

Movement For United Kerala: Role And Strategy Of The Communist Party Of India

Dr. V D Radhakrishnan
Associate Professor
Department of Political Science
S N College, Cherthala, Alappuzha
Kerala, India

ABSTRACT

The Akhila Kerala Movement (Movement for United Kerala) had originally been started by the Congress Party.⁴ Already in 1947, the Congress Party in Kerala had established a United Kerala Committee for the purpose of realizing the Mission of the United Kerala. This Committee was composed of the Congress party, The Praja Mandalam of Cochin and the Travancore State Congress. In April 1947, the United Kerala Committee organized the first All Kerala Convention. But, with the integration of Travancore and Cochin, regionalism and parochialism started working as cankers in the bosom of the Congress. One section of the Congress leadership started an agitation for the separation of the four Tamil speaking Taluks from Travancore and their merger with the Madras State; while the other clamoured for the formation of Akhanda Kerala-a large, multilingual Kerala. This Multi lingual Kerala was to include Travancore, Cochin, Malabar, Coorg, some areas of South Canara and the Tribal areas of the Nilgiris.

KEY WORDS: *United Kerala, General Election, Communist Party , Congress Party , Praja Socialist Party , Revolutionary Socialist Party.*

Date of Submission: 26-08-2023

Date of Acceptance: 06-09-2023

When the second General Election was declared in January-February 1957, the Congress Party had proved its inability to establish a stable government. The history of the party in the post-independence period until 1957 demonstrated this. The political situation at this time was in favour of the Communist Party. The decline in the moral and political stature of the Congress Party led to the erosion of mass support the party had been commanding in the pre-independence years. Its failure in offering a solid leadership and guidance to the demand for the formation of the United Kerala and the manifestation of the new forces of regionalism shook the very foundations of the popular support of the Congress Party. The popular aspiration to form a United Kerala survived the decade of political reverses and brought about a popular upsurge comparable to the struggle against the British. While the Congress Party in Kerala remained indifferent to the peoples' call for the formation of United Kerala, the Communist Party exploited the situation by utilizing the regional feelings of the Keralites.

Thus, the task of the Communist Party in the 1957 General Elections was to place the Party at the helm of the new national and cultural upsurge and make the masses to recognize the Party as the legitimate successor of the Congress Party in Kerala. The theoretical premise for this was laid down by the prominent communist ideologue Sri. E.M.S. Namboothiripad. It was the national and democratic aspirations of the people which proved to be the most powerful force in the colonial countries after the Second World War. Focussing his attention upon the national problem of Kerala, Namboothiripad stated that the essence of the mistakes which had been committed by the Communist Party in the past lay in "underestimation of the national factor in working out the tactics of the revolution; in the failure to realize that the communists in a colonial country can fulfil their class tasks only if they take proper account of the fact that the national aspirations are the decisive political factor in a colonial country"¹

Applying this principle to the concrete political situation prevalent in Kerala in 1956, the Communist Party launched a campaign to rejuvenate the movement for 'Aikya Keralam'(The United Kerala). This movement put forward the demand that the Malayalam speaking areas of the Madras Presidency, namely, Malabar, be united with the Travancore-Cochin State. The message of the Party was tipped in a slogan calling upon the people to struggle for a 'United, Democratic and Prosperous Kerala' which found its way into all the important documents of the Communist Party. As Mr. Namboothiripad declared. "...the Party , however, did not remain satisfied with this practical unification of the democratic movement throughout Kerala, but, through a series of articles and pamphlets raised the pragmatic slogan of uniting all the homogeneous Malayalam speaking

majority areas of the Madras Presidency and the States of Cochin and Travancore into one Province without any Maharajah. This, as we shall see subsequently, was a slogan which caught the imagination of the people and created a very powerful mass movement for democracy".²

The Communists, however, were not satisfied with the exploitation of the regional and linguistic sentiments of the Akhila Kerala Movement. Therefore, they gave it a new dimension by raising the demand for socio-political reforms ".....it was the Communist Party alone that gave an anti-imperialist, anti-feudal context to this slogan; for it was the Communist Party alone that declared : (1) that the struggle for the United Kerala is an indivisible part of the struggle of the people of India for ending the imperialist rule; (2) that the struggle for a United Kerala is also a struggle for ending Princely rule and other remnants of Feudalism- a struggle for the introduction of full and genuine democracy for the people; (3) that the boundaries of the United Kerala are to be so drawn up that all those contiguous areas of Madras , Travancore and Cochin wherein the Malayalam speaking people are in the majority shall be included, the rest going to neighbouring national area provinces; (4) that in the struggle for the United Kerala, the common people of Kerala in alliance with their brethren in the neighbouring nationalities are the decisive forces.

It was these basic principles based upon a Marxist-Leninist interpretation of the National Question that enabled the Party to carry on an ideological struggle against the various disruptive slogans advanced by the feudal, bourgeois and petty-bourgeois parties with regard to the United Kerala".³

The Akhila Kerala Movement had originally been started by the Congress Party.⁴ Already in 1947, the Congress Party in Kerala had established a United Kerala Committee for the purpose of realizing the Mission of the United Kerala. This Committee was composed of the Congress party, The Praja Mandalam of Cochin and the Travancore State Congress. In April 1947, the United Kerala Committee organized the first All Kerala Convention. But, with the integration of Travancore and Cochin, regionalism and parochialism started working as cankers in the bosom of the Congress. One section of the Congress leadership started an agitation for the separation of the four Tamil speaking Taluks from Travancore and their merger with the Madras State; while the other clamoured for the formation of Akhanda Kerala-a large, multilingual Kerala. This Multi lingual Kerala was to include Travancore, Cochin, Malabar, Coorg, some areas of South Canara and the Tribal areas of the Nilgiris.⁵

Owing to the internal dissensions within the Congress Party of Travancore-Cochin and of Malabar, the Party failed to give the movement a united leadership. The Movement came to an end with the integration of Travancore and Cochin into one State in July 1949, thanks to the integration policy of the Princely States pursued by the Union Government.

Though the Congress leadership in Kerala had given up its stewardship of the movement for the formation of the large multilingual Kerala, the movement did not end. In 1952, the Akhila Kerala movement received a new impetus when the people of Andhra took the lead in organising a campaign which demanded the formation of states on the linguistic principle. Raising the demand for the formation of Vishala Andhra, Sri. Potti Sriramulu, one of the veteran leaders of Andhra in the national liberation movement, undertook a hunger strike, causing his subsequent death.⁶

This set ablaze a powerful national surge in Andhra, forcing the Union Government to recognise the formation of Vishala Andhra.⁷ The movement was led by the Communist Party which clashed with the police resulting in the killing of many people. On the day after the massacre, the Central Government agreed to appoint a Commission to enquire into the question of reorganization of States on Linguistic basis .⁸ A 3-member States Reorganization Commission, thus appointed, toured all over India to ascertain the nature of the problem and suggest remedy.

The agitation for the Vishala Andhra and the appointment of the Commission had a profound effect upon Kerala because it brought about a revival of the movement for the Akhila Kerala, dormant since 1947. But this time, the leadership of the revived movement was captured by the Communist Party. On account of the revolt of the Travancore –Tamilnadu Congress, the policy of the Central Government and the attitude of the High Command of the Congress Party, which all opposed the formation of the States on the linguistic basis, the Congress Party in Kerala stood immobilized.

Whereas, the policy of the Communist Party on the National Question in Kerala formulated by Nambuthiripad, offered the Party a strategic line as well as a slogan to keep itself at the top of the Akhila Kerala Movement. The Party organized many a campaign⁹ for mobilizing the public opinion in favour of Akhanda Keralam. When the States Reorganization Commission visited Kerala, the agitation for the United Kerala on linguistic basis was at its zenith.¹⁰

On the basis of the report of the Commission, the Central Government ordered the formation of a new State of Kerala through the incorporation of Malabar and Kasaragod into the Travancore –Cochin State and the separation of the four Tamil- speaking Taluks from Travancore and their merger with the Madras State. On the 1st of November 1956, the new State, assuming the proud and ancient name of "Kerala", officially came into existence. On 27th November, the former advisor to the Raja Pramukh, Sri. B.R.Rao was appointed Governor of

Kerala. The Communist Party in Kerala celebrated the 1st of November as a day of victory and rejoicing as August 15 has been celebrated by the All India Congress Party.

On account of their leadership of the agitation for Vishala Kerala, though their mission was not completely materialized, the Communists got an opportunity to engage in the propaganda that they formed the vanguard of the unification and liberation of the Malayalee from the national, linguistic and economic oppression by the neighbouring nationalities. The clever propaganda of the Communist Party was able to hoodwink the masses in such a way that the people of Kerala, for the time being, overlooked the role of the Congress in the liberation of India from the British.

The Communist Party's Posture as the Builder of New Kerala

The Communist Party leadership realized that it must carefully guard the newly won hegemony over the forces of the Akhila Kerala Movement.¹¹ In order to assure that the hegemony over the forces of Akhila Kerala Movement was not lost after the attainment of the United Kerala, the Party considered it important to concentrate on the problems which would be created precisely by the unification. To give a fresh impetus to the movement immediately after the unification of Kerala, a programme of economic and social reconstruction which would fire the imagination of the people for realizing the dream of the legendary emperor Mahabali's time was needed. The Communist Party wanted to continue to give leadership to this movement through the electoral campaigns.¹²

In a provincial conference of the Communist Party at Trichur from June 22 to 24, 1956, the Party adopted a resolution entitled "For Democratic and Prosperous Kerala" in which the Party dealt with the prospective of continuing its hegemony over the Akhila Kerala Movement. In this resolution, the Party has welcomed the final plans for the formation of the United Kerala and petrified the role of the Party in the formation of the new State. In the same resolution, the Party declared that the final programme for the formation of the United Kerala was adopted in spite of the anti-national and anti-linguistic policies of the Congress Party. The Congress Party was accused of its poor leadership which had been responsible for the mal-administration of the State in the past. The resolution called for the people to unite in a political struggle to form a new government, a people's Government, which would fulfil the mission of establishing a prosperous Kerala by industrializing the State and laying the foundations of Socialism.

The resolution outlined the following programme for building the new democratic and prosperous Kerala:

1. The people should fight against injustices, malpractices and anti-democratic measures of the Presidential rule.
2. People should demand from the Central Government that the State Legislative Assembly be convened on November 1st, 1956, when the New Kerala State came into existence. The Central Government should immediately form a government responsible to the new Assembly. The Presidential rule must be terminated.
3. Conditions must be created to avoid the recurrences of ministerial crisis and governmental instability.
4. Resolve must be made to form a stable Government capable of implementing a minimum programme of building a democratic and prosperous Kerala.
5. On the basis of such a programme the people must forge an electoral alliance which would consist of all the Leftist Parties, democratic and progressive individuals and the "Congressmen willing to fight against the reactionary policies of the Congress". Such a United Front must resolve to form a Coalition Government capable of implementing the minimum programme.
6. The Leftist Parties, progressive individuals and patriotic Congressmen have to unite in order to arrest the rise in prices, secure increase of wages of workers and the middle class, ensure prices for agricultural produce, prevent land evictions and attain the fulfilment of other immediate demands of the people.

In several parts of Kerala, people of different political parties found a common basis for co-operation in this national task.¹³

The resolution further declared that a detailed outline of all the above proposals would be soon presented to all progressive parties, groups and individuals to make them understand the tasks ahead and start the work of building up a New Kerala. An appeal was made to all political parties of the State for co-operation on these national tasks. A special appeal was addressed to the Praja Socialist Party.¹⁴ "...the Communist Party wishes to make its special appeal to the PSP. The Communist Party appeals to the PSP to remember the great enthusiasm generated among the people by the United Front of the Communist Party and the PSP in Malabar during the 1951 election; and between the Communist Party, PSP and other Leftist Parties during the general election in Travancore -Cochin in 1954, and the demoralization of the people after the election-when this United Front broke up."

Nobody can deny the historical truth that the anti-Communist line of the PSP's leadership, which made it impossible in 1954 and even earlier to unite the democratic forces of Kerala to oppose the Congress

Government's undemocratic policies and to establish a Government which would have followed policies in the interest of the people.

"Will they continue to follow the same policy in the same form or other? Will they continue their intrigues to deny the Communists their due place in the Legislative Assembly and in the Government which they have already earned in the public life of the people? Will they try to make agreements with other parties and groups excluding the Communists, or even opposed to them? The Communist Party appeals to the PSP as a whole to re-examine its entire policy and to answer satisfactorily all these questions. At the same time, the Communist Party greets the PSP friends who are making efforts to re-examine their policies in this matter, and lay the foundation for unity'.¹⁵

In the resolution, there was also an appeal to the leaders of the Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP). The communists wanted to use the RSP as a lever to pressurize the PSP join the United Front. Prior to the Trichur provincial conference, the communist leaders who had a sound grasp of the economic problem of Kerala had done home work to prepare the first comprehensive plan for the economic reconstruction of the New Kerala. The Party sought to maintain its hold over the forces of the Akhila Kerala Movement even after the formation of the United Kerala through this programme. This sort of the identification of the immediate goal of the Communist Party as outlined in the minimum programme with the goals of the Congress was viewed critically even by a veteran Communist leader of Kerala, Sri.K.P.R. Gopalan. "When the Communist Party of India was a monolithic organization and its Kerala branch seldom suffering from any schism, the party did not have any economic programme of its own, different from that of the Congress which would bring about a revolutionary transformation of the social and economic life of Kerala. The Communist Party had every hope of winning the 1957 general election in Kerala and of forming its Cabinet, but in the Trichur provincial conference the Communist Party adopted a resolution for the national re-construction which did not contain any socialism in it, on the contrary it was only a duplicate of the economic programme of Congress Party. Thus the history of the Communist Party of India and more particularly its Kerala branch shows that 'opportunism and political expediency' had always been overshadowing the revolutionary ideals of Marxism and Leninism."¹⁶

Notes and references

- [1]. Namboodiripad, EMS: The National Question In Kerala, People's Publishing House, 1952, Bombay.
- [2]. Ibid, Page 156
- [3]. Ibid, Page 156-57
- [4]. See The Resolution Of The 'Praja Mandalam', The Congress Party Organization Of The Foemer Cochin State In 1947 July, Published In The 'Deenabandhu', The Malayalam Daily Of The Party, On 21/07 1947.
- [5]. The Malayalarajyam, Dated 28/09/1956.
- [6]. The New Age, Vol. IV No. 1, January, 1955, Page 2.
- [7]. Ibid, Page 18.
- [8]. Ibid, Page 2.
- [9]. The Janayugam, Dated 15/07/1955, Page 1.
- [10]. See C Achutha Menon's Article, 'Welcome: Kerala State', New Age, Vol.3, No.3, Dated 16/10/1956.
- [11]. Also See 'Political Bureau Statement': Government Of Kerala State; New Age, Vol.3, No.3. Page 2, 20/11/1956.
- [12]. Govindan Nair M N. "The Communist Party Must Safeguard Its Supremacy Over The National Forces In The State And Utilise It Effectively" The Janayugam, 20/11/1956.
- [13]. Sugathan R, The Janayugam, 10/05/1956: "The Communist Party Is Not And Must Not Be Satisfied With The Formation Of A United Kerala, Because The Party Stands For The Liberation Of The Proletariat And Peasantry From The Clutches Of Their Exploiters And To Build Up A Society Based On The Equality Of The Distribution Of Wealth In Which There Would Be No Exploitation Of Man By Man. Therefore, The Communist Party In Kerala Must Strive Hard To Build Up A Socialist Kerala And Only If This Mission Of The Party Is Realized That The Party Can Really Be Proud Of Having Achieved Something Substantial For Kerala." (Translation)
- [14]. The Deenabandhu, 05/11/1956. (Also See The Malabar Mail, 08/12/1956, Page 2)
- [15]. New Age, Vol.3, No. 43, 22/07/1956. (Also See The Navajeevan, 20/07/ 1956, Page 1)
- [16]. 'The Communist Proposal For Building A Democratic And Prosperous Kerala,' Adopted At The Trichur Conference During June 22-24, 1956, New Age, Vol. 3, No. 43, 1956.
- [17]. The Mathrubhoomi, Dated 29/10/1969, KPR Gopalan's Interview With Mathrubhoomi Correspondent On 28/10/1969.