Land Relations: Malabar, 1930s

In Malabar all tenants were not cultivators. Most of the 'Kana Kudiyan' were non-cultivating tenants. By the 1930 Tendency Act, the non-cultivating tenants got ownership on his land. The cultivating sub-tenants had to give 1/3 of the value of the crop to him also as rent. Thus at the top there was the landlord, just below, his supervisor the non-cultivating tenant and still below, the cultivating tenant and at the bottom the agro-labourer.⁴⁴ The 'Malabar Kudiyan Sangham' stood only for the interests of the 'Kana Kudiyan' the majority of whom were non-cultivating tenants. They were against giving ownership of land to the sub-tenants, who were the real cultivating tenants. The 'Kana Kudiyan' were also against reducing the lease-rent. They were intermediaries who secured land from the 'jenmis' on 'kanam right', by paying only minimum rent. They sublet it to the sub-tenants and lived on the exorbitant rent collected from them. They got this right by the Tenancy Act of 1930. there was a provision in the Act prohibiting the eviction of the sub-tenants also. But

Table 7

Degree of Exploitation Undergone by the Sub-Tenants of Malabar, 1940

I

Classes connected to the Land in Malabar

Landlords (Non-cultivating)

: 23,000

Tenants (“ “)	: 19,000
Total no. of non-cultivators	: 62,000
Landlords (Cultivating)	: 40,000
Tenants (“ “)	: 1,72,000
Total no. of Cultivators	: 2,12,000
Total no. of agro-labourers	: 4,01,000
Total population working on land	: 6,13,000

II

Agrarian Production and the Lease-rent

Total paddy production (in paras)	: 8,42,32,500
Lease-rent (2/3 of the net production)	
in paras	: 5,61,55,000
Total coconut production	: 52,81,98,000
Lease-rent (1/5 of the net production)	: 10,56,39,000

III

Value of Lease-rent in Rupees

Value of lease-rent of paddy	: Rs. 225 lakhs
” ” coconut	: Rs. 20 lakhs
” ” other crops	: Rs. 63 lakhs

Total value of lease-rent : Rs. 308 lakhs

Source: Derived from E.M.S. Namboodiripad, “The Objection Report”, to, The Report of the Malabar Tenancy Committee, 1940; in E.M.S. Namboothiripad, Keralam the Motherland of the Malayalees, Trivandrum: Kerala Grandhasala Sahakarana Sangham, 1948, pp. 173-77, 333-334.

that was subject to the condition that he had to remit one year lease-rent in advance, and there should not be any arrear of rent. The conditions were difficult to the sub-tenant because he was in full bankruptcy due to agrarian debt. Thus many of the ‘Kanam tenants’, by charging exorbitant rent on sub-tenants and squeezing money

from them became wealthy. They became new landlords. Slowly, a partnership of the 'jenmis' and the wealthy 'Kudiyans' started developing ⁴⁵. E.M.S Nambudiripad clearly explains with statistical data, how the hard earned money by the sweat and labour of the sub-tenant was usurped by the uncultivating landlord and the 'Kana' Kudiyans.⁴⁶

Formation of the Karshaka Sangham

Every year the cultivating tenants of Malabar had to pay rupees three hundred and eight lakhs to the non-cultivating middlemen i.e., 'Karamdar' and his landlords.⁴⁷ The economic crisis of 1929-'33 and its effect on the economy of Malabar was the last straw to break the peasant's back. In July 1935 the peasants of Malabar, the silent sufferers of several years, subjected to innumerable social and economic exploitation, were brought to awareness of 'collective bargaining' with the formation of an organisation called, 'Karshaka Sangham' (The Peasants' Society), by the leaders of the C.S.P.⁴⁸

The first 'Karshaka Sangham' meeting was held at the residence of Vishnubharatheeyan in Taliparamba taluk, in July 1935. The meeting was presided by a tenant, Pattathil Padmanabhan. Vishnubharatheeyan was elected the President of the Sangham and K. Keraleeyan its Secretary. The Sangham decided to fight against coercive feudal collections, for reduction of lease-rent, for the cancellation of the provision demanding the sub-tenants to remit lease-rent in advance in the Kudiyans Act of 1930 and against all kinds of evictions.⁴⁹ The tenants of the locality were not bold enough to appear even witness in a case against the landlord, in which their own property was plundered by the rowdies of the landlord. The Sangham took up such a case, went to the court against the landlord and won a verdict against the landlord and made the landlord to return the produce. It created confidence among the peasants to fight against landlordism.⁵⁰

In the eastern parts of Malabar, the village officers were mostly landlords. The village officer was called, 'Amsam Adhikari'. They collected both the revenue tax and the lease-rent without the knowledge of the Government. Majority of the peasants could not differentiate the two. For both the Government receipts were given, which too was illegal. The 'Kalyat Yasman' also called, 'Kottoor Yasman', was notorious for coercive collections and was also an 'Amsam Adhikari'. Whenever tenants cleared

forests for cultivation, this landlord used to collect, 'Kathia Panam', a coercive collection, for which Government receipts were given. The Sangham leaders, Bharatheeyan and Keraleeyan decided to fight against it. They collected from the tenants the Government receipts given by the landlord, who legally was only a village officer in the administrative hierarchy. Sangham started agitations throughout north eastern Malabar against coercive collection. The agitation was so intense that the District Collector decided to make enquiry about the illegal collections of the 'Amsam Adhikari'. The Sangham leaders presented the receipts illegally given by the Adhikari. It led to the arrest of 'Kottoor Yasman', who was regarded by the tenants as the one even above God. The news was given propaganda throughout Malabar. Now the peasants were fully convinced that if they stood united, landlords could do nothing against them.⁵¹

In September 1935 the 'Karivalloor Karshaka Sangham' was organised. The tenants of Karivalloor, Vellore, Feralam and Kokad were organised by this Sangham. Its President was A.V. Kunjambu and Secretary was M.P. Appumaster. The Sangham agitated to end the feudal suppressions of the agents of the Chirakkal landlords. Its first agitation was to establish the right of the tenants to collect green leaf manure from the forest of the 'Thazhekad Manakal'. In 1935 itself, the 'Kurumbranad Karshaka Sangham' was organised by M. K. Kelu and M. Gopala Kurup. Its first taluk conference was held at Vattoli.⁵²

The C.S.P in its Meerut conference in 1935 decided to hold an All India Conference. It was followed by the formation of the 'All India Kisan Sabha' in Lucknow, in 1936. For two years as part of the programme of the Sabha, 'Starvation Marches' were organised throughout India.⁵³

In Malabar, under the leadership of A. K. Gopalan, 'Committees of the Unemployed' were organised at Kathiroom and other places, before the organisation of the 'Starvation March'. To start with, it was decided to conduct a 'Starvation March' to the Collector of Tellicherry. The march was to start from Koothuparambu. K.P.R. Gopalan started a march from Kalyasseri and joined the main march. Thousands joined the march. The Sub-Collector at Tellicherry, received the memorandum from the volunteers. A public meeting was held on the beach. It was there, A. K. Gopalan announced the 'Starvation March to Madras' starting the next day.⁵⁴

In July 1936 the 'Starvation March' started from Malabar to Madras. A. K. Gopalan was the volunteer captain. They sung, "Starvation, starvation, total starvation, people in towns and the countryside starve, even when people starve, taxation time is coming".⁵⁵ They walked twenty miles a day. When the march entered Madras, a procession of 3000 received them. A meeting was held in the Congress House. Next day they marched to the Legislature, but they were blocked by the Police. The march covered a distance of Seven hundred and fifty miles, they held five hundred meetings and 25,000 pamphlets were sold.⁵⁶

The leaders of the starvation march decided to convert the popular support they gained into political action. Village sanghams were to organise 'marches' to taluks, for that new cadres were organised. Along with the 'Village Volunteer Force', the 'Peasant Volunteer Force' and 'Labour Volunteer Force' were organised. Taluk peasant conventions were held. The 'Starvation Songs' of the villagers were widely heard in Malabar. After the starvation march to Madras, the Government framed false cases against A. K. Gopalan, Sardar Chandroth, Keralaleeyan and K. P. Gopalan. A. K. Gopalan and Chandroth were sentenced for one year imprisonment. Against Keralaleeyan the charge was that he was organising the peasants of north Malabar to make a Mappila revolt. The trade union leader, K. P. Gopalan was arrested on the charge that he was inciting factory workers to revolution. They were also sentenced for one year imprisonment. Through the arrest, the Government was determined to prevent those popular leaders from contesting the ensuing 1937 Provincial elections. In the election the Congress won majority seats. Raman Menon became Minister for jails. So the leaders were released before the completion of full term.⁵⁷

To create awareness among peasants, a drama, 'Patta-bakki', ie. 'Arrear rent' was staged. It was written by K. Damodaran, the one time 'Gandhian Satyagrahi' and one of the founder leaders of the C.P.I. unit in Kerala. He too acted in the drama along with K.P.R. Gopalan, A. K. Gopalan and E. P. Gopalan. This drama played a great role in increasing the mass support of the Sangham. It awakened the class consciousness of the peasants and workers.⁵⁸ After the starvation march to Madras, Peasant Conventions were organised at taluk level. In November 1936 at Parassinikadavu the first 'Chirakkal Taluk Peasant Convention' was held. It was presided over by A.K.Pillai.⁵⁹

The Fezpur Congress of the A.I.C.C. in December 1936, declared a thirteen point agrarian programme.⁶⁰ The declaration signalled widespread agitations in

Malabar. Throughout Malabar, peasant marches were organised to agitate for their demands. In 1937, those marches were given leadership by the 'Malabar Karshaka Sangham', having P. Narayanan Nayar as its President and K. A. Keraleeyan its Secretary (both were founder members of the C.P.I in Kerala). Shouting the slogans, 'end landlordism', 'end imperialism', 'reduce lease-rent' and 'land to the farmer', the entire tenants of north Malabar moved to the residence of their respective landlords. The sound of the slogans reverberated the political atmosphere of Malabar.⁶¹

On 16-09-1938, the march started from Karivalloor of Chirakkal taluk. The destination was the 'Kovilakom' of the 'Raja of Chirakkal', near Cannanore. He was the most powerful landlord of the time. He never talked to tenants in group; only one at a time was allowed to talk. Against the precedence, he welcomed the march and gave audience to the tenants. It added confidence of the peasants in the Sangham. Similarly the tenants of Mathamangalam, Kattoor, Eramom, Parapoil, Thimiri, Kooveri, Perumthatta and Korom started a March on 12-09-'38 and gave representation to the landlord, 'Vengayil Nayanar'. On 21-10-'38, the peasants of Malapattom, Muyyam, Kurumattoor, Kayaralam, Changalayi, Panniyur, Kodaloor, Kolthuruthi marched to their landlord, 'Karakattidom Nayanar'. They were 7000, walked ten miles to represent their demands.⁶²

The tenants of 'Vellora Devaswom' too conducted 'demand march'. The 'Panur Karshaka Sangham' started its march from Maniyur under the leadership of Kundacherry Kunhiramanmaster to the landlord, 'Koodali Yasman'. In the Kottayam taluk the Sangham march was organised by T. V. Achuthan Nayar. It was led by A. K. Gopalan and Sardar Chandroth. The volunteers from different villages, Dharmadom, Vadakumpad, Eranjoli, Kathiroor, Kodyiri etc. concentrated at the reading room of Pinarayi. From there, more than 2000 peasant volunteers marched to the 'Kovilakom' of Kottayam 'Thampuran'. But the 'Thampuran', ie., 'landlord', refused to see the march. At last, he agreed to see leaders. In the Kurumbranad taluk, the march started from Kuttyadi to the 'Poomeri Kovilakom'. The tenants of Mukkom Moideen Sahib too organised a march against him.⁶³

By the time in December 1938, the 'Second Malabar Peasant Conference' was held at Chevayur, in Calicut. The President of its reception committee was the trade union leader, Manjunatha Rao. The conference was presided over by A.K. Gopalan. In connection with the conference, three peasant marches were conducted; the first from the north, led by Chandroth and the second from the south, led by E.P. Gopalan,

were directed to Calicut. The march from the north started on 11 December 1938. Each of the march contained 500 volunteers, selected from each village of the area. They wore red uniform. Most of them were seeing the Calicut town for the first time. Both marches were to join at Calicut and to present memorandum to the District Collector. But the Collector, Mr. Wood took a negative stand. He conducted propaganda against the march. When the red-march entered the town, Wood disappeared. The march was received by the workers and peasants of Calicut. Together they marched to the Collectorate. Having failed, to see the Collector, they marched to the beach. There, at the public meeting, their leader, E.P. Gopalan read the memorandum amidst applause, and declared that it was implemented in the absence of the opposite party (Collector) ⁶⁴.

In 1938 the 'Punam tenants' (seasonal cultivators of forestland) of Kurumbranad taluk started agitation, under M.K. Kelu. It lasted for nineteen days and ended in success. The lease-rent was fixed in one to ten ratio. Later the agitation spread to the Karinganad region also. Its leaders were, M.K. Kelu, C.H. Kanaran and M. Gopala Kurup.⁶⁵ The peasant marches changed the very mental attitude of the peasants to the landlords.

Table 8

Till then, they had to bow down in the presence of the lord, and could speak only in an inferior language, violation of which was punishable according to tradition. The marches made the peasants bold enough to talk to the lord on equal terms. The slogan, 'end landlordism' was dear to him. Leaders like C.H. Kanaran taught them lessons of 'rationalism', 'atheism' and 'class-war'. The poor tenants started calling the 'well fed' and the 'well dressed' by the term, 'bourgeois'. On 6 November 1938, throughout Malabar, 'The Kudiyan Act Amendement Day' was observed. By the time, peasants of Chirakkal-Kottayam taluks, the tenants of seven landlords planned to boycott the payment of lease-rent from November 1938 onwards. About seventy three village Sanghams agreed to it. But due to stiff resistance from the Rajaji Ministry and K. Kelappan, the plan was dropped.⁶⁶

The peasant marches which culminated in the combined demonstrations of the workers and peasants in Calicut and Mangalore, made the Government panic. The Government realised the danger in the popular agitations directed against landlords, who were the real basic support of the British rule in India. Collector Vellodi issued a 'red notice' giving caution that the peasant movement was danger to the country,

which would finally lead to revolution.⁶⁷ There after the Government officers and the landlords joined together to suppress the growing peasant movement. They knew that the traditional type of feudal oppression was no longer possible before the organised strength. So they resorted to new method of torture and harassment by charging false cases against the activists of the 'Karshaka Sangham'. Thereby they thought the peasants would realise that the membership in the Sangham was an invitation of troubles from the Government and from the landlords. The Government officials started sending false reports and registering false cases against the Sangham workers, with the support of the landlords. Strangely, all those reports were taken at the face value by the Congress Ministry in Madras. In the countryside, new police stations were opened and additional police named, 'Punitive Police' was sent. Thus started the long police suppression of the working class movement, with the support of the landlords.⁶⁸

By the end of 1938 and by the beginning of 1939, Malabar was burning with peasant agitations. It attracted national attention, resulting in the visit of N.G. Renga, the General Secretary of the 'All India Kisan Sabha'. He visited the agrarian regions of Malabar and attended several Sangham meetings. In the Sangham meeting held at Kodakad 15,000 tenants participated, and at Blathoor 10,000. A good number of them were women. In those meetings, A.K. Gopalan asked them, whether they were ready to court arrest for their cause, in one voice, they replied 'Yes, Yes'.⁶⁹ The visit convinced Renga of the grave situation of the tenants of Malabar. The visit of Renga was an eye opener to the Congress Government in Madras. The Revenue Minister, T. Prakasam visited Malabar on 24 December 1938.⁷⁰ He visited Chirakkal taluk, talked to tenants and their leaders and realised the urgent necessity to amend the Malabar Kudiyan Act of 1930 to give relief to the peasants of Malabar. At last, the Madras Ministry led by C. Rajagopalachary decided to appoint an enquiry committee headed by K. Kuttikrishna Menon to submit report on the tenancy problem in Malabar.⁷¹ It was in this background that the C.S.P leaders formed the C.P.I. unit in Kerala by the end of 1939.⁷²

Formation of the Trade Union Movement

India which was an exporting country till 1813, gradually turned into an importing country due to the British rule. The Indian economy was reorganised to assist the British imperial interests. With it, the traditional Indian industries perished, her skilled craftsmen became unemployed and finally turned into wagedworker of

English factories. Their land policy increased agrarian debt, converted farmers into agro-labourers and agro-labourers to the unemployed. They were forced to leave their native village in search of work, to plantation estates or to industrial centres. They formed the early proletariat.⁷³

In plantations and in factories, the working condition was miserable. In plantation estates, bonded labour existed. A newspaper report in 1938 briefly tells the condition of the estate workers of Waynad:

It seems that the slave trade in all its ferocity precipitates at Waynad, among the estate workers. There, bankrupt peasants are sold like cattle by the brokers for the capitalists. Even after the death of the worker, the bond survives.⁷⁴

The bonded workers were given no cash payment. Only a chit was given to a particular shop to buy things. No outsider was allowed entry and the workers could not go out of the estate. To the estate record, each worker was a debtor from which he could not be free. The owner could even kill a worker. Soon, another person in the name of the dead worker would be posted so that even the police could do nothing.⁷⁵

The working condition of the industrial worker was also miserable. The working time was from 7 o'clock in the morning till 6 o'clock in the evening. 14 to 16 hours work in a day was common. Most of them had to reach the factory from the countryside. They had to start before the day-break and to return after sunset. They were not expected to wear clean clothes. The workers were even beaten. There was no labour law. The factory owner could deny work to anyone. Though they worked hard, only poverty existed.⁷⁶

In 1915 textile mills were established in Calicut and Cannanore by the Basel Mission. The mission founded tile factories at Puthiyara in 1874 and at Kodakal in 1891. Later those factories were renamed as 'Common Wealth Factories' by the English. By the beginning of the twentieth century, Indian capitalists also started factories. In Malabar the Congress leader Samuel Aron was such a capitalist. Like the landlords, the Indian capitalists too were alienated from the peasants and workers since they too did not recognise the trade union rights, the workers thought, if power was transferred to political leaders like Aron, they would suppress the freedom of the workers with increased power. The absence of identification between the working class and the Congressmen was a big handicap of freedom struggle. It was to correct that defect, the left-wing Congressmen formed the C.S.P.⁷⁷

The first organised workers' strike in Malabar was, the 'South Indian Railway Strike', in July 1928. About the strike the Malayalam daily Mathrubhoomi wrote, "This strike is inevitable result of the awareness and consciousness among the workers."⁷⁸ Between 1931-'33 period K. P. Gopalan and his friends organised several trade unions such as, 'The North Malabar Labour Union', 'The Azhikode Weavers Union', 'Tellicherry Beedi Workers' Union', 'The D.M.R.T' (Devdar Malabar Reconstruction Trust) etc.⁷⁹ But a systematic co-ordination of the unions emerged only with the formation of the C.S.P. It started working among the workers from January 1935 onwards. In May 1935 all trade union workers of Kerala met at Calicut. It was organised by P. Krishna Pillai. The meeting was presided over by Mrs. Maniben Kara.⁸⁰

At that time the creation of the trade union was not so easy. The difficulties were many. Basically the workers had no confidence in the Congressmen, most of whom were caste-Hindus. Workers were afraid of the Government and police. Lastly, they had no courage to work against the factory owner. The problem of the identification of the leadership with the workers was successfully solved by the tactics of P. Krishna Pillai and the sincerity of A. K. Gopalan⁸¹. In 1935 the Government amended the labour law by reducing the 60 hours work to 54 hours. But the cunning factory owners decided to cheat the workers by reducing the total working hours to 54 by reducing the working days to five and a half and by retaining the ten hours work during five days. On the sixth day, the work was for four hours and only half day wage was given.⁸²

The workers of Calicut realised that they were cheated. The workers of the cotton mill struck work, on 19 February 1935. Their demands were, 'No punishment on striking workers'. 'Implement 9 hour work day' and 'Payment for the reduced six hours'.⁸³ The factory management tried to enroll new workers instead of the striking labourers. It failed because of the stiff resistance from the people of the locality. There was an attempt to make the Government interfere and arrest the workers. Since the strike was peaceful, that too did not happen. Still, the leaders of the strike like A.K. Gopalan were summoned to the police station and they were threatened to withdraw the strike. The strike lasted for fifteen days. During the days of the strike, the leaders like A.K. Gopalan worked on war footing. They rose up at 4 o'clock in the morning. The first thing to do was, informing the volunteers for the day's picketing. Then they talked to the non-striking workers. A special squad was formed to persuade them to

strike. Every day a public meeting was held. The speeches of the C.S.P. leaders were meant for the political education of the workers and to mobilize public support. To collect fund, mainly for the relief work of the families of the striking workers, four to five hours time was spent. Till 12 o'clock, house visit was done. The different problems of the workers due to the strike were discussed at that time. At 2 o'clock in the night, the strike committee met and evolved the programme for the next day.⁸⁴

When the management understood that the striking workers were dedicated and had the active public support, they came down and agreed to talk with the labour leaders. All demands of the striking workers were accepted. There was no victimization of the striking workers. The nine hour working day was accepted. A wage rise of one Anna per Rupee was allowed. Thus the strike was a great success. The 'Cotton Mill Workers' Union' was a creation of the strike. Though the factory owner had the support of the Government and had money and power, he could not defeat the striking workers. It taught a rich lesson to the workers. They no longer looked the C.S.P. workers with suspicion. Leaders like A.K. Gopalan were as an 'elder brother' or as a 'loving son'. 75% of the workers of the cotton mill joined the trade union. An office was opened, workers used to visit the office in the morning and in the evening and started reading newspapers regularly.⁸⁵

The tile factory workers of Feroke were actively supporting the cotton mill strike. They formed the 'Tile Factory Workers' Union' and wanted to strike for more or less the same demands of the cotton mill workers. But the tile factory management had resorted to the method of suppression. Workers were dismissed for participating in demonstrations. Their union was denied venue. Pressure was exerted to see that no union office was opened. Rowdies were paid to create confusion in the labour meetings. At the same time, the workers of the tile factory lacked sufficient class awareness and cooperation. So, to make awareness among the workers, and to protest against the suppressive methods of the factory management, K.P. Gopalan (the Madras Government records mention him as the 'professional agitator') started his ten days 'Nirahara Satyagraha' (hunger strike). Huge protest demonstrations and public meetings were held. Near the Feroke bridge, in such a meeting, after the demonstration of 6000 workers, the decision of the strike was announced.⁸⁶

In February 1935, the strike broke out in the Tile factory of Feroke. The Government decided to suppress the strike with iron hand. Public meetings and gatherings more than four were banned. A.K. Gopalan and P. Krishna Pillai were

banned from making speeches. All capitalists of Calicut and Cannanore joined together to suppress the strike. The rowdies were paid handsomely. For the head of A.K. Gopalan, rupees one thousand and expense for protection were assured. The violence that was created at the Cheruvannur junction, when the C.S.P. leader, K. Damodaran was speaking, resulted in the assault of Keraleeyan. In the presence of police, the rowdies specially recruited from Ernad, broke into the trade union office and destroyed everything. Finally, when the police charged the case, it was against A.K.Gopalan. That situation compelled the leadership to call off the strike.⁸⁷

The cotton mill workers were forced to strike again on 11 November 1935. It was the result of a conspiracy between the capitalists and the Government, to weaken the striking power of the 'Cotton Mill Workers' Union' through a prolonged strike. They started provoking the workers by violating the provisions of the agreement at the end of the first, successful strike in February. By the time, the C.S.P. organised a trade union meeting at Kallai. There, the cotton mill worker, Manari Appu spoke of the grave situation in the factory. For that, on the next day, Appu was dismissed from the factory. Immediately, the workers struck work and went out of the factory. It was the beginning of the second strike in the cotton mill.⁸⁸

The strike lasted for forty days. The management recruited new workers. To make them work, police camped inside the factory. The management and the Government adopted all methods to suppress the strike, which they had tested successfully at the time of the tile factory workers' strike. 'Prolong the strike and finally break it', was the method adopted. During the strike, the C.P.I. leaders, S.A. Dange and Sundarayya visited Calicut. Long starvation compelled the workers to end the strike. In spite of increased popular support, the strike failed. On 16 January 1936, the strike was withdrawn. Though the workers secured some financial benefits, about thirty active trade union workers were dismissed. Still, the capitalists did not win in undoing the trade union from the cotton mill. Instead, it got consolidated through the strike. During 1935-'36 period, strike became a regular feature of the trade union activity. Even during the non strike period the C.S.P. leaders lived among the workers. At Calicut, a 'Central Trade Union Office' started working. It was emerging as a meeting place of left-wing political workers. There a night time literacy class was conducted for the workers. Such classes were conducted by the units also.⁸⁹

The Commonwealth Tile Factory workers also struck work. There, the workers were cruelly beaten by the police. P. Krishna Pillai was arrested and

sentenced to rigorous imprisonment. To bring about a settlement, even the Labour Minister of Madras and the well known trade union leader of the time, V. V. Giri talked to the factory manager, but it was of no use. The strike was suppressed. It was followed by the strike of the beedi workers of Tellichery and Cannanore. The weaving workers of Kakad, Chovva and Azhikode struck work twice.⁹⁰ By the beginning of 1937, the annual of the 'Cannanore Labour Union' was celebrated at the Aanandamandira hall. On 19 September 1937, the workers of Malabar observed the 'Declaration of Rights Day', by conducting mass rallies, holding red flags, shouting the slogans, 'Inquilab Zindabad', 'End Capitalism', 'End Imperialism', and 'Kisan Mazdoor Raj Zindabad'. Such rallies were conducted in Cannanore and Tellichery. The weavers of Karivalloor and Payyannur, saw mill workers, motor workers, workers of umbrella making, today tappers, Municipal workers, soap workers, fishermen, shop keepers, men employed in collecting forest produce etc., could be seen in the rally. The meeting at the Calicut beach passed the following resolution: 1. Demanded factory owners to recognise the trade unions, 2. Fix minimum wage as Rs.15 per month, 3. Reduction of working hours to 48 in a week. 4. Stop piece works on contract basis, 5. a) 14 days casual leave with salary. b) Start provident fund and Insurance. c) Free education and medical aid and d) Residential facility and 6. Ensure freedom of speech, press and organisation.⁹¹

The agitations of the factory workers during 1935-'40 period were projecting more or less the same demands, such as 'recognition of trade union', 'improved working conditions', and 'rise in wage'. In 1933 there were seventy-nine factories and 11,907 workers in Malabar. They were generally classified into 'Textile workers', 'Tile workers' and 'Beedi workers'⁹². If at all the workers attained anything through strikes, the factory owners deliberately neglected it. They with the help of the Government, tried to suppress the trade union movement. The bitter experience of the period made the C.S.P. leaders to reorganise the trade unions on the basis of new programme, such as: 1. Establishment of a 'Trade Union Central Council' in all industrial centres, 2. Organisation of 'Factory Committee' and 'Ward Committee' with every union, 3. To develop class awareness and general knowledge, organise study classes. It was also decided to give training in speech making and in writing, 4. Management of office work through systematic and disciplined day to day activities and 5. Formation of a 'Red Volunteer Force' in each centre.⁹³

In 1939 there was a new development in trade union movement of Malabar. On 17 January 1939 a beginning was made to organise trade union on industrial basis. On that day the 'All Malabar Motor Workers Meeting' was held at Tellichery. A.K. Gopalan was its reception committee president. The meeting was presided over by N.G. Renga. Soon the beedi workers convened an 'All Malabar Beedi Workers' Conference' on 30 July 1939 at Cannanore. Among the five demands they made, the fifth one was to sanction half hour time for lunch break.⁹⁴ Another feature of the strikes of those days was that there was mutual help of workers of different trades and also of peasants. For example, when the beedi workers were conducting a prolonged strike, there was a call from A.K. Gopalan to the peasants to help the striking workers, the response was immediate.⁹⁵ When the Tajmahal factory workers struck work, the textile workers and the T.S. Brothers union declared support. When the Tellichery textile workers struck work, the beedi workers declared support.⁹⁶

No Faith in the Congress Party

The workers like the peasants, gradually lost faith in the Congress Party. When the Beedi and the Textile workers were in strike in Cannanore and Tellichery, the Congress leader, Samuel Aron took negative stand so that, an early settlement of the strike became impossible.⁹⁷ The right-wing Congressmen used the period of the strike to condemn the C.S.P. leadership. The appointment of the Kuttikrishna Menon Committee was the result of the long struggle of thousands of peasants and workers of Malabar. But the way how C.K. Govindan Nayar and other right-wing Congressmen in the Committee submitted their report even against the spirit of the Fezpore A.I.C.C. resolutions, was an eyeopener to the workers and peasants of Malabar. They hoped for the formation of a political party with their class interest, to establish the 'Kisan Mazdoor Raj' (Peasants' and Workers' rule). The workers were only happy when such a political party with the 'red flag' was formed in December 1939.⁹⁸ The early trade union leaders of Malabar were P. Krishnan Pillai, A.K. Gopalan, K.P. Gopalan, N.C. Sekhar, C.H. Kanaran, K. Damodaran, Manchunatha Rao, P. Narayanan Nayar, P. Balanchandra Menon, P.V. Gopalan, M. Appu, and M. Apputty. But for the last two, all other leaders were also leaders of the Congress Socialist Party. The last two sprung up from the workers of Malabar.⁹⁹

The Students' Federation

In Malabar the 'Students' Movement' assumed strength during 1936-'37 period. But even in 1931 when the 'Kerala State Congress Political Conference' was held at Badagara, a 'Students' Conference' also was convened. It was presided over by K.F. Narriman. The main activists were Subrahmanian Thirumumpu, P. Balachandra Menon, P.K. Balan etc, who were all students. But the students' organisation assumed political importance only when they were organised under 'Students' Federation', in 1936, by the C.S.P. Then the leaders of the Students' Federation were, Imbichi Bava, Kallat Krishnan etc.¹⁰⁰

The units of the Students' Federation were soon organised in schools and colleges. Their slogans were, 'Freedom', 'Peace' and 'Prosperity'. The students became aware of their share in shaping the new society. During the election to the Madras Provincial Legislature, they showed active interest. It continued after the election by active participation in the political activities. Their main problem was unemployment. Even degree holders, who were a few, could not get any job, and were roaming about. The educational system was meant to produce obedient servants of the British Government. The teaching method and syllabus too were made suitable to the system. The students were not expected to think about the developments outside the campus. They were carefully taught the 'Glorious Stories of Robert Clive'. In the name of discipline, teachers had the right to beat the students and even to keep them out of the class and even out of the institution. The students had no right to organise. But the students who saw the peasants and workers organising and agitating for justice, and the Congress agitating for freedom the British rule, naturally got organised.¹⁰¹

The first 'All Kerala Students' Federation Conference' was held in Calicut, in 1937. It was presided by Saumendra Tagore.¹⁰² The first students' strike in Malabar was held in 1939 in the Brennan College, Tellichery. It was to reinstate a dismissed student. A few Muslim students sought the help of A. K. Gopalan to organise the strike. In the evening, a meeting of the students was convened inside the college campus. It was presided over by A. K. Gopalan against the prohibition of the Principal. On the next day, the students refused to enter classes. In the conciliation that followed, the problem was solved. With the strike, the federation became strong. An office was opened at Tellichery, and preparations started to hold the second state

conference. The venue of the conference was Tellichery. The President of the conference was Batleewala. At the end of the conference dramatically, Batleewala was arrested by a warrant issued by the Government of Madras. The original order was to arrest A.K. Gopala too. Later it was changed by the pressure from the right-wing Congress leaders, Raman Menon and M. P. Damodaran. It created a stir throughout Kerala and further strengthened the students' federation.¹⁰³

In 1938 another 'Students' Conference' was held at Palghat. It was presided by Narriman. Strikes were held at Badagara and Chirakkal. There too A. K. Gopalan was consulted by the students in conducting the strike and also in establishing normal working condition. Against imposing fine, the students of Payyannur struck work. In front of the school a student conducted 'Nirahara Satyagraha' i.e., hunger strike. The tenants of the locality gave active support to the strike. It was settled by the mediation of the Divisional Officer.¹⁰⁴ The students of the District Board agitated for the recognition of the union and to end the detention system. Another strike broke out in protest against the expulsion of fourteen students from the Annamalai University. It spread all over Kerala. Strikes were held against unemployment and against the proposed constitutional reforms of India. In 1938 during the X-mas vacation, the members of the Students' Federation were engaged in organised political propaganda. They were split into batches of fifty volunteers. Three villages were selected for propaganda. They propagated the ideas of 'Socialism' and 'Class war', which received good response from peasants and workers.¹⁰⁵

The organisation of the Students' Federation and its connection with the C.S.P. irritated very much the right-wing Congressmen. The 'Mathrubhoomi' wrote an editorial condemning the students interfering in politics. It accused 'strikes' and 'hartals' as cheap agitational methods of the tenants and the labourers, copying of it by the students, they had degenerated.¹⁰⁶

Balasangham

In 1936, an organisation was started for the children, by the name, 'Balasangham'. It was first organised at Peelikode in Hosdurg. Its motto was, 'Study and Become Active'. It gradually spread to all taluks of Malabar with the spreading of the Karshaka Sangham and the trade unions. It got every support and encouragement of the C.S.P. It was later becoming the nursery of the Communist leaders in Kerala. The primary lessons of the importance of the 'Organisation' and the necessity of 'propaganda' were taught to Communist leaders at childhood by the Balasangham.¹⁰⁸

It still survives in the same name as the primary tributary organisation of the C.P.I. (Marxist) in Kerala.

The Elementary School Teachers' Organisation

The elementary school teachers had played a decisive role in the development of the agitational politics of Kerala. They organised themselves to fight against injustice and met on collective basis in 1935, at Pinarayi, the birth place of the Communist Party of Kerala. Their first meeting was presided over by A. K. Gopalan. At that time, conducting schools in the private sector was like business to make money. The manager of the school was getting money from the Government by way of grant, for the salary of the teachers and for the maintenance of the school. Often the whole amount of the grant went into the pocket of the manager. That he was doing with the help of corrupt bureaucrats of the Department of Education.¹⁰⁹ During 1938-'39 period, the teachers' organisation took anti-imperialist stand. Then it represented the whole elementary school teachers of Malabar. Apart from organising themselves, they started organising the peasants and students. On 26 September 1939, they struck work and observed 'hartal' (halting of work and business) throughout Malabar.¹¹⁰

The Progressive Writers' Association

In 1936, with the Lucknow session of the Indian National Congress, the 'All India Progressive Writers' Association' was formed. It was the Indian response to the call of Maxim Gorkey and Henry Barbusse at the international level, upon every writer to struggle against the threat of Fascism. Its leaders in India were the pro-Communist writers like, Sajjad Zaheer and K. A. Abbas. E. M. S. Namboodiripad, who was closely associated with it at the national level, decided to form its unit in Kerala.¹¹¹ Its purpose was also to integrate creative writings with the revolutionary movement in the country. The C.S.P. organised its first meeting in Kerala in 1937, at Trichur. The meeting was presided over by A.D. Harisharma. Participants of the meeting were, E. M. S. Namboodiripad, K. Damodaran, Achutha Kurup, P. Kesavadev, A. Madhavan, K. K. Warriar, Subrahmaniam Thirumunpu, K. A. Damodara Menon. C. Narayana Pillai, etc. In Kerala, the movement was called,

‘Jeeval Sahithyam’ (Literature of the Living). The young writers of the movement contributed greatly to the development of the revolutionary movement. Some of the most revolutionary works were, ‘Pattabakki’ i.e., ‘The Rent Arrear’ by K. Damodaran, ‘Red Volunteer’ by P. Kesavadev, ‘Anadha Manidrangal’ ie. ‘Destitute Homes’ by Thakazhi, ‘Inquilab Zindabad’ by Mohammed Basheer, ‘Achane Kandappol’ ie., ‘When Father was Seen’ by S. K. Pottakad etc.¹¹²

NOTES

¹The Malabar District Congress Committee was organised in 1915. In 1916, it met at Palghat. Its patron was, Vasudevaraja of Kollamkode. He requested the Government to recruit more Nayers into the army, congratulated the Government in forming a Nayar Bridge. It is protested against the Government in declaring the rivers and canals as Government property. In 1917, the Congress was presided by Sir. C.P. Ramaswami Iyer. Its patron was the Samrin of Calicut. The meeting resolved not to discuss the tenant problem. The third conference was held in 1918. It was presided by the Valiya Raja. The fourth conference was in 1919. Promoters were Sankara Varma Raja and Rama Varma Raja. The fifth conference was held in 1920. Its patron was Manavetan Thirumulpad of Nilambur. Then, large number of sub-tenants, mostly Mappilas participated. Influenced by the call of Khilafat, they supported the ‘Non- Cooperation Movement’. The landlords allied with Mrs. Annie Besant and voted against the Movement. For the first time, the Congress passed a resolution requesting the Government to give legal protection to the holdings of the tenants. It resolved to limit the working hours, abolish child labour and to cancel the ‘Planters’ labour act. In 1921, the first Kerala State Congress Conference met at Ottapalam. As part of the Conference, ‘Tenant Conference’, ‘Khilafat Conference’ and ‘Students’ conference’ were held. But the interests of the landlords prevented to pass a resolution on the tenant problem.

A.K. Pillai, op.cit., pp. 290-300, 304-316, 326-332.

²Kumaran Asan, Prathibha, Mal. Magazine, Vol. Makaram-Kumbham, 1920, Quoted in, N.E. Balaram, The Communist Movement in Kerala, Mal., Trivandrum: Prabhatham Pub. Co. 1990, pp. 51-52.

³The second State Congress was held in 1923 at Palghat. In 1924, about the working of the Congress, its Secretary, P. Ramunni Menon reported, “ Though two years have

passed, the Malabar Congress has not yet recovered from the shock of 1921 revolt". The meeting of the K.S.C.C. was postponed due to lack of quorum. Soon Ramunni Menon resigned. Mr. Comberbail was nominated as the temporary secretary. He reported, "... Gandhiji has written in Young India that the people of Kerala are in deep sleep so that, they cannot hear the call of the Congress. The General Secretary of the A.I.C.C, J. Nehru complained that he could not get even a list of the Congress Committee in Kerala"

A.K. Pillai, op.cit., pp. 333 & 372.

⁴A.K.Gopalan quoted in, T.V. Krishnan, Sakhav, Biography of P. Krishna Pillai, Trivandrum: Prabhatham Pub. Company, 1975, p. 36.

⁵On 14 August 1925, the Kerala State Congress Committee passed a resolution to form a 'Malabar United National Party'. Based on three point programme (1. Self-Government 2. Hindu-Muslim Unity and 3. Promotion of swadesi and eradication of untouchability), Congress decided to work in coalition with like minded parties.

A.K.Pillai, loc.cit., pp. 373-374.

⁶The fourth Kerala State Congress Committee met in 1928 at Payyannur, presided by Jawaharlal Nehru. In the same venue, the majority of the delegates met under the banner of 'North Kerala Nayar Mahasabha'.

To join the 'Salt Satyagraha', from Travancore, a volunteer team under the leadership of Ponnara Sreedhar, N.P. Kurukkal and N.C. Sekhar reached Malabar, violated law and courted arrest. The first batch of 'Satyagrahis' under Kelappan included P. Krishna Pillai, K.P. Gopalan, Moyyathu Sankaran, T. Subrahmanyam Thirumunpu, Muhammed Abdul Rehman, K. Keraleeyan and R.V. Sharma.

N.E. Balaram, op.cit., p.52, Also vide

A.K.Pillai, loc.cit., pp. 373, 375, 385-88, 390, 392-395.

⁷Moyyathu Sankaran was the pilot of the volunteers. When volunteers were beaten and sent to prison all over India, in Malabar, Government refused to beat and arrest the volunteers the first week. Only on 30 April Kelappan was arrested. In the Kasargod taluk, the agitation was opened by P. Krishna Pillai (founder of the C.P.I. in Kerala). In June the agitation was shifted to Calicut. There together with Kelappan, Abdul Rehman Sahib and P. Krishna Pillai were arrested. In the 1930 agitation, A. K. Gopalan was also arrested. They were first sent to the Cannanore jail and later to Vellore. There were four hundred freedom fighters in the jail. To break their unity, they were classified into A, B, & C. In the upper class, life was comfortable like that

of a hostel. In the C class, life was miserable. Their legs, hands and even body was chained. The special type of chain called, 'Kol changala' was used for it. Without any reason, at any time, they were beaten. They were forced to do works like scavenging. P. Krishna Pillai, K. P. Gopalan, A. K. Gopalan etc. established contact with terrorist leaders like R. Sengupta, T. N. Chakrabarthi, R. C. Acharya, K. N. Tivari, J. Kapoor and Mota Singh. Mota used to ask , "Why should you make salt? Can't you rob the Government Treasury?" Gandhi-Irwin Pact was a subject of talk among prisoners. They feared that the pact would put out the agitating fervour of the people. Released from the jail, Congressman like A. K. Gopalan worked hard to organise the party, to picket foreign cloth shops and liquor shops. It was a difficult task. Common people had no sympathy to the Congress. They mocked at the people wearing khadar. They believed that the Congressmen were responsible for the reduction in the price of coconut. They arranged goondas to beat them. Howling at them was common. Since the Congress volunteers were educated young men from feudal families, no response was invoked from the poor peasants and workers. The difference of casteism existed. When they were picketing a toddy shop, a poor peasant got angry and said. "You say, you work for the poor. Is it not a lie? You have enough to eat. You need not work. We work for you. Due to flood, I got not a single grain. Still I measured the lease yesterday. For that I had to borrow. In debt, I have to leave my hut next year. You do not allow us to draw water from your well. You want our help to drive out the British. We will not. They are better than you. They practice no casteism. Nobody will take you seriously". This was the attitude of the majority of poor peasants. Quoted in, A.K. Gopalan, The Story of My Life, Mal., (autobiography) Trivandrum: Chintha Publishers, 1985, pp. 25, 27-30. Also vide A.K. Pillai, op.cit., p. 405.

⁸A.K. Gopalan, loc.cit., p. 35. Also vide T.V. Krishnan, op.cit., p. 26.

⁹A.K. Pillai, op.cit., pp. 406 & 409.

¹⁰A.K.Gopala, op.cit., pp. 35-36.

¹¹T.V.Krishnan, op.cit., p. 26, Also vide A.K. Gopalan, op.cit., pp. 36-37.

¹²Ibid., pp.37-38.

¹³Ibid., pp.38-41. Also vide E.M.S.Namboodiripad, How I became A Communist, op.cit., p. 127.

¹⁴A.K.Gopalan, loc.cit., pp. 41-42. Also vide, T. V. Krishnan, loc.cit., p. 26.

¹⁵A.K.Gopalan, loc.cit., pp. 43-46.

¹⁶E.M.S.Namboodiripad, How I became A Communist, op.cit., pp. 127-136, Also vide, T.V. Krishnan, loc.cit., p. 25.

¹⁷E.M.S.Namboodiripad, How I became A Communist, loc.cit., pp. 139-140, Also vide, Agarwal, Constitutional History of India and National Movement, New Delhi: Chand & Co., 1981, p. 218.

¹⁸A.K. Gopalan, loc.cit., pp. 47-51.

¹⁹Ibid, pp. 47-53. Also vide, T.V. Krishnan, loc.cit., pp. 26-27.

²⁰Appendices VI, VIa, VIb, VIc, VId, VIe & VIf regarding police report about ‘Guruvayur March’ (Unpublished Document).

²¹A.K. Gopalan, loc.cit., pp. 54-55, Also vide, Infra, p.588.

²²A.K. Gopalan, op.cit., pp. 58-59 & 60.

²³E.M.S. Namboodiripad, How I Became A Communist, op.cit., p. 173.

²⁴T.V. Krishnan, op. cit., pp. 34, 37 & 39.

²⁵E.M.S. Namboodiripad, loc.cit., p. 133.

²⁶N.E. Balaram, op. cit., p. 72. Also vide, E.M.S. Namboodiripad, idem.

²⁷E.M.S. states of another Malayali, A. Madhavan also attending the Patna Conference.

E.M.S. Namboodiripad, How I became A Communist. loc.cit. pp. 164, 172-173.

²⁸A.I.C.C. Files, “G.56” 1935; Mathrubhoomi Weekly, 15 November 1937; Home, Political Department, “4/6, 1941”, New Delhi: National Archives. In,

K. Gopalankutty, “Popular Base of National Movement: Congress and the Workers in Malabar 1934-40”, in, Indian Independence Struggle and the Communist Movement, Trivandrum: Chintha Publishers for, A.K.G. Study Centre, 1984, p. 142, n. 21.

²⁹To E.M.S. Namboodiripad, even in June-July 1937, a secret fraction of the C.P.I. was formed by P. Krishna Pillai, K. Damodaran, N. C. Sekhar and he himself.

E.M.S. Namboodiripad, The Communist Party of Kerala, Vol. I, Trivandrum: Chintha Publishers, 1984, p.4.

³⁰File No. 1938, Sub: “A.K. Gopalan Enlists Members to the Congress Party”, Year 1934: Government of Travancore, C.S. Also vide, Appendix IX (Unpublished Documents).

³¹A.K.Pillai, op. cit., pp. 424-26.

³²E.M.S.Namboodiripad, How I became A Communist, loc.cit., p. 173.

³³A.K. Pillai, op. cit., pp. 434-26.

³⁴A.K. Gopalan, op.cit., pp. 67 & 68. Also vide, T.V. Krishnan, op.cit., p.51.

³⁵E.M.S. Namboodiripad, Motherland, op.cit., pp. 319-322.

³⁶N.E.Balaram, op.cit., p.83.

³⁷E.M.S.Namboodiripad, Motherland, loc.cit., pp.319-322.

³⁸Idem.

³⁹Ibid., 321.

⁴⁰"The Report of the Economic Depression Committee", quoted, N.E. Balaram, op.cit., p.7.

⁴¹Ibid, pp. 40, 51, 56, 58, 65 & 68. Also vide "The Condition of the Peasants of Cochin". Pamphlet, Part III, quoted, N.E. Balaram, ibid., pp. 6 & 7.

⁴²Idem.

⁴³E.M.S. Namboodiripad, ... Motherland, loc.cit., pp. 181 & 182.

⁴⁴Only the 'jenmi' (landlord) had ownership on land in Malabar. By the beginning of the 20th century, the 'Kana Kudiyan' started agitating for proprietorship on his land. It was granted by the 'Tenancy Act' of 1930.

Ibid., pp. 171 & 333.

⁴⁵E.M.S. Namboodiripad, ... Motherland, loc.cit., pp. 333 & 334.

⁴⁶Idem.

⁴⁷Ibid., pp. 173-177.

⁴⁸In the Peasants' revolts of the 19th century, the 'toddy-tappers' of north Malabar and the 'Mappilas' of the south Malabar were in the forefront. In 1924, the 'Verum Pattakudiyan' (sub-tenants) of Malabar organised a meeting at Puthupanam in Badagara. Thousands of tenants participated, under the leadership of a peasant headman, 'Moolayil Koramban', about 100 tenants marched to Madras to make the Government include their interests also in the 'Kudiyan Bill'. They gave memorandum to the Government and also to Mannathu Krishnan Nayar (Balaram).

To A.K. Gopalan, in the entire Kasargode taluks, the peasants were organised by the leaders of the 'Abhinaya Bharata Yuvak Sangham'.

N.E. Balaram, op.cit., pp.27 & 115. Also vide, A.K. Gopalan, op. cit., p. 79; and Supra, pp. 66 & 67.

⁴⁹The tenants existed on unbearable tax, lease-rent and debt. Each birth and death in the landlord's family was added burden to the tenant. He had to do free labour on such occasion. He had to rear the lord's cattle for nothing, guard his house and move away with a bending head at the sight of the lord. He was not allowed to wear clean

cloths, cloths could not reach the ankles, education was denied, the farming expense, even in the years of flood and drought he had to meet and the law and the Government helped the lord to exact rent from the tenant. In the north Malabar, where cruel feudal suppression existed, the Sangham grew strong. There, the landlords had even the right to kill the tenant. Such landlords were, the 'Raja of Neeleswaran', 'Nayanar or Karakkattidom', 'Yesman of Kalyat', 'Thampuram or Chirakkal', 'Kandakayil Govindan Nambiar' etc. Coercive collections such as, 'vasi', 'nuri', 'vachukanal', 'mukkal', 'kankani', 'kazhcha', 'poli', 'kallapara', 'polichezhuthu', 'seelakasu' etc., existed. On all special occasions the tenant had to give gift. Thus apart from the lease-rent, whatever left was usurped by the landlord in the name of coercive collections. The early peasant agitations were against the coercive collections.

A.K. Gopalan, loc.cit., p. 63, Also vide, For Soil, Trivandrum: Chintha Publishers, 1986., pp. 16-19.

⁵⁰Thrice the Sangham leaders tried to hold a public meeting against the landlord, Karimarathu Namboodiripad. First two attempts failed because of the stiff resistance from a loyal tenant, Kariyil Ambukutty. At the third time, when his own crop was plundered by the rowdies of the lord, Ambukutty joined the Sangham and helped to organise the meeting against the lord. But no tenant was courageous enough to stand witness to the case. The leaders of the Sangham gave statements against the landlord in the court. The court verdict directed the lord to return the pepper crop to Ambukutty. The victory of the case gave big stir to the peasants to join the Sangham.

A.K. Pothuval, The Peasant Movement in Kerala, Trivandrum: Prabhatham Publishers, 1976, pp. 35 & 36.

⁵¹Ibid., pp. 37-38.

⁵²A.K. Gopalan, For Soil, op.cit., 19-20.

⁵³The founder leaders of the Sabha were, Swami Sahajananda, Indulal Yajnik, Musafar Ahmed, Acharya Narendradev, Karyananda Sarma & Rahul Sankeertyanan. The objects were:

1. Total liberation of the peasants from economic exploitation,
2. Organise the peasants to agitate and 3. Attainment of sovereign power to the working people and participation in the freedom struggle.

A.K. Pothuval, The Peasant Movement..., loc.cit., pp. 83-84.

⁵⁴A.K. Gopalan, For Soil, op.cit., p. 20-21.

⁵⁵Quoted in

A.K. Gopalan, My Story of Life, op.cit., pp 82-92.

⁵⁶The volunteers of the 'Starvation March to Madras' included, Sardar Chandroth, K. P. R. Gopalan, M. K. Kelu, C. C. Gopi, Kasim Manuel, P. M. Gopalan, P. Padmanabhan, V. Krishnan, Chauthukutty, P. K. Narayanan Nambiar, Gopalan, Krishnan Nayar, etc. P. Gopalan went in advance to give propaganda.

Ibid. Also vide,

A.K. Pothuval, The Peasant Movement..., loc.cit., pp. 42-43.

⁵⁷A. K. Gopalan, op.cit., p.82.

⁵⁸A.K. Pothuval, op.cit., p.47.

⁵⁹A.K. Gopalan, loc.cit., p. 93.

⁶⁰Most of the twelve points were relevant to the peasants of Kerala. They are:
1. Reduction in the lease-rent and tax. 2. Exempt barren lands from rent and tax...,
3. Abolish all feudal collections, declare all collections outside the lease-rent, illegal.
4. Permanent hereditary ownership of the tenant on land, 5. Introduce cooperative farming. 6. Relief from agrarian debt, appoint special court to enquire on agrarian debt, 7. Public ownership on canals, ponds, wells and forests of public use, 8.Recovery of arrear rent through civil court, not through eviction, 9. Agro- labourers should be given minimum decent wage, 10. Recognise agrarian unions.

A.K. Pothuval, The loc.cit., pp. 47-49.

⁶¹A.K. Pothuval, The Story of Peasant Agitation, Trivandrum: Prabhatham Publishers, 1978, pp. 23-24. Hereafter abbreviated, "A.K. Pothuval,... Peasant Agitation".

⁶²Ibid.p.25.

⁶³loc.cit., p. 25-26.

⁶⁴By this time, from Kodakad, South Kasargode, a march started to Mangalore, with 200 volunteers under T. Subrahmanian Thirumunbu to meet the Collector.

A.K. Pothuval, ... Peasant Agitation, loc.cit., p. 28. Also vide, A.K. Gopalan, The Story of My Life, op.cit., p. 194.

⁶⁵Ibid., pp. 82 & 87.

⁶⁶N.E. Balaram, op.cit., p. 118.

⁶⁷A.K.Gopalan, For Soil, op. cit., p.25.

⁶⁸Idem, Also vide.

A.K. Pothuval, ... Peasant Struggle, op.cit., pp. 31, 32, 34, 35, 39 & 40.

⁶⁹The tenants quoted in,

A.K. Gopalan, The Story of My Life, op.cit., pp. 105-106.

⁷⁰A.K. Pothuval, The Peasant Movement..., loc.cit., p. 59.

⁷¹K. Kuttikrishna Menon, an advocate in Madras was the Chairman of the Committee. The other members were C.K. Govindan Nayar, P. Raghava Menon, M.P. Damodaran, Mohamed Abdul Rehman Sahib, E.K. Kannan & E.M.S. Namboodiripad. Excepting the last three, the majority members were right-wing Congressmen. They could have given a report to the spirit of the 'Fezapore Resolution'. But, their opposition to the C.S.P. leaders in Kerala made them submit a report against the spirit of the Fezapore and against the interest of the peasants.

The report was against reducing the lease-rent, exempting unproductive land from taxation and cancel all evictions. Only the 'punam land' was exempted from taxation. Eviction for arrear lease-rent was allowed.

Against the majority report, E.M.S. Namboodiripad gave and 'Objection Report', which was taken to be the 'Manifesto on the Land Relations of Malabar'. It disapproved the purpose of the very existence of landlordism, since it was doing no use to society. At the same time, he proved with statistical data, how landlordism was existing as a burden on the producers on land the tenants.

The right-wing in the Congress was always working against the socialists who were organising the workers and peasants for collective bargaining. To counter the left at the party level, they organised the 'Gandhi Sangham'. They worked indirectly against 'trade unions' and 'Karshaka Saghams'. It gave courage to Capitalist-Congressmen like Samuel Aron to boycott the C.S.P. led K.P.C.C. In the second District Board election, they projected rebels. By the end of 1938, when Malabar was burning with peasant agitations, and when the 'Rajaji Government' sent 'Punitive Police' to suppress the agitations, the right-wing Congressmen supported the Government in its suppressions against the working class. It generated anti-Congress sentiment among the workers and peasants, which was skillfully utilised by the CSP leadership when they formed the C.P.I. unit in Kerala.

E.M.S. Namboodiripad, "The Objection Report", to, The Report of the Malabar Tenancy Committee, 1940, Government of Madras: in, ... Motherland, pp. 173-177, 333 & 334. Also vide, Table 7. Supra, p. 135.

⁷²Infra, p. 309.

⁷³Supra, pp. 131-134.

⁷⁴Quoted from, Mathrubhoomi, Calicut: 14 May 1938.

⁷⁵Andalat, The Origin of the Working Class in Kerala, Trivandrum: Chintha Publishers, 1984, pp. 46-47.

⁷⁶Ibid., pp. 52-55.

⁷⁷A.K. Gopalan, The Story of My Life, op. cit., p. 66.

⁷⁸Their demands were, 'reinstate the dismissed', 'increase low wages', and 'solve difficulties of the running staff'. It was a success in Trivandrum, Palghat, Shornoor, Calicut, Tellichery, Badagara & Cannanore. The Malabar leaders who helped the strike were, K.P. Gopalan, U. Gopala Menon & Kuroor Namboodiripad. Editorial quoted,

Mathrubhoomi, Calicut: 31 July 1928. Also vide, R. Prakasam, History of Trade Union Movement in Kerala, Trivandrum: Prabhatham Publishers, 1979, pp. 42-43. N.E. Balaram, op.cit., pp. 98-99.

⁷⁹In 1931, the workers of Common Wealth factories struck work 19 days against reduction of wages. But the strikes were not well organised. After the strike, the workers used to invite the congress leaders for conciliation. V.R. Nayar, U. Gopala Menon, P.V. Chathu Nayar etc., were interested in the Welfare of the workers. Early demands included, stop beating, time to use toilet, stop indiscriminate dismissal, etc. R.Prakasam, op. cit., pp. 41-44.

⁸⁰The leaders participated were, P. Krishna Pillai, K.P. Gopalan, A.K. Gopalan, R. Sugathan, N.C. Sekhar, K.K. Varrier, P.S. Namboodiri, P.K. Balan etc. Balaram, op. cit., pp. 98-101.

⁸¹P. Krishna Pillai and A.K. Gopalan used to wait at the gate of the cotton mill to befriend the workers for making a trade union. They started at their khadar clothes, turned their heads and passed away. They were afraid to go to the leaders. Still Krishna Pillai approached them with a smile. A.K. Gopalan too talked to them. Finally the workers were convinced of the sincerity of the two, they realised that they were a new type of Congressmen, whom were able to understand the sufferings of the workers. After a few days, the workers agreed to hold a meeting. One day after the work they met. Only 15 workers were present. But the number increased due to the work of men like, Maneri Appu, a worker. Regular classes of A.K. Gopalan and Krishna Pillai helped them to understand that the worker was starving because, the factory owner was accumulating profit. Within one month, the trade union was organised in the cotton mill and 75% of the workers joined it.

A.K. Gopalan, The Story of My Life, op.cit., pp. 70-71.

⁸²Mathrubhoomi, Calicut: 31 March 1935.

⁸³R. Prakasan, op.cit., pp. 66-67.

⁸⁴A.K.Gopalan, The Story of My Life, op.cit., pp. 72-73.

⁸⁵Prabhatham Annual, Calicut: 1939. Also vide. A.K.Gopalan, loc.cit., op.cit., pp.72-73.

⁸⁶Public Department (General), Fortnightly Reports; Report of the second half of March 1935, Government of Madras: Tamilnadu Archives. Ibid., second half of April 1935.

⁸⁷A.K. Gopalan, loc.cit., op.cit., pp. 76-77.

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 78.

⁸⁹Ibid., p. 78. Vide R. Prakasan, loc. cit., p.70.

⁹⁰A.K.Gopalan, The Story of My Life, loc.cit., pp. 100-102.

⁹¹R.Prakasam, op.cit., p. 89. Also vide E.M.S. Namboodiripad, "Looking Back", Desabhimani Weekly, Calicut: 26 June 1977.

⁹²Prakash Karat, "Agrarian Relations in Malabar, 1925-'47", Social Scientist, Trivandrum: October 1973, p. 37.

⁹³K. Gopalankutty, "Congress and the Workers in Malabar", op.cit., p. 138.

⁹⁴R. Prakasan, loc.cit., 91-92.

⁹⁵The peasants from Pinarayi and Erayoli marched to Tellicherry with their produce. An old peasant told A. K. Gopalan, "As long as we are alive, these working boys need not fear, we will feed them".

A. K. Gopalan, op. cit., p. 101.

⁹⁶K. Gopalankutty, loc. cit., p. 139.

⁹⁷A.K.Gopalan, loc cit. pp. 101-103.

⁹⁸Supra., pp. 315-318.

⁹⁹R. Prakasan, loc.cit., p. 91.

¹⁰⁰N.E. Balaram, op. cit., pp. 212-213.

¹⁰¹Ibid., p. 214. Also vide, A.K. Gopalan, The Story of My Life, loc.cit., p.98.

¹⁰²N.E. Balaram, loc cit., p. 214.

¹⁰³A.K. Gopalan, The Story of My Life, loc.cit., p. 99.

¹⁰⁴Idem.

¹⁰⁵N.E. Balaram, loc.cit., pp. 214-15.

¹⁰⁶A.K. Gopalan, The Story of My Life, loc.cit. p. 270.

¹⁰⁷N.E.Balaram, op.cit., p. 214. Also vide, A.K. Gopalan, op.cit. p.106.

¹⁰⁸A.K.Gopalan, The Story of My Life, loc. cit., p. 106.

¹⁰⁹A.K. Gopalan wrote an article entitled, 'School Business' in the daily newspaper, 'Mathrubhoomi', exposing corruptions in the management of a particular school. Based on it, an enquiry was conducted by the Government and the school was denied grant.

Ibid., p.100.

¹¹⁰Idem.

¹¹¹E.M.S. Namboodiripad, How I Became a Communist, op.cit., pp. 208-209.

¹¹²N.E.Balaram, loc. cit. pp. 181-184.