

## *Anti-Communist 'Research' vs the Reality*

Kerala hit the headlines in March-April 1957 when the then undivided Communist Party of India, along with independents supported by it, won an absolute majority in the elections to the first legislative assembly of the newly formed state. The new Communist Government was accordingly sworn in on April 5. This was described as 'a new political experiment'—the formation of a Communist Government on the basis of elections under the provisions of an ordinary bourgeois democratic constitution—'unprecedented in the world' !

Hardly had two years elapsed since the ministry was sworn in when all the opposition parties, led by the Indian National Congress ruling at the centre, came together in an 'Anti-Communist Front'. That was the beginning of what the sponsors called a 'liberation struggle' against the Communist Government in which were banded together the Muslim League, the Christian churches, the Nair Service Society, the Ezhava SNDP, and so on.

The coming together of all the caste and communal organizations in the state led by the 'secular nationalistic' all-India party headed by the well-known 'radical and socialist', Jawaharlal Nehru, was called another 'political experiment'. The 'struggle' included the defiance of the constitutionally elected government of the state by the state unit of the party which ruled at the centre and was organized under the direct guidance of the all-India president of that party (the Prime Minister's daughter, Indira Gandhi). It was hailed by its supporters as a 'great mass upsurge', which, it was argued, showed that the people who voted the Communist Party into office two years ago had lost their faith in it. That was the

political ground on which the central government dismissed the state government and ordered fresh elections.

The Communists are thus to be blamed for getting elected in the first instance : that has never happened in world history ! They are to be blamed for having been thrown out by a combination of 'mass upsurge' from below and dismissal from above: it shows that 'the people' are correcting a mistake committed earlier ! As for the Communists receiving more votes after than before the 'mass upsurge', that of course is of no consequence !

Ever since then, Kerala has attracted the attention of scholars not only in the rest of the country but even abroad. Lying before me are two books: *The First Communist Ministry in Kerala, 1957-59*, by G. K. Lieten, and *Kerala : Yenan of India: Rise of Communist Power, 1937-1969*, by V. M. Fic. This, however, is only a very small proportion of the number of books that have appeared from the pens of foreign and Indian authors. Scholarly articles on the subject have also been appearing in academic journals in India and abroad.

Going through this voluminous material, it can be seen that, with honourable exceptions, the authors invariably paint the Communist movement in dark colours. Not because all of them are anti-Communist by political conviction. They cannot but be directed towards anti-Communist conclusions because they are fed by the newspapers and journals published in Kerala and outside during the nearly half century that has by now elapsed since the Red Flag came to Kerala. Owned and run, as these publications are, by confirmed anti-Communists who have mastered the art of distorting facts and inventing lies in order to blacken the face of the Communist movement, they cannot but draw anti-Communist conclusions.

If one were to make a detailed analysis of the 'facts given', quotations cited and conclusions drawn in these writings, that itself would require an entire volume far bigger than is attempted here. Nor is it necessary for the simple reason that, if even a

small fraction of all that is written were true, the Communist movement should have incurred the wrath of the people of Kerala and been wiped out of the political life of the state. In fact, however, the undivided Communist Party which was supposed to have been 'thrown out of power' by the 'people' in the 'liberation struggle' and defeated in the following mid-term elections secured nearly five per cent more votes than that with which it was voted into an absolute majority in 1957.

What of the post-'liberation struggle' period ? In exactly seven years after the 1960 mid-term election, i.e., in 1967, many constituents of the anti-Communist Front joined the Communists against the Congress and the latter was reduced to a miserable minority of 19 in a house of 133. With all the zigzags in the fortunes of political parties since then, the CPI (M) today enjoys the position of the strongest political party in the state.

## II

A refrain that can be heard in the writings of these scholars, as well as in the remarks made by sources which are considered 'knowledgeable' is this : the political life in Kerala is shaped by the ideology and organization of castes and religious communities. Every party, it is seriously argued, bases itself on one or a combination of castes and communities. For instance, it was said in 1957 and the following years that the Communist Party was essentially a party of the scheduled and backward Hindu castes; the Congress, on the other hand, had the support of the Christians, while the Muslim League by definition had the support of the Muslim community. All the subsequent developments in the political life of the state are sought to be 'explained' on similar lines. One is shocked at the shallowness of thinking shown by those who claim themselves to be 'scholars of social science', who are reduced to such 'theoretical' positions.

It is the contention of this author—and he hopes to establish it in the main body of this book—that the Communist Party based itself on the genuinely secular stand which was the hallmark of our freedom movement. It took the firm stand that the State and religion should never be mixed with each other.

Although the Indian National Congress also formally adhered to this principle, its practice, beginning with Mahatma Gandhi and other top leaders, had a Hindu revivalist orientation. This found expression in the Constitution of India which provided for ban on cow slaughter (an essentially Hindu idea) as a 'directive principle of state policy'. The performance of pujas and other religious rites which have become part of governmental functions shows the same trend.

The Communist Party, from the very beginning, was totally opposed to 'spiritualization of politics'. It was and remains pledged to the uncompromising struggle against caste oppression and against the mixing up of religion and the State. It dissociates itself completely from caste and communal separatism.

Such dissociation was necessary for the Party, since it took upon itself the responsibility of uniting the working people belonging to all castes and communities against the exploiting classes with no distinction of the caste or religious faith of individuals belonging to those classes.

It is of course true that the Party did, in the interest of the masses, champion the cause of and support the oppressed Hindu castes and religious minorities. It appealed to the working and oppressed sections of society belonging to the upper castes and to the majority religious communities to include the protection of the weaker and backward castes and religious minorities in the programme of their struggle, since, without drawing these sections into the movement, the class unity of the oppressed and exploited cannot be forged. It however, firmly set its face against any attempt on the part of the scheduled and backward castes as well as religious minorities who try to separate their people from the mainstream of the people's movement for freedom, democracy and socialism. It told the masses belonging to these weaker sections that they cannot defend themselves and advance their cause unless they join forces with the entire democratic movement.

It was such consistent struggle for genuine democracy and

secularism that helped the Communist Party to make rapid advances during the quarter century since the initial foundation of the young Communist group in Trivandrum in 1932 and down to the formation of the Kerala government in 1957. The leaders of the caste and communal organizations naturally opposed the Communist movement since, like the Congress leaders, they represented the same bourgeois and landlord classes. Their lower ranks and mass followers, however, defied them and gave support to the Communist Party.

The two sections representing the same bourgeois-landlord classes—the Congress on the one hand, and the leaders of the caste and communal parties on the other—did, of course, have their mutual contradictions due to which some of the latter gave limited and temporary support to the Communists. This happened in the 1952 elections when the Congress was reduced to a minority in the Travancore-Cochin assembly and had a still more humiliating defeat in Malabar. A repetition of the same result in the 1954 mid-term elections to the Travancore-Cochin assembly and in the elections to the Malabar district board in the same year showed that the Communist Party had come to a position in which it could use the contradictions between two sections of political leaders representing the same classes in order to come very near a majority in elected bodies.

The 1957 election to a newly formed Kerala state legislature was the logical culmination of this process. Hence the eagerness with which the leaders of all caste and communal parties and organizations rallied round the Congress party in the 'liberation struggle' and the following mid-term elections which, however, showed that the Communists' mass base had not only not narrowed but had actually widened.

### III

1957-60 may therefore be considered the beginning of a new stage in the political development of Kerala—a stage in which the state unit of the all-India ruling party and that of the Communist opposition became the two poles around which other political forces in the state were revolving. While the Congress

on the one hand and caste-communal leaders on the other were united in the common objective of keeping the Communists out, they had so many contradictions among themselves that they could not remain permanently united against the Communist movement.

The crisis of the anti-Communist Front formed in 1959-60 was so deep that not only did it break up completely but was replaced by the non-Congress Front of 1967 in which several participants of the earlier anti-Communist Front became partners. Having thus joined hands with the Communists whom they had earlier helped throw out, the Muslim League had to join hands with the CPI (M) in the 1965-67 elections which culminated in the formation of the non-Congress government.

This was followed by many twists and turns such as the formation of a mini-front in the non-Congress United Front of 1967-69; the toppling of the 1967-69 government by the mini-front in collaboration with the Congress-Kerala Congress opposition; the coalition governments of 1970-79 in which the Congress, the CPI and RSP collaborated with the Muslim League and Kerala Congress; the infighting that led to the break-up of that coalition culminating in the formation and then the fall of the Left Democratic Front, etc.

In this process of continuous shifts in the positions adopted by the non-Congress (I) and non-CPI (M) parties, the leaders of caste-based and communal organizations and parties have lost a good deal of influence on the masses belonging to the respective castes and communities. This loss among the masses finds expression also in the divisions and splits that have weakened these parties. To cite a few instances :

In the 1960 mid-term elections, when the Congress and the Muslim League had an electoral united front, the Communist Party lost every seat contested in the Muslim majority areas which constitute the present Malappuram district; it, in fact, lost the security deposits in all constituencies except one. In the elections that were held in May 1982, the Congress (I) had the same alliance but could not deprive the

CPI (M)-led Left Democratic Front of its security deposits in any single constituency; one seat was, in fact, won by the LDF, while another was lost by a narrow margin of less than 100 votes; the percentage of votes secured by the LDF was, in most cases, over 40 per cent, showing clearly an erosion of the position occupied by the League among the Muslim voters. The growing discontent among the masses was given expression to by a section of the party leadership who broke from the main organization and joined the CPI (M)-led LDF.

In the districts of Idukki, Kottayam, Ernakulam and Alleppey where the Christians occupy a dominant, though not a majority position, the Congress swept the polls in 1960. Here again, the LDF won several seats in 1982 and secured a substantial percentage of votes even in constituencies where they lost. Like the Muslim League, the Kerala Congress with its Christian base has also got split.

The erosion of the authority of the Muslim and Christian leaders and political parties backed by them and the advance of the Communist movement among the people, are thus clear.

Among the caste-based political parties, the strongest are the Nair-based NDP and the Ezhava-based SRP. Both of them took up the question of reservation on which they whipped up passions among the masses belonging to their respective castes. They also had an electoral alliance with the Congress (I), the Muslim League, the two Kerala Congresses, etc., both in the 1980 and the 1982 elections. The number of seats 'graciously conceded' by the senior partners of the alliance to be contested by these parties and the results of the polling show that, even with the strong support rendered by more powerful partners, these caste-based parties cannot independently make their presence felt in the politics of the state. Internal divisions and splits which have weakened the Muslim and Christian parties have affected these caste-based parties as well.

#### IV

The facts given here show that the 'theory' advanced by several Indian and foreign scholars who have made a study of the



experiments going on in this 'political laboratory' has no leg to stand on. Caste-based and communal parties and organizations are losing their authority among the common people belonging to the very caste and communal groups whose interests they claim to be championing. They are also getting ever more and more weakened due to internal divisions and splits. The ruling party at the centre which tried to use these caste-based and communal parties and organizations in its struggle against the Communist movement is finding that its efforts in this direction are proving less and less productive.

Why is it so ? Because the main force carrying on a genuine struggle against the caste-based and communal politics of the state is the Communist Party, the CPI(M), and its left-democratic allies. There is every reason to expect that the crisis affecting the parties on the other side and the advance of the LDF would convince larger and larger sections in all parties, including the Congress(I), that the policies pursued by the UDF are proving a serious danger to the entire people of Kerala, to the masses belonging to every caste and communal group.

Indian and foreign scholars who make an over-simplified 'analysis' of Kerala politics as clashes and compromises among caste and communal groups would want the people to close their eyes to these realities; they themselves dismiss all relevant facts and quote only such 'facts' as suit their pet 'theory'. They are supported in this endeavour by certain schools of historians who, in the name of reconstructing 'scientific history', advance the theory that the 'social history' of Kerala is a collection of the separate 'histories' of different caste and communal groups.

The two-volume *History of Kerala* produced by the Kerala History Association containing contributions from the best-known historians in the state, for instance, contains separate sections on social history, economic history, political history and cultural history. The social history section is itself divided into individual chapters, each devoted to a particular caste or communal group, most of them written by a person belonging to the particular caste or group in question.

It is not suggested here that all historians in Kerala today belong to this category. There are honourable exceptions. Unfortunately, however, the evil legacy of caste-based and communal politics is felt among the historians as well. It is in the best interests of the developing unity of radical, democratic and secular forces that an energetic ideological battle is waged against these historical 'theories'.

It was with this objective that the author of this volume made some efforts to reconstruct the history of Kerala. The conclusions drawn by him were recorded first in the *National Question in Kerala* (1952) and its follow-up, *Kerala : Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow* (1966). Criticisms made by several friends and further studies made by the author himself helped him in writing *A Peep into Indian History*, and *History of India's Freedom Movement*, both written in Malayalam and published in the 1970s. In the light of these criticisms from friends and from the author's own studies, it was found that :

1. The studies made earlier were not related to the history of India and of the world; a new chapter is therefore being added.
2. This failure to relate the history of Kerala to that of India and of the world has led to some serious mistakes in the chapters dealing with the history of Kerala in the ancient and medieval periods; those chapters are therefore being revised, though several passages are being kept unaltered.
3. The approach to the socio-historical evolution of Kerala and its people as a distinct nationality is incorrect; necessary corrections have, therefore, been made in the relevant chapters.
4. The later chapters dealing with the rise and growth of the Communist movement are being revised, with a view to rebutting the anti-Communist slanders which have found their way in the writings of many scholars referred to above.
5. Finally, the earlier volume had come to its end with the formation of the 1967 non-Congress government it is now being brought up to date.