

## FOREWORD

**THIS IS THE THIRD IN THE SERIES OF PAMPHLETS ON the peasant movements in different states, which is being published in connection with the Golden Jubilee Celebrations of the All India Kisan Sabha.**

The present pamphlet contains two articles—one dealing with the heroic struggle of Punnapra-Vayalar peasants, and the other dealing with the origin and development of the peasant movement in Kerala, beginning with the Moplah revolt and covering the period since the formation of the All India Kisan Sabha. These descriptions provide an answer to the question as to how the peasant movement became so strong in Kerala as it is today, and how it not only broadened the basis but struck deep roots among the agricultural workers and poor peasants in that state. It was the consistent struggle against feudal, semi-feudal exploitation as well as that at the hands of the monopolists, and building up of the organisation on that basis, which provided a strong base to the Kisan Sabha in Kerala.

The first article is written by V.S. Achuthanandan, member of the Polit Bureau of the CPI (M) and Secretary of its Kerala State Committee, who has the privilege of having participated in the Punnapra-Vayalar struggle. The second article is written by T.K. Ramakrishnan, President of the Kerala state unit of the Kisan Sabha, who himself has taken part in many of these struggles. This pamphlet will certainly be of immense help for all those who are interested in the development and growth of peasant movement and wish to draw lessons from peasant struggles for their guidance.

*Harkishan Singh Surjeet*

## THE HISTORIC PUNNAPRA-VAYALAR STRUGGLE

*V.S. Achuthanadan*

WE ARE ON THE EVE OF THE FORTIETH ANNIVERSARY of the heroic Punnapra-Vayalar struggle. The message and lessons of this historic struggle, which is a milestone in the history of the revolutionary movement in Kerala, and which added a resplendent chapter in the history of the freedom struggle of India, continue to be relevant even today. This chapter recorded in history with the blood of the heroic martyrs of Punnapra and Vayalar, demonstrated to the people all over India that the working class embarks on struggles not merely for the sake of its narrow self-interests but for the protection of the vital interests of the nation and its people, and that, as a revolutionary class, it is prepared to make and is capable of making supreme sacrifices to safeguard the interests of all sections of the people and of the country at large.

At a critical stage in the movement for responsible government in the erstwhile princely State of Travancore (which is now part of the Kerala state), even some prominent leaders of the Travancore State Congress were lulled into a state of inaction by the Machiavellian tactics and propaganda of Dewan Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer. The Dewan was able to bamboozle some of these leaders with his tall claims about the benefits that would accrue to the State of Travancore in case his notorious "American Model Constitution" for the State was accepted. He boasted that this princely State at the southern-most end of India, being a maritime State, endowed with natural resources, could flourish as an independent State, not linked to the Union Government.

It was in this background that the working class of the State came forward to lead the struggle for responsible government, without falling into the trap laid by the Dewan, and called upon all to defeat his machinations and to boldly carry on the struggle. While the State Congress leaders were content with the demand for responsible government "under the aegis of His Highness the Maharaja", it was the working class that boldly raised the slogan of "abolition of princely rule" and establishment of a democratic government responsible to the people, and emphasised the need for carrying on the people's struggle in the State as an integral part of the struggle for the independence of India.

The Dewan, in the name of the Maharaja, had in fact established a brutal autocratic regime in the State. Cunning and clever as he was, the Dewan also tried to isolate the working class from the mainstream of the political struggle for independence by offering inducements and enticements like especially reserved seats for workers in the State Assembly. The working class and its leaders did not, however, fall prey to such inducements as they considered the interests of the country and its people, and the defence of the democratic and political rights of all sections of the people, as supreme. History will never forget or forgive the Congress leaders for the cowardly role which they played at a time when the working class had embarked upon the path of determined political struggle against the Dewan's autocratic rule and for the freedom of the country. The Congress which now fondly delivers sermons to the workers on patriotism, unity and integrity of the country, not only failed to fight for the country but even joined hands with the enemy when the workers were engaged in a struggle for the cause of independence and integrity of all sections of the people. The Congress leaders went to the extent of indulging in slanderous propaganda against the workers and their leaders, calling them traitors, who were leading the country into a blood-bath. Without compunction they shamelessly repeated the false propaganda unleashed by the Dewan, that the leaders of the working class movement had deceived the workers by leading them into a direct confrontation with the State and the armed forces. They also shamelessly alleged that the workers were made to believe that the landless

labourers would be distributed land, once the struggle came to a successful end.

When the Congress came to power after Independence, the Congress leaders in the State without hesitation invited into their fold political leaders like R. Shanker, A.A. Rahim, Kainikkara Padmanabha Pallai and others who had functioned as stooges of the Dewan. At the same time they were not prepared even to release from prison the heroic patriots who had participated in the Punnapra-Vayalar struggle. Even today the Central Government has not recognised the Punnapra-Vayalar struggle as part of the freedom struggle.

It is no wonder that the Congress had adopted this attitude to the Punnapra-Vayalar struggle, because as we know, the All-India leadership of the Congress was frantically trying to reach a settlement with the British rulers, at a time when the tide of the post-World War anti-imperialist struggle was sweeping the entire country. Similarly, the Telangana armed struggle of the kisans against the Nizam's regime, the "tebhaga" struggle against the landlords in Bengal, the All-India strike of the P&T workers, the country-wide agitation for the release of INA leaders from prison and, above all, the RIN mutiny which commenced in Bombay and spread throughout the country, had not gladdened the hearts of the Congress leaders but had, on the contrary, alarmed them.

The bourgeois leadership of the Congress was jittered at the thought that in case all these struggles develop into a mighty struggle against the British, not only the princes and landlords who had been the pillars of support for the British power in India, would crumble, but that they too would not be able to achieve power. So they were ready to accept the transfer of power from the British into their own hands even if the country were to be partitioned and the freedom to remain incomplete. They were not even concerned about communal riots spreading throughout the country and the blood of innocents being shed in these riots. What they were really afraid of was the possibility of the establishment of a social system and state in which the workers, the kisans and other sections of toiling people might predominate. They did not want that the prospects of capitalist development in this country be hindered or blocked.

For this purpose the Nehru-Patel leadership of the Congress was prepared even to ignore the advice and guidance of their own leader, Mahatma Gandhi.

When we examine the situation in the State at the time in the above background, the reason why the bourgeois leadership of the Congress betrayed the Punnapra-Vayalar heroes would be patently clear. The bourgeois leadership of the Congress was leading the people not with the outlook and perspective which the heroes of the Telangana, Tebhaga and Punnapra-Vayalar struggles or the heroes of the Naval mutiny had. They were trying to bring about a negotiated settlement with the British for transfer of power to the Indian bourgeoisie, who could rule the country by aligning with big landlords and forging links with foreign monopoly capital.

What was the socio-economic and political conditions in the princely State of Travancore at that time when the workers were forced to launch a determined struggle ?

The vast majority of the people had rallied behind the struggle for responsible government. Landlords in the period of the princely rule were living like despots, oppressing the poor agricultural workers who were being treated like slaves. They had to bow in obeisance before the landlords. They were treated as untouchables. They were not even allowed to use the same words and terms as the landlords used even for their essentials like rice, cloth, etc. They had, instead, to use especially coined lowly terms for these items.

A farm worker who dared to ask for his wages for the work done, would not only lose his job the next day but would also be evicted from his hutment constructed on the land owned by the landlord. Tenants had to pay high rent to the landlords and also offer them presents at the festival time.

The fishermen residing in hutments on the sea-shore were also treated like slaves. Fishing nets and boats belonged to the landlords, and the fishermen had no ownership rights over them. A big share of the fish caught by fishermen was considered to belong to the landlords. For their own share the fishermen got only a meagre price which they had to share amongst themselves.

The landlords, with the connivance and support of the

police, used to attack workers. The police also used to carry out house raids at nights without any reason or provocation and beat the workers and their family members.

To resist these attacks and to secure adequate wages for their hard labour, the farm workers of Sherthallay and Alleppey formed their organisation and started agitation. It was the coir factory workers of Alleppey who helped the farm workers to organise themselves.

The workers in coir factories who were being thrown out of their jobs, also started their struggle against retrenchment. Fishermen started organising themselves against exploitation. Poor peasants and farm workers started their struggle against eviction. A new wave of consciousness and struggle for their essential demands swept among the rural toiling masses. Red flags began to be hoisted in every nook and corner of the countryside.

The Dewan's regime unleashed police terror to suppress these struggles. Armed police camps were set up in the Ambalapuzha and Sherthallay talukas. The State military force was also brought on the scene. The military, police and goondas began to run amok, beating up workers, attacking their homes and indulging in rapes of women in the workers' hutments.

To resist these attacks, the workers of the Sherthallay and Ambalapuzha talukas set up their own camps and volunteers were trained to carry on the resistance struggle. Following this, the leaders of the Communist Party were arrested and thrown behind the bars.

It was in the last week of October 1946 that the workers were forced to directly confront the army and the police, and started attacking their camps. On October 23 the first attack by the workers on the army and police camps took place at Punnappra. The military and police resorted to firing. Some comrades were shot dead. Many others were injured. (The police officer in command of the camps was killed by the workers in the clash that ensued.) But undeterred by this, the workers marched forward to attack the army and police camps. Police resorted to firing at Mararikulam on the way to Sherthallay on October 25. Six comrades were shot dead there. Many were arrested. On the 27th the army surrounded Vayalar, an island

in the backwaters. The army reached that place in boats. When they saw the brave volunteers marching forward to face the bullets, the army men without alighting from their boats, began to fire at them with machine-guns. Several comrades were shot dead. These were, however, only some of the major incidents that took place during the struggle.

### *RELEVANCE OF PUNNAPRA-VAYALAR TODAY*

Today, after forty years since this heroic struggle was waged in Punnapra and Vayalar, when we pay homage to the heroic martyrs, we find that even after 38 years of the Congress rule, heavy burdens are being imposed every year on the people through increased taxation and high prices. The recent hike in prices of essentials through executive orders on the eve of the budget session of the Parliament and the increase in passenger fares in the railway budget are further examples of imposition of heavier burdens on the people. Unemployment has mounted to unprecedented heights. More and more people are being driven down below the poverty line. Attacks on Harijans and women, wanton attacks on the democratic rights of the people continue. Caste-communal and divisive forces are running amok endangering the unity and integrity of the country. The failure of the Congress agrarian reforms, the retention of antiquated agrarian relations over a greater part of the country, and the continued concentration of land in the hands of a very small section of the people have precipitated an unprecedented crisis in the country. Sickness in major industries and decline of the traditional industries throw out tens of thousands of workers out of jobs without any possibility for them of regaining employment. The Rajiv Gandhi Government's new economic policy, in the name of promoting advance technology and quick industrial development, has, as its basic postulates, removal of controls, freedom to private sector, opening of the Indian market to multinationals and scuttling of meaningful planning. Industries are being delicensed, import policy is being liberalised to facilitate the entry of multinationals, and big tax concessions amounting to one thousand crores of rupees have been announced in favour of big industrialists. The new fiscal policy offers further encouragement, incentives and assurance

to the private sector. The anti-national and anti-people policies of the Government bring the entire democratic forces into open conflict with the ruling party.

The sharpened contradictions engendered by these reactionary policies find expression in the continued attacks on the democratic rights of the people. Even the right to vote is often not allowed to be freely exercised. Elections are rigged by forcible capture of polling booths. Legislatures are often made irrelevant and the Congress-I ministries continue to rule on the basis of ordinances. Concentration of power at the Centre and the violation of the principles of federalism curtail the powers of the states. This leads to fissiparous tendencies, providing opportunities for divisive forces and opportunist politicians to make regional, parochial and casteist-communal appeals.

Corruption, jobbery, nepotism and the growing influence of black-marketeers and smugglers on the Congress-I leaders, make the administration a curse for the common man.

The authoritarian drive of the ruling party expresses itself in a blatant manner in the use of black acts and measures by the administration when confronted by the organised forces of the democratic movement. It is against this situation that massive strikes, bandhs, and protests are taking place all over the country

The people of India have to carry on an intense fight against the authoritarian move and the danger of one-party rule, in the midst of the serious challenges to national unity from the imperialists and the secessionists, and the compromising policy of the ruling party.

The ruling part has revealed its total bankruptcy and opportunism in face of the challenge of the secessionists. It brought Punjab to the brink of disaster and the people had to pay a heavy price in the form of lives, untold sufferings and suppression of democracy. In Punjab, the Congress-I tried to outbid the Akali Party in appealing to Sikh feelings by pandering to Bhindranwale.

Neither the Congress-I leaders at the Centre nor in the state dared to expose the hand of the U.S. imperialists in Assam in fanning the fire of separatism and financing the movement.

The association of the Congress-I with the TUJS in Tripura



in the Lok Sabha elections and those to the District Councils is another scandalous example of the unprincipled conduct of the ruling party.

While the Punjab Accord is welcome, it will not immediately repair the great damage done by the selfish policies of the Congress-I. The Assam settlement reveals the opportunist policies of the ruling party. To appease the agitationists the Central Government has sacrificed the citizenship rights of tens of thousands of Indian citizens, creating a sense of insecurity among thousands belonging to the minority communities. The terms of settlement will have a profound disruptive effect on national unity in the north-eastern region.

The other states of north-eastern region—Manipur, Nagaland, Mizoram—are facing discontent, insurgency and secessionist challenge. The situation in Kashmir is also serious with the pro-Pakistani elements capable of doing a lot of mischief.

The CPI(M) has always held aloft the banner of national unity, fighting the secessionists politically among the masses in Assam, Punjab and Tripura. In Assam and Tripura, the party had to pay a heavy price. Many had to sacrifice their lives. Many had to face terrorist attacks.

The ruling party is equally incapable of fighting the forces of obscurantism and separatism, based on caste and religion. The RSS and Hindu communal forces are aggressively rousing communal passions. Recent events in Gujarat and Bhiwandi in Maharashtra witnessed the fractionalisation of the police on caste-communal lines. The behaviour of the police during the Delhi riots shattered the secular image of the country's administration and inflicted irreparable damage on national unity. The Congress-I party in Kerala retreats before the obscurantist challenge coming from the Muslim orthodoxy. The Congress-I in Kerala aligns itself with all casteist and communal forces in order to keep itself in power.

Thus the continuation of the Congress-I in power not only endangers democracy but also endangers national unity.

Today, when the country is in danger, when the task is of fighting authoritarianism, defending national unity, defeating imperialist conspiracies against the country, only the unity of the Left and democratic forces and only the increase of their

might in Indian politics will save the country.

In the international sphere the struggle against war and for world peace, against the mad drive of the imperialists to unleash a nuclear war, against racism and against the attempts of imperialism to dominate the world, have to be linked with our struggle within the country.

While we pay homage to the Punnappa-Vayalar martyrs, let us take the pledge that we shall continue to wage a determined struggle for the realisation of the aims for which these heroes had fought and laid down their lives. □

## PEASANT STRUGGLE IN KERALA

T.K. RamaKrishnan

“THE PEASANT MOVEMENT IN MALABAR”, WROTE EMS Namboodiripad in *A Short History of Peasant Movement in Kerala* in 1942, just 7 years after the All-India Kisan Sabha was formed, “is almost a century old. Its slogans have changed, its plan of action has changed, and above all, it has advanced from a *movement* to an *organisation*” (*Selected Writings*, vol. II, page 170).

Tracing the growth of peasant struggle in the Malabar part of Kerala, he went on : “It is to the illiterate, backward Moplah of the Ernad and Walluvanad talukas that the honour goes of having raised the initial voice of protest against the oppression of the *Jenmi*. His very backwardness, his inability to see the might of the new state built up by the white man, his ignorance of the intricacies of the new legal concepts introduced by that state, made him rise individually against individual acts of oppression indulged in either by the *Jenmi* or by the new bureaucratic state. He did not organise himself and his brethren into a peasant movement ; for, in his ignorance, he only saw a particular *Jenmi* or a particular official oppressing him ; he could not see the *Jenmi* system or the bureaucracy which supported it. At the same time, he acted firmly against his own immediate oppressors because he was not sophisticated enough to submit himself to the new oppressive system” (*ibid*, pp. 170-1).

Further : “Between 1836 and 1898, as many as 35 cases of criminal action by Moplahs against Hindus are recorded in the Ernad, Western Walluvanad and North Ponnani talukas (an

area with a dominant Moplah population). (This constitutes the present Mallapuram district—T.K.R.) The official historians of Malabar draw the conclusion that the Moplahs are a fanatical band of law-breakers. The Government have accordingly enacted special laws (Moplah Outrages Act) to protect “the decent and law-abiding citizens” from them.

“A careful analysis, however, shows that 80 per cent of these crimes are those committed by Moplah tenants against Hindu *Jemis* or their agents or servants or the *Adhilgari* (village headman) or a revenue official or a police party. And remember that almost all the *Jemis* in this area are Hindus—Nambudiris, Rajahs and Temples particularly—and most of the tenants are Moplahs.

“It is not, of course, denied that a certain percentage of the crimes are of a purely fanatical type. There are, for instance, cases of *Cheruma* (Harijan) converts having been attacked by bands of Moplahs for having reconverted themselves to Hinduism. Such instances are, for one thing, very rare, and, for another, we should remember that Moplah priests are working with the deliberate purpose of clouding the vision of the Moplah peasants. It is to the interests of these priests to turn the anti-*Jenmi* sentiments of the peasants into the anti-Hindu sentiments of the Moplahs. And it is no wonder that the backward Moplah fell a victim to this propaganda. The wonder is, rather, that such fanatical outbursts are so few in proportion to their anti-*Jenmi* and anti-official actions. It clearly shows that with all his traditional illiteracy, backwardness and priest-riddenness, the Moplah peasant is much more a class-conscious peasant than a community-conscious Moplah” (pp. 171-2).

These earlier outbreaks of the Moplah tenantry were, however, suppressed by the British rulers with an iron hand. The peasant movement therefore had to adopt a new form which it did a few decades later. No more was the fighting tenantry confined to the educationally and culturally backward Moplah but cut across all caste and communal differences. The process of the formation of these new forces was explained as follows in EMS's booklet referred to above :

“The Rajahs and *Sthanis* (chieftains) formed the political superstructure of the old, pre-British society while the

Nambudiris and religious institutions formed its cultural superstructure. The British regime gave a stunning blow to both and constructed a new superstructure politically and culturally. The British power, however, kept the elements of the old superstructure intact as the base of its own economic superstructure. The contradictions involved in this gave birth to a new class—the rising bourgeoisie—and laid the basis for a great social upheaval.

“It was the middle strata of the old society that constituted the cadres of the new political and cultural machine. The Rajahs, *Sthanis* and Nambudiris did not take up English education and secure administrative posts. They held on to the economic and social predominance and poohpooed the alien tongue. It was their dependents, tenants and poor relatives, that went to schools, passed examinations and secured Government posts.

“Now this created a new situation. The new class of educated young men and officers were politically and culturally far more advanced than their landlords who, however, were economically and socially dominant in the countryside. The very state which made them politically independent of the *Jenmis* made them much more dependent economically on those same *Jenmis*.

“A Tehsildar or a Police Inspector or a Sub-Judge is part of a machine which deals with *Jenmis* as with any other citizen, but individuals who are appointed to these posts are socially and economically dependent on some of these *Jenmis*. The officer has innumerable opportunities of bossing over the *Jenmis* as over the rest of the people, but the *Jenmi* can evict his family from the house in which it lives. The educated and professional man with a wide outlook and a sturdy sense of self-respect, has to humiliate himself before the narrow-minded and conceited ignoramus who is the landlord.

“It was this conflict between the new rising bourgeoisie and the old decaying *Jenmi* that gave a new leadership to the peasant movement. The most outstanding individual of this type is the late Sir C. Sankaran Nayar” (pp. 173-4).

The struggle between the two, EMS continues, “was bitter and prolonged. It took over half a century (from the latter

part of the last century to 1930) to see the end of the struggle in which the *Kanamdar* emerged victorious. The struggle was not confined to British Malabar but took the same form and intensity in the States of Cochin and Travancore where, however, the struggle ended more than a decade before it did in British Malabar. The chequered history of their struggle by means of reports and memoranda, brochures and tracts, newspaper articles and platform oratory, petitions and counter-petitions, draft-bills and debates, committees and conferences, vetoes and recommendations which at last resulted in three separate Acts for the three separate political divisions of the Malayalam-speaking area. All this need not be detailed here. Sufficient to say that the Malabar tenancy question was as recurrent and persistent a subject in Madras for half a century as the Irish question was (for 4 centuries) in London. And yet its solution did not touch the fringe of the problem even as the Anglo-Irish treaty has not touched the fringe of the British colonial problem. What is more, the solution of the tenancy question in 1930 had to be preceded by the Rebellion of 1921, even as the settlement of the Irish question in 1921 had to be preceded by the Easter Rising of 1916" (p. 175).

A new dimension to the tenant movement in Malabar was added in the post-First-World War years when the earlier tenant movement got integrated with the political movement for Non-Cooperation, launched under the joint leadership of the Congress and the Khilafat Committee. The two most controversial resolutions hotly debated and ultimately passed at the Malabar District Political Conference, held at Manjeri in 1920, were those supporting the Non-Cooperation Movement and demanding tenancy reforms. And it was after this Conference that the Congress and the Khilafat Committees came to be formed in such large numbers as were not rivalled up to the end of the 1930s. This gave a new hope and a new slogan to the oppressed Moplahs who joined the movement in large numbers. It, however, was very rapidly diverted into communal channels, transforming the militant fighters for political freedom and for tenancy reform into anti-Hindu rioters. How did this happen? EMS asks:

"Why was it that the movement was confined to an area

with a Moplah majority? The British bureaucracy and the *Jenmi* system which it set up cannot be said to be partial towards the Hindu peasants who are as numerous in other talukas as the Moplahs are in Ernad, and parts of Walluvanad and Ponnani. The oppression and exploitation of the *Jenmi* and the officials are as bad for the Hindu peasants as for their Moplah comrades. Why is it then that Moplah peasants rose almost to a man while the Hindu peasants fell victims to the propaganda that the rising was not anti-*Jenmi* or anti-Government but anti-Hindu? For, it cannot be denied that the Hindus as a whole kept aloof from the rebellion and were far behind the Moplahs in the pre-rebellion period of agitation and organisation. The number of Congress and Khilafat sabhas organised and members enrolled in the Moplah area was far higher than the corresponding number in other areas. And, finally, why was it that a certain number of forced conversions took place, which as I have remarked before, cannot by any stretch of imagination be explained away as part of a purely agrarian movement?

"I have posed the question which every Marxist historian worth the name should answer. I do not, however, pretend to answer them here. It requires much better and more careful study; that I have made has led me to certain conclusions which I set forth below:

"1. The Moplahs as a community have a much higher sense of organisation than the Hindus. Their congregational prayers, their common feasts and dinners, their conception of equality among themselves, etc., make them much more amenable to organised work than their brethren of other communities. So when the message of organisation and struggle was preached by political leaders, the Moplahs took it much more easily and with much firmer determination than others.

"2. The Moplahs had more reason to rally round the Congress and Khilafat than the Hindus. For, one of the slogans raised by the nationalist leadership was "hands off the Turkish Khalifa", a slogan dear to the hearts of every pious Muslim. While for the Hindu peasant it was only a question of freedom from bureaucracy and the *Jenmi*, it was to the Moplah a question of defending his religious head, a question of sacred war

against the desecrator of his creed.

"3. While the above two reasons give adequate explanation for the more solid organisation in the Moplah area, they do not explain the course which the rebellion took. This is much more complex a question than the one answered above.

"4. The key to the whole question as to the course of the rebellion is supplied by the different strata of society which rallied by the Congress-cum-Khilafat-cum-Tenancy movement. These can be divided as follows :

"(a) The Hindu elements of the central leadership in Malabar. They were *vakils* and intellectuals drawn from among the *Kanamdars*. They were the typical bourgeois nationalist leadership. Furious against the bureaucracy, earnest about the struggle against it, elated at the staggering response to their call for struggle, sanguine about their own ability to control the masses within the four corners of non-violent non-cooperation, indignant against the oppressive *Jenmi*, yet blind to the demands and aspirations of the *Verumpattamdars*, they went forth to the masses with the message of organisation for a struggle. They were with and among the masses, till the latter began to adopt their own methods of struggle, i.e., went beyond the creed of non-violence and then left them to their fate.

"(b) The Moplah elements of the same leadership. Closely akin to their Hindu counterparts, but with firmer roots in the masses, they stood for the *Verumpattamdars* and were therefore more progressive. They did not leave the masses, but tried to bring them into the limits of non-violent non-cooperation. The most outstanding of these, Mr. Mohammed Abdur Rahiman, is even today the hero of the Moplahs.

"(c) The middle leadership in the rebel area consisted mainly of Musaliars, Thangals, Hajjis and other saintly Moplahs. Sincere anti-imperialists, they, however, think and speak in terms of religion which had tremendous effect in rallying the Moplahs. Some of them have had the adventurous and the careerist in them, but most of them were good material as peasant cadres, if only there had been a good and efficient central leadership. Their loss is irreparable to the peasant movement as they showed their mettle as good organisers both before and during the rebellion.



“(d) Rank and Filers. These may have naturally included a certain percentage of unsocial and individualist elements, but most of them were typical anti-*Jenmi* and, therefore, anti-Government peasants.

“(e) Hindu elements of middle leadership and rank and filers were on the same pattern and their leaders, and left the movement altogether after the outbreak and the arrival of the military.

“It is not difficult to explain now why the movement in its later stages took a partially communal turn. The Moplah found that his Hindu compatriots, both the leaders and the rank and file, deserted him : the military arrived to hunt him out of his abode ; his Hindu neighbours helped the military as against him. He naturally got enraged at them. This was worked upon by fanatical and adventurous elements among the rebels. No wonder then if anti-Hindu actions took place. The wonder is, rather, that they were so few in number and proportion.

“It was thus that the greatest mass movement in British Malabar was diverted into the most tragic and most futile mass action. Did anybody divert it deliberately and if so, who, is a question for a penetrating study of facts, but one can definitely say that behind the whole tragedy can be seen the colossal ignorance of the central political leadership in Malabar and India as to the actual character of the mass force roused by them. The leaders got a following of a very different character from what they wanted, yet thought it was what they wanted. South Malabar had to wade through blood and get its civil liberties suppressed for over a decade in order to learn that leadership is not all-powerful, nor the masses a herd of sheep. Thousands of lives had to be lost and many more to suffer untold privations because the masses had an organisation of their own but a different type of leadership” (pp. 179-82).

The suppression of the rebellion created an entirely new situation. The peasant movement had to adopt new forms of agitation and organisation based on new slogans, if it had to be revived. Within a decade and a half after the Malabar rebellion, however, a new dimension was given to the movement.

EMS goes on : “The national struggles of 1930 and 1932 gave rise to a new type of Congress cadres which ultimately developed into the leadership of the new peasant movement.

"The social composition of the Congress volunteers in Malabar was predominantly rural middle class. What does this actually mean? It means that, apart from a few individuals from among the progressive *Jemmi* and bourgeois elements and also a number of nationally conscious (but not class conscious) workers, the great majority of Satyagrahis were connected with land as tenants. They were, however, junior members of their families, who had jobs as local school teachers. They were in consequence connected with the peasantry but were not themselves working peasants. They did understand the problems and feelings of the peasants but had risen sufficiently above the ordinary peasant to think more of national than of agrarian problems.

"The course of the national struggle, the heated discussions over it inside the jail and outside, the earnest study of political questions and the close contact with some revolutionaries, made these Satyagrahis into convinced revolutionaries by the time they came out of jail. The point need not be further elaborated here, since it was the same tendency as was observed all over India. Sufficient to say that this provided adequate material for the building up of the Congress Socialist Party. Almost the entire rank of the Satyagrahis joined the party and became its active workers. And their social composition made it inevitable that they turn their main attention to the peasant movement.

"This character of the new leadership determined the area in which the new peasant movement should rise and grow. It was in North Malabar that the national struggle of 1930 and 1932 were stronger. The Congress leadership was in indescribable terror about the movement in the South, they were afraid of another 1921. They, therefore, carefully omitted South Malabar from the area of civil disobedience and asked volunteers from the South to go to Calicut or some 'safe' centres in the South itself and not to have any movement in their own village. Not so in the North. Sri Kelappan's march to Payyannur electrified the whole North. The Salt Satyagraha in the Payyannur camp, the Forest Satyagraha in Hosdurg taluka and other actions like the Cannanore Youth Conference gave rise to large numbers of cadres even apart from the 1000 or so of actual jailed Satyagrahis.

This formed the nucleus out of which the latter peasant movement arose. Every Satyagrahi, on coming out of jail, set himself up in his own village. He started a small reading room where the young men of the locality would gather every day, read the daily paper and discuss politics. He would also tell them what he learned in jail, whom he met, what they talked about, what they had decided to do. The reading rooms gradually grew in number and became ever more and more the centres of political activity. Perhaps some Satyagrahis go out of the picture some times, some reading room goes into disuse but others rise up elsewhere, and those that already existed grow in strength and popularity. Here it is a boisterous K.P.R. Gopalan setting up a Sri Harshan Reading Room, or organising a Kalleisseri Youth League, running and participating in football matches; there it is the venerable Bharatheeyan with his Ashram and Bhagavat Gita and Mahabharatham, reciting Sanskrit slokas to prove that the peasant has his rights, going from village to village with his pious and humble personality but effective and uncompromising speech; in a third place it is A.V. Kunhumbu building his Yuvak Sangham to a position unrivalled anywhere else in Kerala; and so on and so forth. Everywhere the youth in North Malabar was showing its mettle as organiser of itself which was later to come out as the new organiser and leader of the new movement" (pp. 186-7).

It was against this background that Karshak Sanghams started their activities in North Malabar. While South Malabar, too, witnessed the formation of the Sangham and while both together developed a powerful movement which forced the Congress Government of Madras in 1938-39 to appoint a tenancy enquiry committee, there was a new development which equally affected the entire Kerala—the State of Travancore and Cochin as much as Malabar. EMS says :

"The price of paddy, coconut and pepper—Kerala's staple crops—had fallen to more than half its pre-depression prices. Commitments in cash like revenue, debt and cart rent more than doubled in value. .

"This began to draw the upper sections of the landed elements themselves into some sort of agitation and organisation. Import of rice from Burma and copra from Ceylon was pointed

out as the reason for this phenomenal fall in prices, and heavy tariff was demanded to stop this import and protect the cultivator. They did not care to answer the question why pepper also fell in price, nor did it matter to them how the one crore of people in Kerala whose annual paddy production is less than half their annual requirements, are to live.

"Four distinct forms of organisation were visible in Kerala during this period as a direct result of the misery caused to the people by the depression :

"(1) Coconut Growers' Association in Travancore, led by late Changanasseri Parameswaran Pillai, a retired Judge of the Travancore High Court. Its demands were centered round raising the price of coconut. This had some contacts and tried to built up an organisation in Cochin and British Malabar also. It, however, did not grow into a mass movement drawing large masses of peasants. Of the same character and on minor scales were some agitations set up by the arecanut growers in Cochin State and paddy growers in Malabar. But, in both cases, growers meant only a few landlords or merchant contractors and hence these did not acquire even as much of the mass character as the Coconut Growers' Association did. The reason is that the price of coconut is a subject which deeply affects even the poorest peasants since they have to sell it for purchasing daily necessities, while in the case of paddy it is only the richer tenants and landlords that have any surplus left for sale.

"(2) Of a similar character but with a different platform was the land revenue agitation set up in British Malabar. This was started by the *Jenmis* and rich *Kanamdars*. It was primarily directed against the new enhancement of land revenue under the periodical revenue settlement. That the fall in prices should be accompanied by an 18.75 per cent increase of revenue, was intolerable not only to the over-taxed people as a whole but to the most prosperous sections among them.

"The course of this agitation is very interesting reading. It was started by Mr. R.M. Palat, the then President, District Board, and the *Jenmi* representative in the Madras Legislative Council, both to ventilate the grievances of the *Jenmi* and to lay basis for himself as against the Congress for the future election. The Gandhist Congress leaders, on coming out of jail in 1933,

took it up and gave it a mass character, effectively foiling Palat's game. The Congress Socialists, for their part, worked it up as Congressmen, got experience of mass agitation and organisation and, as we will see, developed it into a movement embracing other peasant demands (like debt, rent, etc.).

"(3) The third type was again in Travancore. Its leadership was reformist bourgeois (Christian clergymen) and the platform centred round debt relief. It was confined to one area (Kuttanad, near Alleppey). Kuttanad figured subsequently (1938) as an area of a heroic struggle of peasants for democratic reform, and recently it again became the scene of a determined and victorious struggle of agricultural labourers.

"(4) The most radical and at the time the most significant movement was the widespread Karshaka-Thozhilali (i.e., Peasant-Labourer) Movement in Cranganore (Kodunga'lur) in Cochin State. Started by Mr. K.M. Ibrahim, M.L.C. (Cochin), originally for debt relief, it was the first general anti-landlord anti-moneylender movement that Kerala has had. Its slogans were on a par with the general socialistic slogans, although the emphasis was much more on debt relief. The movement rallied a great number of cadres and developed into Civil Disobedience. It, however, collapsed as rapidly as it grew. Too much reliance on one or two individual leaders, too much of demagogic methods of agitation, too little of substantial and solid organisation, too little of an understandable programme, made it a nine day's wonder. Not a single one of its leaders and no more than two or three of its rank and files are now in any mass movement, although it was at the time supposed to be the model for the Congress Socialists in Malabar. Very close to the Socialists then, Mr. Ibrahim later became a Gandhist and now is a Muslim Leaguer" (pp. 188-9).

By the end of 1930s, therefore, the peasants throughout Kerala were agitated over a number of burning problems like the prices of their crops, taxes, indebtedness, etc. It was, however, not these but the problem of tenancy which roused the peasants in the Malabar part of Kerala to militant action. Furthermore, since the Congress organisation in the Malabar part had come under the leadership of the leftists—the Congress Socialists and the Communists—the peasants were roused as

much on the political issue of freedom for the country as the securing of economic demands such as tenancy reform. The outbreak of the war in 1939 therefore witnessed a number of militant struggles beginning with the observance of the anti-repression day on September 15, 1940. Once again to quote EMS :

“Working class and Kisan leaders of Chirakkal taluka thought that the movement against the economic effects of the war had gone so far that time had come for a review of the whole work and for the chalking out of a new programme. They therefore, fixed September 15, 1940, as the date on which the taluka Kisan Conference should be held. Keecheri, a village near Cannanore, was decided to be the venue of the Conference.

“While arrangements for this conference were going on, the Kerala Provincial Congress Committee fixed the same day for a province-wide demonstration of protest against the August Order made by imperialism.

“Two days before the Protest Day, the District Magistrate of Malabar issued an order under Section 144 prohibiting the Protest Day celebrations. Although this did not apply to the Chirakkal Taluka Kisan Conference for which arrangements were being made at Keecheri, the local Sub-Magistrate issued an order prohibiting this as well.

“Meetings were cancelled in many places. Gandhian Congressmen issued press statements advising people not to disobey the order. But it was disobeyed in 15 or 16 places all over Malabar, resulting in the arrest of over 200 Congressmen on that day. Clashes between the authorities and demonstrators took place in many places, but it was in three places that they took serious proportions.

“The first was Morazha, a village in Chirakkal taluka near Keecheri. Since the Conference was banned at Keecheri, its organisers changed it to the adjoining village of Morazha. But the authorities followed suit and prohibited the meeting there too. About 2000 people—peasants and volunteers—were present and they decided to disobey the order. A clash ensued in which an Inspector of Police and two constables were killed. This led to the now well-known Morazha Rioting Case in which Comrade K.P.R. Gopalan was the first accused.

“The second was Mattanur village, in Kottayam taluka. All the Kisan organisers and volunteers in that locality were present there. The order was disobeyed. A clash took place and a constable was killed.

“The third was Tellicherry town in Kottayam taluka where, too, there was a clash in which not the police but audience also suffered casualties. Two Kisan volunteers—Abdulla and Chathukutty—were shot dead.

“These incidents naturally led to severe repression. Meetings and other forms of protest were prohibited. Police and M.S.P. (Malabar Special Police)—a semi-military organisation formed at the time of the Moplah Rebellion of 1921—started a reign of terror in all the villages in Chirakkal and Kottayam talukas. Arrests and house-searches, beating and intimidation of innocent people became the order of the day. Some officials and their yes-men used this opportunity to extort money from innocent people. Almost all the top and middle leaders of the Kisan movement had already been arrested before September 15 or arrested in the first two weeks after it.

“The reports of this repression were so widespread that the Gandhites also came out against it. Their daily organ, the *Mathrubhoomi*, protested against it, and demanded an enquiry into it while at the same time, it condemned those who were responsible for the violent clash of September 15. The Congress Working Committee condemned the disobedience of the prohibitory order on September 15, held the leftist Congressmen responsible for it, dissolved the Provincial Congress Committee and appointed an ad hoc committee to take its place. But one of the first resolutions of the ad hoc committee at its first meeting was to set up a committee to enquire into the reports of repression received from Chirakkal and Kottayam talukas. This committee, however, could not conduct the enquiry as planned because the District Magistrate prohibited the enquiry itself.

“Though the Kisans were thus denied the protection of the Congress, though most of their own leaders were removed from their midst, they did not lose heart; they refused to be cowed down by repression. They evolved new methods of keeping their organisation intact, took great care in saving those of their own

leaders who were not yet arrested, from the clutches of the police. The manner in which Comrade K.P.R. Gopalan was saved for 8 months which enabled him to give personal and direct guidance to the kisans and the volunteers in several villages in his own taluka not only kept the organisation intact but electrified the whole country. The kisans knew that if only they surrender the person of K.P.R., most of the repressive acts of the authorities would come to an end, but they preferred to keep and develop their organisation rather than save their own skins (p. 207-8).

Emboldened by the repression let loose after September 15, 1940, the *Jenmis* of North Malabar launched an offensive against the kisans. It, however, could be beaten back because the mass of kisans organised in their Karshaka Sangham and led by the Communist Party, had learnt how to fight unitedly. EMS gives two instances :

“The first *Jenmi* to take up the cudgels against the kisans was Kalliat Nambiar. He demanded that all his tenants should immediately renew their leases which means that they should pay him “renewal fees”. He expected to get a substantial amount from this and offered to the officials to pay part of it to the War Fund. In this way, he hoped to get the support from the officials in case it was needed to suppress any opposition. But the Kisan Sabha immediately took up the question, carried on a systematic campaign among the peasants, and put courage and confidence in their minds. The result was that every peasant individually expressed to the *Jenmi* his inability to pay the renewal fees. The *Jenmi* saw that the kisans were so firm in their resolve that not to accede to their demand would cost him much more than what he might recover by recourse to long and tedious processes of law. He, therefore, gave up the proposal for collecting renewal fees.

“The second *Jenmi* to do this was Karakattidathil Nayanar. His demand was not for payment of renewal fees, but for payment of all levies which he had to give up in 1938, 1939 and 1940 when the Kisan Sabha was strong. He coupled this with the threat that unless these payments were made immediately, they would not be allowed to clear the jungle and bring the *punam* lands under cultivation. Hundreds of kisans families were



thus faced with the alternatives of either giving up all that they had gained two to three years ago or getting starved because no land was available for cultivation. The Kisan Sabha took up the question and mobilised all the peasants for their demands. The kisans resolved that they would cultivate the lands in spite of the *Jenmi's* ban. The *Jenmi* got the police and the M.S. P. to enforce his ban. But they found that the kisans were so united in their organisation that repression would not crush them. He, therefore, adopted a policy of "conciliation plus repression". He decided to give concessions to a section of his tenants, thus driving a wedge into the ranks of the kisans. A section of the backward kisans (including some of the local leaders of the Kisan Sabha) were taken in by this, and advised a policy of compromise with the *Jenmi*. The class conscious section found that opposing this compromise with the *Jenmi* would be directly playing into the hands of the enemy because it would disrupt the Kisan Sabha. They, therefore, agreed to the compromise but carried on a vigorous explanatory campaign among peasants to the effect that it was the organised strength of the kisans that forced the *Jenmi* to make concessions. The Kisan Sabha got new cadres out of this, vacillating elements were thrown out of the leadership, and a new revolutionary leadership was thrown up.

"This was a great lesson to the other *Jenmis* in the neighbourhood who were awaiting the result of this *Jenmi's* offensive to adopt the same tactics against their own tenants. They all decided that it is better to give the *punam* land for cultivation. An organised offensive of the *Jenmis* was thus averted by the organised counter-offensive of the kisans in one *Firka* and today the kisans of this *Firka* are in the vanguard of the kisan movement in Kerala.

This was followed by the Kayyur incident following which four kisan militants were hanged. EMS explains :

"Kayyur is a village in the Hosdurg sub-taluka of Kasargod taluka of South Canara district. Adjoining as it is to Chirakkal taluka of North Malabar, and having an overwhelming majority of Malayalam speaking people, this sub-taluka has the same social, cultural and economic structure as prevails in Malabar. But it is administratively part of South Canara district. The

tenancy law which is in force in Malabar is not applicable there because it is part of the South Canara district.

“Although it is administratively part of Karnataka and, therefore, its land tenure is the usual *ryotwari* system, it is in actual fact groaning under the *Jenmi* system. The *ryotwari* system of Karnataka, like the same system in other places, has a substantial percentage of cultivating owners. In Malabar, on the other hand, most of the land is owned by non-cultivating owners who take exorbitant rents from their tenants. The result is that the few *Jenmis* who possess all the land are considered as *ryots* and not landlords. Their tenants, therefore, did not get any benefit from the Malabar Tenancy Act 1930. The rights of the *Jenmis* with regard to enhancement of rent, eviction of tenants, etc., were in no way restricted. The *Jenmis* there could do what their brethren in Malabar could do before the Act of 1930.

“The main demand of the Kisan Sabha for this area was that the provisions of the Malabar Tenancy Act should be made applicable to Hosdurg also. It was on this basis that the Kisan Sabha and Congress movements were built up in this area in 1938 and 1939 when Hosdurg was next only to Chirakkal and Kottayam talukas in regard to organisation. In spite of the fact that the *Jenmis* were legally entitled to do what they pleased with their tenants, the organisation and struggles of the kisans forced them to make the same concessions as the *Jenmis* of Malabar were making. The difference in the legal status of peasants in Hosdurg and Malabar was overcome, in fact, by the united will of the kisans.

“After September 15, 1940, the *Jenmis* here also tried to take back what they had lost in the previous two years. The method that they adopted was to harvest the crops sown by the tenants on the plea that they had evicted the former tenants and replaced them with new ones. The Kisan Sabha took steps to see that this does not take place. They sent volunteers to protect the crop of the kisans from the *Jenmis*' men who came to harvest it, and when the time came for harvesting, volunteers came to the help of the kisans in harvesting it themselves. This was in the first week of February 1940.

“This led to repression. The *Jenmis* sought and received the

help of the police in intimidating the kisans, arresting some leaders, beating up others, etc. Police enquiries were going on into some of the incidents relating to harvesting by kisans with the help of the volunteers. In the course of one of these enquiries in the village of Kayyur, in the third week of March, one volunteer was severely beaten up by the police. To protest against general repression and against this particular incident, a meeting was fixed for March 28 at Kayyur. A procession of 200 to 250 people—kisans and volunteers—was marching to the place of the meeting. A police constable who had visited the village more than once in connection with some of the enquiries came on the scene. The people got agitated and went to him. He considered discretion the better part of valour and joined the processionists in shouting slogans but at the first available opportunity extricated himself from the crowd and began to run. He was hotly pursued by the people. In the struggle between the infuriated people and the reeling policeman, the latter was killed.

“This led to repression much more severe than in North Malabar after September 15, 1940. Arrests and beatings were being put into the shade by other forms of terror—a terror which was unexampled in the history of Kerala except in South Malabar 1921/1922. Whole villages were deserted; men, women and children left their hearths and homes and took shelter in the jungle.”

Four comrades were sentenced to death in connection with this Kayyur incident. Madathil Appu, Podavara Kunhambu Nair, Koithattil Chirukantan, Pallickal Aboobacker—and 17 peasants were sentenced to 5-year imprisonment each. Choorikadan Krishnan Nair, who was a minor, was sentenced to life imprisonment.

The four Kayyur comrades were hanged and thus became martyrs on March 20, 1943.

Then came a number of kisan struggles in the Malabar part of the present-day Kerala state, of which short accounts are given below.

## PUNAM-THARISSU STRUGGLES

Police atrocities became acute during 1940-41. The peasant movement had to deliberately retreat. The landlords thought that the movement had failed and refused to give land to the peasants for *punam* shifting cultivation. This caused the Punam-Tharissu struggles.

### ELLARINJI STRUGGLE

Karakkattidam Nayanar did not give land to the peasants for *punam* cultivation. The peasants made many attempts but the landlords did not yield. The Government did not intervene even though it was a famine period. The tenants could not be silent for long. They encroached upon the land at Ellarinji in February 1941. At the instance of the landlord, the police started beating the peasants. The residence of Nayanar turned into a camp of the Malabar Special Police for three months. Cases were registered against 40 workers. They were imprisoned for 8-9 months. The *punam* struggle became widespread during 1943. In that year the peasants approached the Kallyatte Samanan for *punam* cultivation. That landlord had to yield to the peasants' demand.

### NADIYANGA STRUGGLE

The peasants started struggles for *punam* cultivation at Pittari Malai. It belonged to one Karakkattidan Nayanar. Thirteen persons encroached upon the *punam* land and ploughed the same. The British Government let loose a wave of repression against them. The Malabar Special Police was rushed and peasants were beaten. Cases were registered and they were sentenced for one year each.

### THOLAPPRRA STRUGGLE

The landlord of Tholappra village was himself the *adhikari* of the village in the former Kottayam taluka. When he refused the *punam* cultivation, the peasants started agitation. 48 peasants, including P.K. Krishnan, encroached upon the land and ploughed it. The Government too supported the landlord, and the peasants were arrested and sentenced.

### KOOTHALI STRUGGLE

The Koothali Estate in Perampura belonged to the State. The area of that estate was about 30,000 acres. Out of these, some 20,000 acres were quite suitable for *punam* cultivation but were not given for *punam* cultivation, though this land belonged to the State.

Peasants conducted a *jatha* and submitted a petition to the Malabar Sub-Collector in 1946, but nothing substantial came out. In February that year, about 40 young persons crossed the MSP cordon, entered the estate and started cultivation. The Government resorted to repulsive measures. At least, in 1947, 1500 acres of land were sanctioned for *punam* cultivation.

K. Choyi, a young peasant, was leading the struggle from the underground. On May 19, 1950, Choyi was killed by the police. More than 100 persons were implicated in the case by the police in connection with the Koothali struggle. 79 persons were sentenced for various periods.

Koothali issue was not yet solved. The agitation was conducted before the Tahsildar of Perambra Estate, demanding the Koothali wasteland for the peasants. They demanded the assignment of the wastelands in Malabar for the peasants. This struggle was continued for one month but there was no solution. The peasant volunteers started struggle before the Collectorate of Malabar from February 17, 1955. This struggle continued for 66 days. At last, the authorities yielded. They conceded to the important demands of the peasants.

### THIMIRI - CHEEMENI STRUGGLE

George Kottukappilly purchased 2,000 acres of land in Thimiri-Cheemeni villages of the Kasargod taluka. This land belonged to Thazhekkattu Mano. Prior to this, the peasants were allowed to get firewood from and skins of the trees standing on this land. But the new landlord stopped this privilege. Those who went there for firewood and skins were insulted. The peasants raised their protest against this. The struggle started against the management of the estate on November 15, 1946, and the police prevented the peasant leaders from reaching there. The peasants marched into the estate and freed the leaders from the police custody. Cases were registered against 7 persons. At last the

authorities intervened, the management was forced to accede to the demands of the farmers, and the cases were withdrawn.

### *EASTERN ERANADU WASTELAND STRUGGLE*

The wasteland struggle was intensified and became fierce in 1952. There were about 3,000 acres of wasteland in the eastern Eranadu. Most of this belonged to Nilampoor Kovilakam. The landlord was not prepared to entrust this land to the peasants for cultivation. In certain places, the peasants started the cultivation under the leadership of the Karshaka Sangham. The Government did not help these peasants and registered cases against them. Thus 62 persons in Eranadu taluka were arrested. Strong protest actions took place against these arrests. The peasants of Muslim and Hindu faiths joined together and started the struggle. The landlords tried to instigate communal feelings in order to defeat this agitation. There was police firing at the mosque at Naduvattathu but this could not weaken the unity of the peasants.

The peasants' conference held at Manchery on April 11, 1954, under the chairmanship of A.K. Gopalan, urged upon the Government to distribute the wasteland for cultivation among the farmers. Thereafter the struggle intensified.

### *OONGATTIRI WASTELAND STRUGGLE*

Koippathody House had 8,000 acres of wasteland in Eranadu taluka. The peasants had been cultivating this land 1/10 of the produce as rent. When a new manager was appointed the rent was increased to 1/5. The peasants opposed this. A struggle started. Meetings were conducted; the last meeting was at Therattammal. The landlord was forced to withdraw the enhancement after this meeting.

### *KARIVELEURE - KAVUMPAVI STRUGGLE*

The second World War came to an end in 1945. There was a terrible famine, and the economic crisis worsened. Karshaka Sangham demanded relief measures from the famine, actions against blackmarketing, and the distribution of wasteland among the farmers. The Sangham gave a call for encroaching upon the wasteland on December 15, 1946. The peasants started

agitation against blackmarketing and hoarding.

### *KARIVELLURE FIRING*

Most of the peasants of the Karivellure village were the tenants of Chirackal Thampuram. The landlord tried to take away the paddy harvested, as rent from these peasants. The farmers opposed. They demanded that the paddy be sold through the local co-operative store. But the landlord did not heed. The peasants started a vigil at the farm of the landlord. On December 20, 1945, an MSP battalion of 45 persons reached the site along with 90 regular police constables. Many more peasants from the nearby areas flocked to the site. A.V. Kunhambu and others led the peasants. These peasants were unarmed while, on the opposite side, the police stood with arms. At last, the police started firing. Two persons, Manakkadu Thidil Kannan and Keenery Kunhambu, died martyrs. A.V. Kunhambu was arrested and beaten by the police.

Thereafter the police let loose a wave of repression in the whole area. Cases were registered against 196 persons, including A.V. Kunhambu. Many went underground. The police repression was widespread. The court acquitted 106 persons. 70 were convicted and sentenced from 6 months to 5 years of imprisonment.

Struggles took place in many other places against the collection of paddy as rent. Peasants prevented the taking away of paddy by Pachenyil Appukkittan Nair, and Colancherry Aboobacker. In both those places the police intervened and registered cases against these peasants.

### *KAVUMPAYI FIRING*

The struggle for *punam* cultivation continued. The peasants of Kuyiloor submitted a petition to the Sub-Collector. A meeting was organised at Calicut. The peasants formed a volunteer corps.

The police lathicharged the peasant volunteers at Kuyiloor on December 9, when they were participating in a camp. 13 persons were arrested and taken to the police station. Peasant women started struggle in front of the Irrikkure police station against these arrests. The police lathicharged them also. An MSP camp was opened at Irrikkure. Towards the end of December the

peasants encroached upon and ploughed the wasteland. The MSP rounded that place as well as Kavumpayi hills. The people inside could not come out. The police started firing. 4 persons were killed; they were P. Kumaran, Manchery Govindan Nair, Thengil Appa Nambiar, and Alorampan Krishnan. Pulikkool Kunhircaman was beaten with the bayonet and killed. Thereafter the police repression extended over the whole *Firka*. Cases were registered against 186 persons. Some of them were acquitted by the court while others were convicted and sentenced for various periods, upto 7 years. Among them, Raman Nambiar and O.V. Anandan Nambiar were killed in the Salem Jail firing.

#### *ONCHIYAM--THILLANKERI--MUNYANKUNNU*

The peasant leaders were not freed from the jail even after independence. Many were underground because of the warrants pending against them. The peasant movement did not weaken. Peasants were strong and vigilant against hoarding and black-marketing. The Government resorted to various repressive measures. The peasants were shot and killed in April-May, 1948, at Korome, Thillankeri, Onchiyam, and Munayankunnu, in North Malabar.

#### *KOROME--FIRING*

The farmers of Korome village in Payyrynure *Firka* started struggle against hoarding and blackmarketing. They forcibly took paddy from the farm of Alakkattu Kunhamby Nambiar at Korome village and sold it at a fair price. The money thus received was given to the landlord but he did not receive it. Next day the MSP came. Many of the peasant workers were arrested. On receipt of this news, the peasants conducted a *jatha* on April 12, 1948. The MSP fired upon the *jatha*. K. Raman, K. Abu, Puthookkaran Raman, Mavilachindan Nambiar, and M. Kunhambu died of police beating. N. Koran died in Salem Jail. Punnakkodan Kunhambu was shot dead on April 23. Korothu Kannan and his son lost their feet in the Salem firing.

#### *THILLANKERI FIRING*

400 peasants of Kottayam taluka conducted a *jatha* at Thillan-



keri against hoarding and blackmarketing. The police fired at the *jatha*. Seven persons were killed on the spot and many were wounded. Cases were registered against 107 persons ; many were convicted for imprisonment for long periods. Four persons out of them were killed in the Salem firing, and two were killed in the police lock-up.

Severe police repression was let loose in the whole of Kottayam taluka. V. Anandan and Koran were shot dead. Seven peasant comrades died due to beatings in the lock-up.

#### *ONCHIYAM FIRING*

The Congress Government insisted that two ounces of corn must be purchased in order to get six ounces of rice as ration. A strong protest was registered against this order in the Kurumbanadu taluka. The authorities knew that Onchiyam was the centre of the agitation. The MSP was sent on April 30, 1948 to teach the Onchiyam people a lesson. One peasant and his son were arrested and beaten by the police. People who gathered there demanded their release. The police fired against them. Eight peasants were shot dead. Many of them were implicated in the cases. Two of them died in the lock-up beating. One died in the Salem firing.

#### *MUNAYANKUNNU FIRING*

Munayankunnu is in the Payyannur *Firka*. 40 peasant volunteers were camping there. The police came to know this, and when all the people were asleep, approached the camp and fired. Six peasants died. This happened on May 1, 1948. Fifteen comrades died in subsequent lock-up beatings, during 1948-51. In North Malabar five labourers were also killed. In addition to this, Mayyathu Sankaran and Sardar Gopalakrishnan were also killed in lock-up beatings.

#### *SALEM FIRING*

Thousands of persons from Malabar were sentenced to imprisonment in connection with various cases. There were 220 persons in the annexe of the Salem Central Jail, who belonged to the Karshaka Sangham and the Communist Party.

When the doors were opened in the morning of February 11'

1950, and the persons started coming out, the police started firing. 22 comrades died on the spot, and many of them were wounded.

#### *PADIKKUNNU FIRING*

padikkunnu is 5 kms away from Cannanore. Some peasant leaders—K.K. Rayaru Nambiar, Kammatumal Kuttiyappa and Manjeri Govindan Nambiar—were brought to the Padikkunnu and shot dead.

#### *AMARAVATHI-KOTTIYOOR STRUGGLE*

*Amaravathi struggle:* The peasant movement started in the eastern high ranges during 1948. Then Congress Government had allotted five acres of land to each family there. The peasants started cultivating the land which they had got from the Government. Side by side with this, rich and resourceful people also started land grabbing. This was the beginning of unauthorised occupation of forest land by the rich people. They also started selling such lands to the land-hungry farmers who came there after having sold their lands and properties in their native places. They came with the hope of getting land at low prices. They did not know that such deeds were unauthorised and illegal. Most of the peasants of Udumpanchola taluka and the refugees of Amaravathi were poor and innocent peasants of this very kind who were cheated in this way.

The forests which were full of wild beasts and thick wild growths were converted into beautiful, fruitful agricultural fields yielding bumper crops. These peasants never expected that they would be evicted; therefore, they invested everything for improvement of the land.

Eviction started from May 2 to 10, 1961, at Ayyappankoil. A big battalion of police reached there in the morning of May 2. A magistrate court and a police station were set up there for the purpose of evicting the peasants. A large number of officials were brought in. The police started burning the huts instead of demolishing them. The plan was to burn, on an average, 100 huts everyday. There was fire and smoke everywhere. Children and women started crying. The grown-up people were stunned. The police destroyed everything—the plantain gardens, paddy

fields and the tapioca crops. 1700 families, consisting of 10,000 people, were evicted from the 8,000 acres of Ayyappankoil lands. All of them were shifted to a place 40 miles away from Kumali.

The people were forced to move away, leaving behind their domestic animals and household goods. No arrangement was made by the Government for their rehabilitation at Amaravathi. It was a period of heavy rains. After one week, the Government arranged for the construction of thatched sheds. Generally, 60 to 70 families were stuffed in these small sheds which could contain only 6 to 7 families. Each family was given one *edangazhi* of rice for a week, irrespective of the number of the family members. In addition to this, one acre of land with Rs. 10 only, was also given to each family by the Government.

The total cultivable land available at Amaravathi was only about 500 to 600 acres. The remaining portions were rocky. Even such barren, rocky lands also were given to the people after much delay. People who had 4 or 5 acres of fertile land at Ayyappankoil got only one acre barren land at Amaravathi. Knowing about it, A.K. Gopalan rushed to the place on June 1, 1961. He had an on-the-spot study of the miseries of these farmers and addressed the public meeting there. Then he visited Udumpanchola.

There was a public meeting at Kottayam on June 2. In that meeting AKG declared his intention to stage a fast at Amaravathi from June 6 onward.

AKG reached at Kumali with EMS in the morning of June 6. Both of them addressed the meeting of the Karshak Samiti and then went to Amaravathi in a procession. At that time, it was heavily raining. By that time, a small shed was completed near the refugee camps. Having taken a glass of fresh lime, AKG started his fast in that small shed. People belonging to all parties and religions participated and cooperated in the struggle. A large number of people visited the Satyagraha camp. A box was placed in the camp for collection of donations which people liberally made.

After eight days had passed the Satyagraha became an all-India issue. All important papers wrote editorially about this. This issue was discussed in the Kerala Assembly too. The Opposition parties staged a walk-out, protesting against the

stand of the Government on this issue. Letters and telegrams began to reach the Prime Minister and the Kerala Chief Minister, demanding immediate solution of the problem.

The DSP of Kottayam, with two vans of police, reached at Amaravathi to arrest AKG. The news immediately spread to all the refugee camps. There was a spontaneous flow of people from all these camps to the Satyagraha shed. Children, women and even aged people rushed to the shed, shouting slogans. They cordoned the Satyagraha shed. The DSP knew that the situation would get worsened, so he remained silent. Next morning, at about 10, AKG was arrested under Section 309 for an attempt at suicide. He was brought to the Kottayam Hospital. By the 10th day of the fast, the Amaravathi issue had received wide support from all sections of the people. Even anti-Communist papers inside and outside Kerala wrote editorials against the wrong stand of the Government in this issue. They also requested AKG to stop the fast.

But AKG was not prepared to withdraw his fast without the solution of the pressing demands of the farmers. Efforts were made to have a settlement with the Government. On the other hand, struggles in many farms in many places of the state were conducted, declaring support for this agitation. Collectorates were picketed, *jathas* were taken to Trivandrum, protest meetings were held in many places. The whole of Kerala arose in support to this struggle. Negotiations continued for three days. There was an agreement on 17 June. The Government agreed to accede to certain demands of the peasants, including the demand for three acres of land for each family. The fast was withdrawn at 1 p.m. on that day. All other struggles connected with this one were also withdrawn.

*Kottiyoor Struggle:* A struggle was started in 1961 under the auspices of the Kerala Karshaka Sangham with 16 important demands. Some of these demands were :

1. For preparation of a register for the ownership of the peasants who had no previous records with them,
2. For the setting up of a land tribunal for every 2000 petitions,
3. For protection of the demands of the peasants for forest lands,

#### 4. For cancellation of the *Melpattam* on Kottiyoor Devasam land.

The struggle was started from November 27. The peasant volunteers picketed the Collectorates of the state. On the very first day, 320 volunteers were arrested. This agitation spread to the taluka headquarters by December 4.

The Karshaka Sangham declared that AKG and 101 volunteers would picket the State Secretariat on December 15. The picketting *jatha* started from Kottiyoor on December 4. The leaders of the Karshaka Sangham throughout the state were arrested in the night of December 3. The Kerala State Trade Union Congress gave a call for strike on December 16. AKG appealed to the workers to extend the struggle to all villages.

This *jatha* created a lot of public awareness among the people. A large contingent of police accompanied the *jatha*.

AKG and the volunteers, including nine women, were arrested and brought to the Sub-Jail Alwaye. The Party State Secretariat called for a boycott of the Assembly to protest against these arrests. Another *jatha* of 10 persons started the next day. Communist members boycotted the Assembly on December 13. There was lathicharge at Trivandrum on December 15, and a general strike on the same day.

AKG and others were brought to the court. Though the Magistrate granted bail, AKG refused to come out on bail. P.T. Chacko, the Minister, invited EMS for negotiations. On 5th, Minister Chandrasekharan invited the representatives of the peasants for negotiation.

About 5,000 persons participated in the mass picketting which took place on December 27. Many demands were acceded in the course of the negotiations. Thus, after a 41-day long struggle, the movement was withdrawn on January 5. AKG and others were released from the jail.

Kottiyoor struggle was the first all-Kerala struggle conducted under the auspices of the Kerala Karshaka Sangham. About 75,000 volunteers had participated in this struggle. □

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The third pamphlet, *Kerala : Punnappa-Vayalar and Other Struggles* written by V. Achuthanandan, member, CPI(M) Polit Bureau, and T.R. Ramakrishnan, President of the Kerala unit of the AIKS, who were participants in these struggles, is in your hands.

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