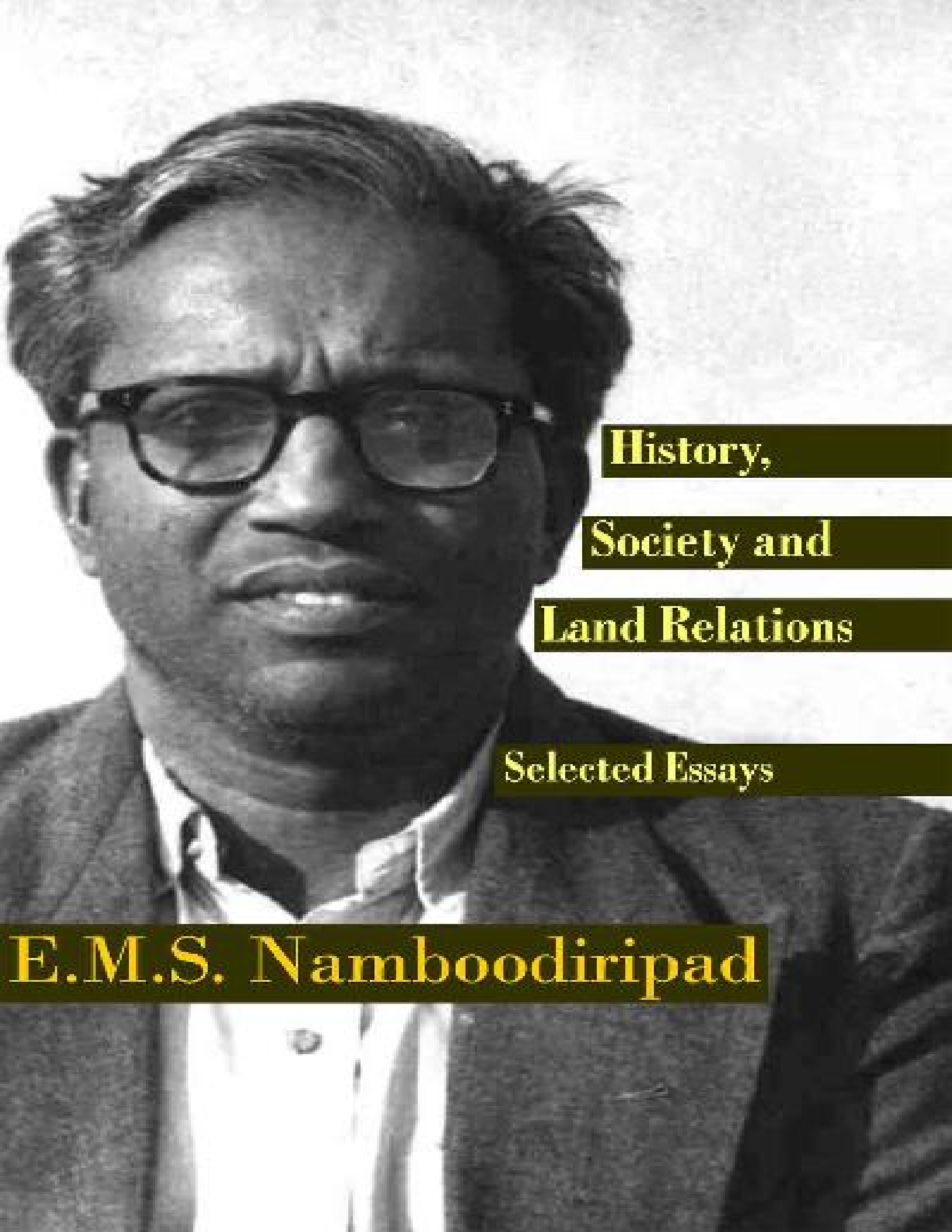
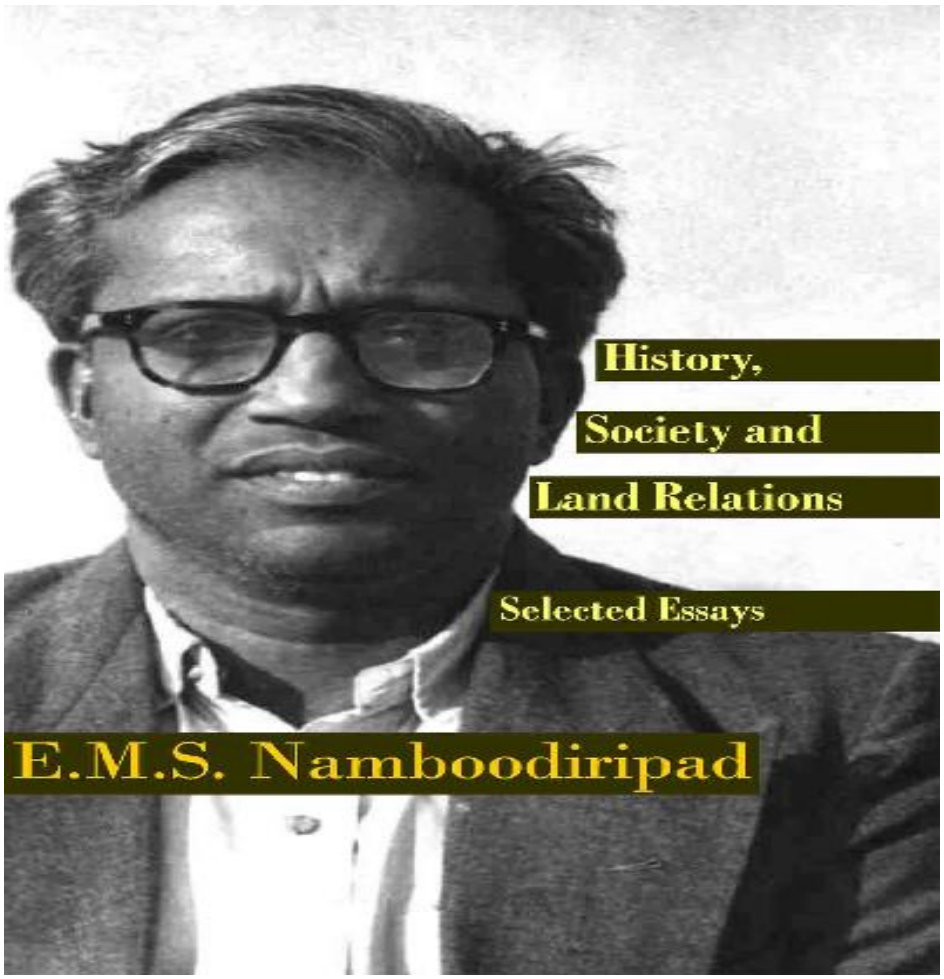


History, Society and Land Relations

Selected Essays

E.M.S. Namboodiripad



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'Marx, the Asiatic Mode and the Study of Indian History'. E.M.S. Namboodiripad, *Selected Writings*, Vol. I, Calcutta: National Book Agency, 1982.

'Adi Sankara and his Philosophy: A Marxist View'. *Social Scientist*, Vol. 17, No. 1–2, Jan.–Feb. 1989.

'Classes and Class Struggle in Indian History'. *Social Scientist*, Vol. 22, No. 9–10, Sept.–Dec. 1994.

'The Class Character of the Nineteenth Century Renaissance in India'. *Social Scientist*, Vol. 24, No. 9–10, Sept.–Oct. 1996.

'Class Character of the Nationalist Movement'. *Social Scientist*, Vol. 4, No. 1, Aug. 1975, The National Question in India Special Number.

'The Indian National Question: Need for a Deeper Study'. *Social Scientist*, Vol. 10, No. 12, Dec. 1982.

'Castes, Classes and Parties in Modern Political Development'. *Social Scientist*, Vol. 6, No. 4, Nov. 1977.

'Once Again on Castes and Classes'. *Social Scientist*, Vol. 9, No. 12, Dec. 1981.

'Caste Conflicts vs. Growing Unity of Popular Democratic Forces'. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 14, No. 7–8, Annual Number on Class and Caste in India, Feb. 1979.

'The Marxist Theory of Ground Rent: Relevance to the Study of Agrarian Question in India'. *Social Scientist*, Vol. 12, No. 2, Feb. 1984, Marx Centenary Number 3.

'The Question of Land Tenure in Malabar'. E.M.S. Namboodiripad, *Selected Writings*, Vol. II, Calcutta: National Book Agency, 1985.
'A Short History of the Peasant Movement in Kerala'. E.M.S. Namboodiripad, *Selected Writings*, Vol. II, Calcutta: National Book Agency, 1985.
'Marxism-Leninism and the Bourgeois Judiciary'. E.M.S. Namboodiripad, *Selected Writings*, Vol. I, Calcutta: National Book Agency, 1982.
'Talking about Kerala: A Conversation with E.M.S. Namboodiripad' by V.K. Ramachandran. *Frontline*, Vol. 15, No. 09, April 25–May 08, 1998.

Publisher's Introduction

E.M.S. Namboodiripad (1909–1998) left behind an enormous legacy, both in theory and in practice. As a young man, EMS was inspired by the freedom movement, to which he gave his energy in his native Kerala. Born into a family and community at the fortunate end of the feudal system, EMS threw himself early into undermining its foundation. His early writings in *Unninamboothiri* were against what EMS later called the *jenmi*-landlord system. Nothing would have pleased him more, he felt, than to make the Namboodiris into human beings. It was a vast assignment for a young man, but EMS was up to it. Not for him only scholarly combat. EMS threw himself into the movement for freedom, first into Gandhi's Congress, then into the Congress Socialist Party and finally into the Communist movement. The political domain provided EMS with a wider canvas within which to push against the curious combination of feudal and capitalist power in colonial India.

EMS encountered Marxism in the mid-1930s, when he was already involved in building a socialist movement in Kerala. Within a few years, he had taken his lessons from Marxism to write a minute of dissent to the report of the Malabar Tenancy Enquiry Committee ('The Question of Land Tenure in Malabar', 1939, included in the present volume). Reading this dissent, even seventy years later, one is struck by the freshness of his insights, and the considerable work EMS did to use the Marxist method to analyze Kerala's *jenmi*-landlord system. It was on the basis of this analysis that EMS threw himself into the peasant movement (see 'A Short History of the Peasant Movement in Kerala' in this volume), helping build one of the strongest Kisan Sabhas in the country. EMS would later be the Joint Secretary of the All India Kisan Sabha and he would play a very significant role in the writing of the CPI's 1954 resolution, *Our Tasks among the Peasant Masses*. There was no mechanical application of Marxism as dogma; for EMS, Marxism remained alive, a method by which to interpret the history and society of India.

It is this suppleness that defines EMS's account of the history of the Malayalam-speaking people. Here EMS drew from the Marxist theory of nationalities to creatively apply it to the Indian context. The Malayalam essay, *One and a Quarter Crore Malayalees* (1945), was later expanded into English as *The National Question in Kerala* (1952). EMS drew from his own historical research to provide the basis for his advocacy of *Aikya Kerala*, United Kerala (the unity of Travancore, Cochin and Malabar into the modern state of Kerala). See 'The Indian National Question: Need for a Deeper Study' in this volume, which summarizes his earlier approach. What is essential to grasp about EMS's oeuvre is his spirit of infusing Marxism into history.

Already by the 1940s, EMS wrote on a range of issues, from agrarian relations to language questions, from Indian history to contemporary matters. This array would deepen as the years went on, with EMS writing with fluidity on questions of the ancient world to questions of immediate political relevance. He was able to engage with professional historians and professional politicians with equal gravity, and this is evident in the fifteen essays collected in this volume. Book reviews of works by Irfan Habib and K.N. Panikkar ('Classes and Class Struggle in Indian History' and 'The Class Character of the Nineteenth Century Renaissance in India' in this volume) are peppered with EMS's generosity and his learning, his willingness to engage with professional scholars and the keen insights he could bring to their work from the trenches of political practice. When Ramakrishna Mukherjee felt that one of EMS's essays was drawn from the work of Andre Beteille, EMS responded, 'I tried to show that the conclusions drawn in my paper were independent of Beteille; in fact, I based myself on what I learnt in the course of my own practical activity, supplemented by what humble theoretical work I have been able to do' ('Once Again on Castes and Classes' in this volume). The 'humble' work was not as modest as EMS claims. He read widely, from Indian historiography to the various currents in Marxism (including, toward the end of his life, the work of Antonio Gramsci). EMS also engaged with the questions of the general public, answering their queries in a daily column for *Deshabhimani*. Nothing escaped his attention; everything warranted a thoughtful response.

EMS's writings cover a large number of themes. In this volume we have restricted the selection to essays on history, society and land relations. Even here there are remarkable asides on the general character of Indian social development, and on Marxist theory. But there is something that holds these essays together. The unity is not simply dialectical and historical materialism; it arises out of an understanding of the remarkable continuities in Indian history, where rather than revolutionary transformations we see 'superimpositions'. How does one account for this continuity? European observers during the colonial times attributed this to the fact that Indian society was made up, according to them, of 'village republics', which remained more or less unchanging even when there was political upheaval at the top which led, every once in a way, to change in ruling dynasties. Marx contemplated this question as well, and, to explain the lack of development of capitalism in India came up with the formulation of the Asiatic Mode of Production. EMS was drawn to this concept, but not uncritically. He was persuaded by the historical research (especially of Marxists like D.D. Kosambi and Irfan Habib) that Marx's concept did not fit Indian society in quite the way Marx had formulated. Yet, EMS did not entirely abandon the kernel of the concept either—which was to seek an explanation for the continuity that characterizes Indian history (indeed, Eric Hobsbawm refers specifically to EMS in his writings on the Asiatic Mode). Central to this continuity, EMS felt, was the institution of caste. As EMS puts it in 'The Indian National Question', included in this selection:

> As opposed to this two-stage transformation—slave to feudal and feudal to capitalist—in Europe, India remained tied to the same old order under which the overwhelming majority of the people belonged to the oppressed and backward castes. This is the essence of what Marx called India's 'unchanging' society where the village was not touched by the wars and upheavals at the higher levels, the British conquest being the first revolution. (p. 74)

Caste society and the hegemony of brahminism had a most pernicious impact on Indian society. The caste system not only kept the oppressed masses in thrall, the ideological hegemony of brahminism resulted in a sustained stagnation of science and technology, and therefore, ultimately, of

the productive forces as well. This comes out in his essay on Adi Sankara included in this volume. Following the Marxist philosopher Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya, EMS sees the philosophical triumph of Adi Sankara as the triumph of idealism over materialism, leading, in the end, to the loss of national independence:

> Why and how did our country fall from its brilliant antiquity to the degradation of pre-British days? The answer is that the defeat of the oppressed castes at the hands of the Brahminic overlordship, of materialism by idealism, constituted the beginning of the fall of India's civilization and culture which in the end led to the loss of national independence. (pp. 39–40)

Pre-capitalist social formations, cultivated by colonialism and by the national bourgeoisie, had to be systematically undermined by the people's movements of independent India. EMS traced the potentialities within Indian society, finding opportunities for social progress and brakes against it. Cognizant of the special oppression of caste and of religious majoritarianism in Indian society, EMS fought against the organizing of people based on these very lines; one cannot fight caste oppression on caste lines. Instead, caste oppression had to be fought by organizing people into unified class organizations that understood and emphasized the special role of caste in Indian society. As he put it in 'Once Again on Castes and Classes',

> We had then and still have to fight a two-front battle. Ranged against us on the one hand are those who denounce us for our alleged 'departure from the principles of nationalism and socialism,' since we are championing 'sectarian' causes like those of the oppressed castes and religious minorities. On the other hand are those who, in the name of defending the oppressed caste masses, in fact, isolate them from the mainstream of the united struggle of the working people irrespective of caste, communities and so on. (p. 107)

EMS did not seek to subsume the fight against caste oppression or religious majoritarianism *beneath* class organizations, but to use the platform of class organizations to openly attack caste oppression, religious

fundamentalism and feudal male chauvinism. It is based on this analysis that EMS urged the provisions of reservations (both in 1957 and in 1989), and supported the women's movement, which has become a crucial part of the struggle against feudal chauvinism. His writings both provide clues for this transformation as well as a method to continue the political and intellectual work that he conducted over six decades.

EMS was one of the most outstanding Marxists of his generation, not only in India, but around the world. Few others combined the depth of scholarship and the dedication of political work at the same level of sophistication. In this period of his birth centenary, LeftWord Books has published a series of books by EMS, of which this one you hold in your hands is one, a small window into his thoughts.

"We do not regard Marx's theory as something completed and inviolable; on the contrary, we are convinced that it has only laid the foundation stone of the science which socialists must develop in all directions if they wish to keep pace with life."

V.I. LENIN

On Historical Materialism

Our historians once held the view that the Indian history began with the advent of the Aryans. However, historians in southern India argue that the Dravidian people have had a more ancient and developed civilization than the Aryans. Thus emerged the two streams of Indian history—one biased towards the Aryans and the other towards the Dravidians. Both the streams are largely based on mythologies. Instead of writing history based on myths, the present author attempted some time back to examine what instruments of production were existing at each historical epoch, what were the social relationships that governed production with such instruments, and how the changes in social relations led to political clashes, wars and revolutions.[1]

Many scholars and historians have emerged now, who have examined history connecting it with the development of instruments of production, although all of them cannot be said to have fully assimilated the method of Historical Materialism. These scholars have none-the-less subjected the views and ideas of early historians to strong and effective criticism. For example, the very title of the Sardar Patel Memorial Lectures delivered by Professor Romila Thapar in 1972 was 'Past and Prejudice'. There she has pointed out that there were two sections amongst the historians, one that tried to justify and uphold imperialist domination of India, and another sympathetic to anti-imperialist struggles. Historians of both these persuasions tried to examine history with a prejudice and to formulate 'historical theories' that went well with their respective political biases.

This holds good for the writing of modern Indian history as well. For example, the pro-imperialist historians described the situation prevailing in India during the centuries immediately preceding the advent of foreigners in such a way as to strengthen the claim of the imperialists that the traders from Portugal, Holland, France and England made 'uncivilized' India 'civilized'. Nationalist historians, on the other hand, selected and interpreted historical facts in such a way as to establish that it was foreign domination alone which stood in the way of India's modernization and progress and but

for it, India would have achieved progress comparable to any civilized country in the world.

I have tried to show elsewhere that anyone who examines Indian history objectively would reject both these views which are subjective and suited to serve the narrow interests of the classes which their protagonists represent.[2] In particular, I have attempted to show that it was the weaknesses inherent in the Indian social system evolved through centuries which prepared the ground for foreign domination to take deep roots in the country. Although it destroyed the foundation of Indian society in its ancient and medieval forms, it failed to modernize it on a new basis. It was the process of modernization that began with the freedom struggle.

This is an approach which is different from that of most other authors on Indian freedom struggle. For example, the pro-imperialist historians treated with contempt the anti-British uprisings that took place earlier in the South in different forms. The nationalist historians, on the other hand, considered them as the beginning of and models for the struggle for national independence. I evaluate these events yet differently. In fact, people's resistance to the British rule is as old as the British rule itself. Like the anti-British revolts under the leadership of Velu Thampi Dalava and Pazhassi Raja in Kerala, the people in different parts of India had revolted even before the British rule had got established in the country. The 1857 uprisings were the most widespread and the highest form of such local revolts. That widespread anti-British revolt which the British historians designated as

'Sepoy Mutiny' marked the end of a stage in the history of the national movement. It was a higher form of revolts jointly conducted by the peasant masses and the feudal gentry who exploited them, in order to preserve the *varna-jati* relations and the village system based on these relations which

prevailed in the country before the establishment of the British rule. At the same time, it was the final stage of a national struggle of a particular type. Finally, the events that followed the 1857 struggle showed that such struggles would never be successful.

Twenty-six years after the suppression of the 1857 revolt, another organized movement emerged against the foreign domination. This was the

Indian National Congress. As distinct from the people who participated in the 1857 and earlier anti-British revolts, the people who formed the new organization were those who perceived the 'progressive' character of the British rule and foreign culture and wanted to copy it in India. They were, therefore, distressed to notice that the British rulers who introduced progressive changes in their own country were standing against those changes being introduced in India. This grievance became more widespread and grew and finally turned into an anti-British mass struggle. August 15, 1947 was the successful culmination of this struggle. Therefore, pro-Congress historians claim that the growth and final victory of the Indian National Congress represented the continuation and successful culmination of the mass revolts that took place in different parts of India in 1857 and earlier.

Several books, monograph and research articles were brought out in the early 1970s marking the Silver Jubilee of Independence, in which studies on anti-British revolts found a prominent place. These researches have surely enriched our historiography. Most scholars, however, failed to provide logical answers to a number of important questions such as:

(1) Why were the revolts that took place in 1857 and earlier not successful? Why did they get suppressed?

(2) Why did the national independence movement that emerged after the suppression of the 1857 revolt keep itself away from armed struggle of the masses? Why was it that the central slogan of that movement came to be 'non-violent struggle' even when it had reached the common masses? Why did the leaders of that movement avoid the 'danger' of an armed mass struggle by coming to terms with the foreign rulers?

(3) How was it that sectarian politics based on religious and caste ideologies put obstacles before the nationalists from the very inception of the freedom movement and that the foreign rulers, taking advantage of this kind of politics, were able to foster disruption within the movement? How did India, a single political entity throughout the freedom struggle, come to be divided into two (Indian Union and Pakistan) which came into clash with each other continually after independence?

(4) Why was it that August 15, 1947 which the entire people of the country rejoiced at as the birth of a new era, failed to enthuse Mahatma Gandhi who had stood at the head of the freedom struggle for a generation? Why was it that when a section of his followers turned themselves into new rulers, another section got disappointed by the contradiction between their words and deeds? Why was it that a large section among the Gandhians began to organize the people one way or another against the new rulers in the subsequent years?

In brief, the early national movement which culminated in the 1857 revolt was violently suppressed by the foreign rulers. The new national independence movement which emerged around 1885, although it ended apparently victorious, raised several new problems instead of fulfilling the aims and objectives it had placed before the people. The reason is not far to seek.

It was in the second half the 18th century that the British became rulers in some parts of India. It took nearly a century for them to bring the whole of India under their rule. And within another century, on August 15, 1947, they had to wind up their regime and leave the country.

The Indian people fought bitter battles against the domination throughout this period. Thousands laid down their lives in order to make these battles, in which millions participated, victorious. Numerous families became destitute and people faced brutal repression. It was, in fact, the determination, courage and the organizational skill demonstrated by the people in these battles that forced the British to leave the country.

But independence came not in the manner in which the courageous patriots who participated in this long drawn out struggle wanted it. The content of the pledge which the people in thousands of villages and towns were taking on 26th January every year since 1930 did not materialize. Foreign domination over the social, political and cultural fronts was not overthrown; change took place only in the political administration of the country. White masters were replaced by brown masters.

In the first stage of the fight for national independence feudal princes headed the struggle, while in the second stage, the bourgeoisie was the

leadership. Further, this bourgeoisie did not eliminate the pre-capitalist social system; instead, it came to a compromise with it. Therefore, it is necessary to reconsider both stages of the struggle for independence—one that ended with 1857 and the other that ended in 194 7. The weaknesses inherent in both the stages must be examined objectively and evaluated. Being a modest attempt in this direction, in the present work, my perspective is one of Historical Materialism. Consequently one may find in it an approach quite different from that of the ordinary nationalist historian.

This may naturally raise some doubts in the minds of non-Marxist historians. First, it may be asked: does not a commitment to Historical Materialism amount to putting a fetter on independent historical investigation? Second, whatever be the situation with regard to other countries, is Historical Materialism relevant to India? In order to answer these questions it is necessary to examine the essence of Historical Materialism and its methods of investigation.

We may begin with the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (*Communist Manifesto* for brief), the most concise and comprehensive of all the works written from the perspective of Historical Materialism. Engels summarizes the content of this work as follows:

> . . . economic production and the structure of society of every historical epoch necessarily arising therefrom constitute the foundation for the political and intellectual history of that epoch; . . . consequently (ever since the dissolution of the primeval communal ownership of land) all history has been a history of class struggles, of struggles between exploited and exploiting, between dominated and dominating classes at various stages of social development; . . . this struggle, however, has now reached a stage where the exploited and oppressed class (the proletariat) can no longer emancipate itself from the class which exploits and oppresses it (the bourgeoisie), without at the same time for ever freeing the whole of society from exploitation, oppression and class struggles . . . (Preface, 1883)

Later there arose some misconceptions among Marxists on certain points relating to the essence of Historical Materialism as summarized

above. In a correspondence, Engels himself clarified the position on one of these points. He stated:

> Marx and I are ourselves partly to blame for the fact that the younger people sometimes lay more stress on the economic side than is due to it. *We had to emphasize the main principle, vis-à-vis our adversaries, who denied it, and we had not always the time, the place or the opportunity to give their due to other factors involved in the interaction.*[3]

In this same self-critical letter Engels clearly brings out the interaction between the economic and non-economic factors.

> . . . The economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure—political forms of the class struggle and its results, such as constitutions established by the victorious class after a successful battle, etc., juridical forms, and especially the reflections of all these real struggles in the brains of the participants, political, legal, philosophical theories, religious views and their further development into systems of dogmas—also exercise their influence upon the course of the historical struggles and in many cases determine their *form* in particular. *There is an interaction of all these elements in which, amid all the endless host of accidents (that is, of things and events whose inner interconnection is remote or so impossible of proof that we can regard it as non-existent and neglect it), the economic movement is finally bound to assert itself.* Otherwise the application of the theory to any period of history would be easier than the solution of a simple equation of the first degree.[4]

This conception can be found in all the comprehensive works of Marx and Engels and even in their brief correspondences. Marx and Engels did not, nor did the Marxists, ever consider Marxism to contain the ultimate and permanent truth, unlike the faith of the believers in the Vedas and Upanishads. The Marxists, who strive not only to 'interpret the world in various ways' but also to 'change it', examine objectively the changes that are continuously taking place around them, with the aid of the view briefly stated above. This is the method of Marxism (Historical Materialism) for historical investigations.

When the *Communist Manifesto* was being written, Europe was witnessing a violent revolutionary upsurge. Marx and Engels who actively participated in this upsurge, analyzed the various theoretical aspects of this revolution. The Introduction written by Engels to the re-publication of Marx's *The Class Struggle in France, 1848 to 1850*, analyzing the revolution of 1848–49 and its lessons, throws light on certain questions relating to the application of Historical Materialism:

> The work here re-published was Marx's first attempt to explain a section of contemporary history by means of his materialist conception, as the basis of the given economic situation . . . If events and series of events are judged by current history, it will never be possible to go back to the *ultimate* economic causes. Even today . . . it still remains impossible . . . to follow day by day the movement of industry and trade in the world market and the changes which take place in the methods of production in such a way as to be able to draw a general conclusion, for any point of time, from these manifold, complicated and ever changing factors, the most important of which . . . generally operate a long lime in secret before they . . . (are) violently felt on the surface.

In the Introduction, Engels also points to certain errors made by Marx while undertaking to evaluate the class struggles in France between 1848–50:

> When Marx undertook his work, the source of error mentioned was even more unavoidable. It was simply impossible during the period of the Revolution of 1848–49 to follow up the economic transformations taking place at the same time or even to keep them in view. It was the same during the first months of exile in London, in the autumn and winter of 1848–50. But that was just the time when Marx began his work. And in spite of these unfavourable circumstances, his exact knowledge both of the economic situation in France before, and of the political history of that country after the February Revolution made it possible for him to give a picture of events which laid bare their inner connections in a way never attained ever since, and which later brilliantly stood the double test applied by Marx himself.

Stating that Marx wrote these in the midst of the revolutionary upsurge in 1848–50 and that some changes were introduced in the formulation as a result of the studies conducted later by Marx himself, Engels continues:

> . . . we declared as early as autumn 1850 that at least the *first* chapter of the revolutionary period was closed and that nothing was to be expected until the outbreak of a new world economic crisis. For which reason we were excommunicated, as traitors to the revolution, by the very people who later, almost without exception, made their peace with Bismark—so far as Bismark found their worth the trouble.
>
> But history has shown us too to have been wrong, has revaled our point of view of that time to have been an illusion. It has done even more: it has not merely propelled the erroneous notions we then held; it has also completely transformed the conditions under which the proletariat has to fight. The mode of struggle of 1848 is today obsolete in every respect . . . .

Marx and Engels, however, did not confine themselves to this self-criticism with respect to the experience of revolutionary struggles. They also reviewed carefully the contents of each of their works written before, during and after writing the *Communist Manifesto*. In this process they did not hesitate to draw new conclusions whenever they found new facts which convinced them of the need to revise the conclusions they had earlier arrived at. They took particular care to gather all the historical facts and statistics in respect of all countries, including Russia, China and India. They began to learn many languages for this purpose.

It is clear that Marx and Engels never regarded themselves as sages who had realized the ultimate truth, but as scientific investigators devoted to finding truth. It is in this sense that Marxist students of history, including the present author, accept the approach of Historical Materialism.

Anyone who is engaged in the study of and research in history with the perspective of Historical Materialism should not neglect the historical facts brought out by other investigators who do not adopt this perspective. Rather, each such historical fact should be carefully examined. Similarly, the conclusions they reach on the basis of these facts should be critically

examined. For example, several studies have come out in the recent times in Indian history in general and in the history of freedom struggle in particular. Each of these studies contains a good deal of valuable facts.

However, many of these studies are made with the perspective of bourgeois nationalism. Some others, on the other hand, are written from the point of view of a religion or from the narrow outlook of the people of a region or the speakers of a language. Such biases can be discerned not only in arriving at conclusions but also in selecting the materials for study. They should not be blindly accepted. At the same time, as scholarly investigators, they have brought out historical facts. These facts must be used to enrich the method of Historical Materialism.

The questions raised earlier make obvious the need to enrich the method of Historical Materialism by subjecting the studies and investigations of non-Marxist historians to critical examination. These questions are such that none of the histories of freedom struggle is capable of providing logical answers to them. On the other hand, if one utilizes Historical Materialism to examine the entire freedom struggle based on the study of the development of India's past, the nature of social system prevalent in India immediately before the establishment of foreign rule in the country and the changes introduced by the foreign rulers in this system, one can provide answers which the nationalist historians are unable to provide. This is what is being attempted in the present work.

NOTES

1 E.M.S. Namboodiripad, *lndyacharitrathilekku Oru Ethinottam* (in Malayalam), Chintha Publishers, Trivandrum, 1975.

2 Ibid.

3 Engels to Joseph Bloch, September 21 (22), 1890. Emphasis added.

4 Ibid.

Marx, the Asiatic Mode and the Study of Indian History

Bourgeois scholars and nationalist politicians have tried to prove the 'total irrelevance' of the Marxist approach to the study of Indian history. Idealism, rather than materialism, is, according to them, the essence of India's 'age-old culture', while, in social life, Indian society is guided by mutual cooperation rather than class struggle.

This has been contradicted by several Marxist scholars who have proved that the basic principles of historical materialism are as applicable to the development of Indian society as to that of any other society. Quite a few monographs and bigger books have been produced showing that behind the apparently idealistic Indian culture is the reality of the development of material forces.

Even bourgeois scholars of the science of history have shown that it is as true of Indian history as of any other society, that it is through the development of the tools and instruments of production that man advanced from savagery and barbarism to civilization; they have also shown that behind the apparent 'mutual co-operation' inherent in the age-old 'village community', social conflicts have been developing, leading to the emergence of the relations of exploitation and oppression.

It is thus impossible even for one who does not subscribe to the theory of historical materialism to escape the conclusion that the laws of scientific history are as applicable to India as to any other country.

There are, however, some big gaps in the scientific understanding of Indian history. Questions such as the manner in which the Indus Valley Civilization was destroyed; the existence or otherwise of slavery in that civilization; the extent to which elements of that civilization were absorbed by the invading Aryans, and so on, yet remain to be explained. Only time and painstaking study by dedicated scholars will answer these and many other questions posed by the developing science of Indian history.

One question which is of particular interest to Marxist scholars of Indian history is: Did Indian society develop in accordance with the formula, 'primitive communism to slavery, then to feudalism and then to capitalism', or did it evolve its own pattern of development which is known by the celebrated term 'Asiatic Society'? Some scholars have attempted to fit the development of Indian history into the former pattern while others have tried to explain Indian history in accordance with the latter formula. Both have defended their positions with reference to some well-known passages from the writings of Marx and Engels themselves.

Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations by Karl Marx (translated by Jack Cohen, edited and with an introduction by Eric J. Hobsbawm, International Publishers, New York, 1965) would help a further, more intensive study of the problem. The publisher has done an immense service to historical research by collecting together the Notes made by Karl Marx in 1857–58 in preparation of his *Critique of Political Economy* and *Capital*, with a lucid introduction explaining the *circumstances in which the Notes were written* and giving his own interpretation of what they mean.

As the editor correctly observes, the exact meaning which the author wanted to convey is very often by no means clear, but has to be inferred from the context as well as with reference to other published works. Hobsbawm, however, has done an intelligent job by piecing together all the information available and explaining the most likely implications.

Every student of Indian affairs—not only scholars of Indian history, but economists, sociologists, political scientists, critics in the field of art and literature, and so on—would, therefore, do well to study this volume, along with other published works of Marx and Engels, in order to get a precise idea of what the founders of historical materialism had to say on 'Asiatic Society' in general and about Indian society in particular.

Just as in all his major writings, so in these Notes too, Marx is primarily concerned with the capitalist society whose origin and evolution he was investigating. He is interested in the Asiatic society, the Germanic society, the Slavonic society, the Ancient Classical society and so on, because they are all 'pre-capitalist societies'. Only by studying all the available material on

every one of these types of societies could he show how capitalism was bringing every other type of society under its domination.

> The dissolution both of free petty landownership and of, communal landed property, based on the oriental commune'—such was the subject matter of his study in these Notes. Such, a dissolution of pre-capitalist property alone can create the prerequisites of wage, labour and capital. These pre-requisites are:
>
> (1) Free labour and exchange of free labour against, money, in order to reproduce money and to convert it into values in order to be consumed by money, not as use value for enjoyment, but as use value for money.
>
> (2) The separation of free labour from the objective' conditions of its realization—from the means and material of labour. This means above all that the worker must be separated from the land, which functions as his natural laboratory. (p. 67.)

It would, therefore, be contrary to the spirit of Marxism to look upon Marx's reference to 'Asiatic Society' in general, or to Indian society in particular, as anything more than the analysis of the conditions under which that society was being subordinated to capitalism—an analysis of how, under the impact of capitalist advance, Asiatic or Indian society was being dissolved and the main pre-requisites created for the evolution of capitalist relations. Nothing can be more unscientific than to look upon this as the key to the understanding of the entire course of our historical development. Neither these notes by themselves, nor together with all the other works of Marx and Engels, should therefore be quoted by any other scholar of Indian history to *prove* or *disprove* his own independently worked out theoretical postulates on any aspect of Indian history. Marxism after all is not the 'Open Sesame' for all problems of scientific analysis. It is only the guideline for that research, for the collection and analysis of factual data, for drawing provisional conclusions, for the further verification of these provisional conclusions by the collection of more data, and so on, which is indispensable to any scholar.

The Notes are of great assistance to the scholars of human history—not only of Asiatic or Indian history but of human history all over the world—because they give the general picture of how pre-historic primitive communal society disintegrated and gave rise to various forms of class society. Referring to the former, Marx says:

> We may take it for granted that pastoralism, or more generally a migratory life, is the first form of maintaining existence, the tribe not settled in a fixed place but using up what it finds locally and then passing on. Men are not settled by nature (unless perhaps in such fertile environment that they could subsist on a single tree like the monkey; otherwise they would roam, like the wild animals). Hence the tribal community, the natural common body, appears not as the consequence, but as the precondition of a joint (temporary) appropriation and use of the soil.
>
> Once men finally settled down, the way in which, to a smaller degree, this original community is modified, will depend on various external, climatic, geographical, physical, etc., conditions as well as on their special natural make-up—their tribal character. The spontaneously evolved tribal community, or if you will, the herd—the common ties of blood, language, custom, etc.—is the first precondition of the appropriation of the objectives of life, and of the activity which reproduces and gives material expression to, or objectifies it (activity as herdsmen, hunters, agriculturists, etc.). The earth is the great laboratory, the arsenal which provides both the means and the materials of labour, and also the location, the *basis* of the community. Men's relation to it is naive: they regard themselves as its *communal proprietors*, and as those of the community which produces and reproduces itself by living labour. Only in so far as the individual is a member—in the literal and figurative sense—of such a community, does he regard himself as the owner or possessor. In reality *appropriation* by means of the process of labour takes place under these *preconditions,* which are not the *product* of labour, but appear as its natural or *divine* preconditions. (pp. 68–69.)

This is a state of society which once existed in every part of the world. Here there is no contradiction between the labourer and the owner of the preconditions for labour. Every member of society is at once a labourer and an owner of the conditions of labour. There is no relation of exploiter and exploited. Ownership, as well as labour, is collective. Here, therefore, is that 'golden age' of primitive communism where complete equality prevailed between man and man.

It is when this type of primitive communal organization is broken up, and new relations of exploitation evolved, that a number of new socioeconomic formations come into existence. And it is here that the mechanical theory of Marxism, according to which primitive communism must necessarily be replaced by slavery, which in its turn should be replaced by feudalism, which again is to be replaced by capitalism, breaks down. The Notes published now bring out at least four variants into which, according to Marx, primitive communal society was dissolved—Ancient Classical (Greece and Rome), Germanic, Slavonic and Asiatic.

Mentioning these four variants, however, should not be understood to mean that there are no other variants. It only shows that these are the four types of pre-capitalist economic formations in relation to which Marx came across factual data:

> Ancient classical history is the history of cities, but cities based on land ownership and agriculture; Asian history is a kind of undifferentiated unity of town and country (the large city, properly speaking, must be regarded merely as a princely camp; superimposed on the real economic structure); the Middle Ages (Germanic period) starts with the countryside as the locus of history, whose further development then proceeds through the opposition of town and. country; modern (history) is the urbanization of the countryside, not, as among the ancients, the ruralization of the city. (pp. 77–78.)

As regards the Slavonic type, Marx called its Russian variant 'the most modern form of the archaic type, which in turn has passed through a number of evolutionary changes' (p. 142). Again: 'Property in land is communal, but each peasant cultivates and manages his plot on his own

according to a way recalling the small peasant of the West' (p. 144). Marx adds a necessary caution:

> Primitive communities are not all cut in single pattern. On the contrary, taken together, they form a series of social groupings, differing both in type and in age, and, marking successive phases of development. One of these types, now by general agreement called 'the agricultural community', is the type of the *Russian community.* Its counterpart in the West is the *Germanic community*, which is of very recent date. . . .
>
> The 'village community' also occurs in Asia, among the Afghans, etc., but it is everywhere the *very youngest type, as* it were the last word of the *archaic formation* of societies. . . . As the last phase of the primitive formation of society, the agricultural community is at the same, time a transitional phase to the secondary formation, i.e., transition from society based on common property' to society based on private property. The secondary formation comprises, as you must understand, the series of societies based on slavery and serfdom. (pp. 144-45.)

Nothing can, therefore, be more un-Marxian than to wave the magic wand on either of the two formulae, 'slavery–feudalism–capitalism' or 'Asiaticsociety–capitalism', as the beginning and end of the Marxian understanding of Indian history. Repeating any such formula cannot be a substitute for the painstaking study of factual data which is obligatory for any Marxist student of Indian history.

The Notes, however, give a sufficient insight into the evolution of Asian society in general and of Indian society in particular. 'Oriental despotism therefore appears to lead-to a legal absence of property. In fact, however, its foundation is tribal: or common property, in most cases created through a combination of manufacture and agriculture within the small community which thus becomes entirely self-sustaining and contains within itself all conditions of production and surplus production.'

'Part of its surplus labour', Marx goes on, 'belongs to the higher community, which ultimately appears as a *person.* This surplus labour is rendered both as a tribute and as common labour for the glory of the unity,

in part that of the despot, in part that of the imagined tribal entity of the god' (p. 70).

Interesting and significant also is Marx's comparison between slavery in the Orient and slavery in Europe:

> *Property*—and this applies to its Asiatic, Slavonic, Ancient Classical and Germanic forms—therefore originally signifies a relation of the working (producing) subject (or a subject reproducing himself) to the conditions of his production or reproduction is his own. Hence, according to the condition of production, property will take different forms. The object of production itself is to reproduce the producer in and together with these objective conditions of his existence. . . . Slavery, serfdom, etc., where the labourer himself appears among the natural conditions of production for a third individual or community and where property therefore is no longer the relationship of the independently labouring individual to the objective conditions of labour—is always secondary, never primary, although it is the necessary and logical result of property founded upon the community and upon labour in the community. (This character of slavery does *not* apply to the general slavery of the orient, which is so considered *only* from the European point of view). (p. 95.)

Here Marx points to the incorrectness of the efforts to show that India too developed from primitive communism to slavery as European countries did. Whatever system of slavery developed in some oriental countries is different from the system that developed in ancient Greece and Rome. Furthermore, even that type of oriental slavery which developed in West Asia (for instance) did not develop in India, where social development took an entirely different line.

Marx's references to the Oriental and European systems of slavery do not give us anything more than an insight into the different ways in which primitive communal society got broken up and class society arose up and class society arose.

Discussing the various ways in which communal property developed within itself, both state and private property, and how their development led' to the disintegration of communal property, Marx says:

> The Asiatic form necessarily survives longest and most stubbornly. This is due to the fundamental principle on which it is based, that is, that the individual does not become independent of the community, that the circle of production is self-sustaining, unity of agriculture and craft manufacture, etc. If the individual changes his relation to the community and its economic premise, conversely, the modification of this economic premise—produced by its own dialectics, pauperization etc. (p. 83.)

Why did this 'long and stubborn survival' take place in Asia? A hint is perhaps thrown with reference to India where caste has played a particularly important role. Marx makes the following reference to it:

> The tribes of the ancient state were constituted in one of two ways, either by *kinship* or by *locality*. *Kinship tribes* historically precede locality tribes, and are almost everywhere displaces by them. *Their most extreme and rigid from is the institution of castes*, separated from one another, without the right of inter-marriage, with quite different status; each with its exclusive, unchangeable occupation. (pp. 76–77; emphasis added.)

Again,

> The primitive forces of property necessarily dissolve into the relation of property to the different objective elements conditioning production; they are the economic basis of different forms of community, and in turn presuppose specific forms of community. These forms are significantly modified once labour itself is places among the objective *conditions of production* (as in slavery and serfdom) as a result of which the simple affirmative character of all forms of property embraced in No. 1 (property in land) is lost, and therefore their own abolition. So far as No. 2 (property in instrument) is concerned, in which the particular kind of labour—i.e., its craft mastery and consequently property in the instrument of labour—equals property in the conditions of production, this admittedly excludes slavery and serfdom. *However, it may lead to an analogous negative development in the form of a caste system*. (pp. 101–02; last emphasis added.)

Kinship tribes developing into rigid system of castes, leading to a negative development analogous to the two forms of property and ultimately giving rise to a socio-economic formation which survives longest and most stubbornly, that is, which resists the test to the utmost—such are therefore the elements of Indian society about which Marx gives us only a few hints. However, these are significant enough for all scholars, and students of Indian history to take up and test their correctness in the light of available factual data· For, as the *Programme* of the CPI (M) has pointed out:

> Even though developing in the capitalist way, Indian society still contains within itself strong elements of pre-capitalist society. Unlike in the advanced capitalist countries where capitalism grew on the ashes of pre-capitalist society, destroyed by the rising bourgeoisie, capitalism in India was superimposed on pre-capitalist society. Neither the British colonialists whose rule continued for over a century, nor the Indian bourgeoisie into whose hands power passed in 1947, delivered those smashing blows against pre-capitalist society which are necessary for the free development of capitalist society and its replacement by socialist society. The present Indian society, therefore, is a peculiar combination of monopoly capitalist domination with the caste, communal and tribal institutions. It has thus fallen to the lot of the working class and its Party to unite all the progressive forces interested in destroying the pre-capitalist society and to so consolidate the revolutionary forces within it as to facilitate the most rapid completion of democratic revolution and preparation for the ground of transition to socialism. (Para 33.)

It also falls to the lot of Marxist scholars of Indian history to enrich Marx's understanding of 'the longest and most stubborn survival' of the pre-capitalist formations in the Indian society by subjecting all the rapidly accumulating factual data of Indian history to scientific analysis and attempting a reconstruction of Indian history from the most ancient times to the present day.

Adi Sankara and his Philosophy

A Marxist View

The year 1989 is the 1200th year of the birth of Adi Shankara. It is being observed in various parts of the country, his home state above all. The cultural department of the Government of Kerala is organizing at Kaladi, the birth place of the great sage, a one-day seminar on some aspects of the teachings of this illustrious son of Kerala.

Is the participation of Marxist theoreticians not a betrayal of dialectical and historical materialism by intellectuals and political activists who should be opposed to the philosophy of Adi Shankara?

IDEALISM VERSUS MATERIALISM

This question assumes that idealism and materialism are such polar opposites that they have always and everywhere to be opposed to each other. It fails to note that, like other opposites in real life and human thinking, the idealist and materialist philosophical trends are related to each other in a dialectical, rather than metaphysical, manner. Neither idealism nor materialism remains static, both are ever moving forward, always negating each other, the struggle between the two in newer and newer forms is the law of development of human thought. There is therefore no question of materialism as such being superior to idealism, idealism as such being inferior. As Lenin observed in his *Philosophical Notebooks*,

> Philosophical idealism is *only* nonsense from the standpoint of crude, simple, metaphysical materialism. From the standpoint of *dialectical* materialism, on the other hand, philosophical idealism is a *one-sided*, exaggerated development (inflation, distention) of one of the features, aspects, facets of knowledge into an absolute, *divorced* from matter, from nature, apotheosized. Idealism is clerical obscurantism. True. But philosophical idealism is ('more correctly' and 'in addition') a road to

clerical obscurantism *through one of the shades* of the infinitely complex knowledge (dialectical of man).[1]

Like Marx and Engels who were the disciples of the greatest philosophical idealist in history (Hegel), Lenin highly valued the contributions made to human knowledge by idealism. Developing in mutual conflict for several centuries, idealism and materialism successively negated each other as they assumed newer and newer forms, culminating in the emergence of Dialectical Materialism in the nineteenth century. Marx and Engels, known earlier as talented Young Hegelians, developed and enriched Hegelian dialectics while assimilating all that is best in the then existing materialism. Dialectical Materialism was therefore a negation of both existing (Hegelian) Idealism and existing (Feurbachian) Materialism. It goes to the credit of Lenin that he further developed and enriched the Marx-Engels philosophy.

PHILOSOPHY OF PROLETARIAN REVOLUTION

Dialectical (and Historical) Materialism of Marx, Engels and Lenin is the philosophy of revolutionary action. 'Philosophers', said Marx, 'have in various ways *interpreted* the world; the point is to *change* it.' Theirs' however, is not the philosophy of any revolution but of *proletarian* revolution. To quote from Marx's *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*: 'As philosophy finds its material weapon in the proletariat, so the proletariat finds its spiritual weapon in philosophy.'

Marxism-Leninism being dialectical *materialism*, it is of course opposed to the philosophy of Shankara which is the acme of India's idealist philosophy. No Marxist, however, can help seeing that the evolution of that philosophy was an important stage in the development of Indian thought which, in its turn, is integrally connected with the development of Indian society. For, as Marx and Engels pointed out in the *Communist Manifesto*, 'Intellectual production changes its character in proportion as material production is changed. The ruling ideas of each age have ever been the ideas of its ruling classes.'

To make a critique of Adi Shankara's philosophy therefore, we should make a survey of Indian society and thought. For, Shankara like any other Indian philosopher was a product of Indian society; his thought was the further development of Indian thought down to his time. Though born in Kerala (the village Kaladi in what is today Ernakulam district in that state), he acquired name and fame as an Indian scholar of a high order who carried forward the best in Indian idealist philosophy. His life and thoughts were moulded by India as a whole not Kerala alone.

CLASS STRUGGLE

What then is Indian society? How did society and thought develop here?

'The written history of all hitherto existing society' is according to Marx and Engels, 'the history of class struggle' (*Communist Manifesto*). This is as true of India as of Europe about which the Manifesto was speaking.

In India however, class struggle did not develop (as it did in Europe) 'between freeman and slave, patrician and plebian, lord and serf, guild master and journeyman, etc.' The first division in ancient Indian society arose between the first two of the four varnas (Khatriya and Brahman) and the last two (Vaisya and Shudra). The beginnings of this could be seen in the emergence of a class of fighters and another of those who engaged themselves in the performance of rituals which is as necessary for success in war as actual fighting.

The two classes whose services were thus essential for the victory of the advancing Aryan tribes against their opponents first marked themselves off as the 'twice-born' (dwijas), superior to the rest of the population—Vis to begin with, later to be further divided into Vaisya and Shudra. In course of time, the four varnas proliferated into innumerable castes and sub-castes at whose head stood the 'twice-born' (dwijas), the Brahman in particular.

Naturally therefore, the two varnas (Khatriya and Brahman) were dominant in Indian society. They were, by and large, the producers of the intellectual, the aesthetic, the scientific and other forms of spiritual wealth including philosophy, while the rest of society produced material wealth. The division into the oppressing and oppressed sections of society thus

involved the division between intellectual and physical labour, between the spiritual and temporal life. The dialectical relation between these opposites constitutes the totality of intellectual and physical life.

ROOTS OF PHILOSOPHY

This explains the emergence of idealist and materialist trends in Indian philosophy. To quote Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya,

> The philosophical view which arose to condemn and reject life could only have been the result of the philosophical pursuit turning away from life itself. As with the development of slavery in ancient Greece, so also in the Upanishadic India, the lofty contempt for the material world with its ever-shifting phenomena was the result of the philosophical enquiry taking free flight into the realm of 'pure reason', or 'pure knowledge', i.e. knowledge only when a section of the community, living on the surplus produced by another, withdrew itself from the responsibilities of direct manual labour, and therefore, from reality of the material world, for the process of labour alone can exercise a sense of objective coercion on conscious theory. Theory, in other words, was divorced from practice and became 'pure theory', the things thought of became mere ideas and thus the knower, the subject, sought to emancipate itself from the inhibitions of the known or the object, and a look at the latter as but products of ignorance or *avidya*.[2]

Adi Shankara with his philosophy of Advaita Vedanta was the finest and most sophisticated exponent of this school of India's idealist philosophy. He developed his teachings on Brahman to such an extent that it implied the denial of even God (everything other than Brahman); for this he was denounced by his opponents as 'Buddha in disguise' (*Prachchanna* Buddha). This very appellation shows how bitter was the conflict between the teachings of Buddha and Brahmin domination, between idealism and materialism, how far the two had gone in Indian philosophy. Despite the powerful and successful fight put up by Shankara against what was considered to be the main contender in opposition to Upanishadic idealism

he was denounced for making concessions to that philosophical trend which had thrown a serious challenge to Brahmanism. Shankara was and is still revered however, for the erudition with which he defeated the Buddhist philosophical trend.

Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya who traced the roots of ancient India's idealist philosophy also explained the basis on which the materialist trend in Indian philosophy arose and developed. In his well-known work *Science in Ancient India*, he analyses the two classical works on ancient Indian medicine—*Charaka Samhita* and *Susruta Samhita*. The authors of the two books in their elucidation of problems connected with the human body, its ailments, remedies for them and so on see no iota of the soul when they give a materialistic account of these aspects of human life. Having done this of course, they show their loyalty to the dominant ideology of the age making obeisance to God (as part of treatment of the sick body).

SCIENCE AND MATERIALISM

This is as true of other sciences as of the medical science. The artisans and other sections of the working people skilled in one or another area of practical activity were materialists when dealing with the phenomena and problems of their work. But the moment they go over to the general problems of social life, they had to become votaries of the dominant ideology—the philosophy of life after death, the soul, *moksha*, and so on. It is out of skilled artisans, practitioners of occupations like medicine, etc., that a distinct materialist trend in philosophy originated. Those who followed this trend had to be materialist in their interpretations of problems connected with their art or professions. But, being dominated by the ideology of the ruling class-varna-caste-which was idealistic in essence, they had to submit themselves to idealism.

This is true of such philosophers of the materialist school as Nyava-Vaisesikas who are 'very near to materialism' in Chattopadhyaya's opinion but 'fully endorsed the authority of the scriptures, argue at length to prove the soul, and its survival after death' etc. 'There however, remain',

Chattopadhyaya proceeds, 'enough of very clever and subtle hints in the Nyaya-Vaisesika literature itself that all these were not to be taken earnestly.'[3]

There were however, other schools of materialist philosophy who refused to bow to the ideology of the ruling class—the Charvakas, the Lokayatas, etc. They minced no words to expound their philosophy which was opposed to that of idealism. Very little of their writings however, have been handed over to us. Their arguments having been quoted for purposes of refutation (as *Purvapaksha*), we get an inkling of the extent and sweep of materialist thinking in ancient Indian philosophy.

SCIENCE VERSUS POLITICS

The struggle between the two schools of philosophy was so bitter and prolonged that the outcome was decided by what Chattopadhyaya calls 'politics'. What this means is explained as follows:

> The spokesmen of traditional Indian politics were above all our lawgivers whose writings are generally called the *Dharmasastra*. What these lawmakers were basically concerned with was of course the safety of a social structure which they considered as the ideal one. Such a social structure generally goes by the name *Varnasrama*, by which is meant a society in which the conduct of everybody must be regulated by the caste in which he or she is born as also by the stage of life reached by every one. Concretely however, it stood for the norm of a society in which a minority of the population—consisting of nobles, priests and traders—were entitled to all material privileges, though in varying degrees. The rest of the people which could only mean the direct producers whose surplus products alone could create the material benefits for the *dwijas*, was dumped under the general category called Sudras. And the lawmakers insisted that these direct producers were entitled to have nothing more than was essential to keep themselves alive. Their only duty was to serve the upper strata of society, because the creator himself brought them into being exclusively for this specific purpose.[4]

The struggle between idealism and materialism in India was, in other words, the manifestation of the Indian variety of class struggle—a minority of upper castes (*dwijas*) as opposed to the overwhelming majority of the common people. The latter being engaged in physical labour for their livelihood were in constant touch with the various phenomena of nature. The ideas that they formed of the universe around them was naturally materialist. The narrow upper layer of society on the other hand depended on intellectual exercises and were therefore moved by ideas in the mental horizon, rather than phenomena of nature. They developed themselves into idealists, those who assert the supremacy of ideas over nature. The most sophisticated expression of this idealistic outlook was Shankara's Advaita Vedanta which asserted everything other than the Brahman (the absolute idea) as *avidya*, non-existent.

Out of the ranks of the overwhelming majority of people who engaged themselves in physical labour—artisans and others—arose the various schools of materialism. This class as a whole and the ideological representatives of this class however, were completely at the mercy of the idealist philosophers. It was therefore, an unequal battle between the toiling people who were inherently materialistic in outlook and those who lorded it over them with their idealistic philosophy. The battle between the Buddhists and the Vedantins was in fact the final engagement between the two forces and Shankara was the commander-in-chief of the idealists in that battle in its last stages. The defeat administered to the Buddhist materialists was therefore the victory of the dominant upper castes whose theoreticians championed idealism.

SCIENCES: GROWTH AND DECLINE

The battle between the two ideological trends did much to develop the various branches of natural sciences. Astronomy, mathematics, chemistry, medicine, etc., were so developed in ancient India that this country not only equalled but excelled most other countries in terms of ancient civilization and science. The defeat of the Buddhist materialists at the hands of Shankara however, meant a big setback to the development of Indian science. The pioneer historian of Indian science, P.C. Ray, observes:

> The Vedanta philosophy, as modified and expanded by Shankara, which teaches the unreality of the material world is to a large extent responsible for bringing the study of physical science into disrepute. Shankara is unsparing in his strictures on Kanada and his system.
>
> One or two extracts from Shankara's commentary on the Vedanta Sutras will make the point clear: (Observes Shankara) 'It thus appears that the atomic doctrine is supported by very weak arguments only, is opposed to those scriptural passages which declare the Lord to be the general cause and is not accepted by any of the authorities taking their stand on scripture, such as Manu and others. Hence it is to be altogether disregarded by high-minded men who have a regard for their own spiritual welfare'. (Again): 'The reasons on account of which the doctrine of the Vaiseshikas cannot be accepted have been stated above. That doctrine may be called semi-destructive'.[5]

Having quoted the above from Shankara, Ray added: 'Among a people ridden by caste and hide-bound by authorities and injunction of Vedas, Puranas and Smritis and having their intellect thus clamped and paralysed, no Boyle could arise to lay down sound principles for guidance'.[6]

EUROPEAN RENAISSANCE IN WORLD HISTORY

While India after the defeat of the materialists at the hands of the idealists was thus stagnant, Europe which had earlier been behind India in ancient days was going through fundamental socio-cultural transformation. The eminent scientist and historian of science, J.D. Barnal, refers to the European Renaissance as having 'healed, though only partially, the breach between aristocratic theory and plebeian practice' (Chattopadhyaya, p. 101). Barnal goes on (as quoted in Chattopadyaya, pp. 101–02)

> What was really new was the respect given to the practical arts of spinning, weaving, pottery, glass-making and, most of all, to the arts that provided for the twin needs of wealth and war-those of the miners and metal workers. The techniques of the arts were of more account in the Renaissance than in classical times because they were no longer in the

> hands of slaves but of free man and these were not, as they had been in the middle ages, far removed socially and economically from the rulers of the new society. The enhancement of the status of the craftsman made it possible to renew the link between his traditions and those of the scholars that have been broken almost since the beginning of the early civilisation.

POLITICAL FALL-OUT

The question, however, was not merely of the decline of science in Indian history. It was a question of what Karl Marx called 'undignified, stagnatory and vegetative life' in pre-British India. The village communities in India as Marx saw them 'were contaminated by distinctions of caste and slavery'. Marx further noted such 'a brutalizing worship of nature, exhibiting its degradation in the fact that man, the sovereign of nature, fell down on his knees in adoration of Hanuman, the monkey and Sabala the cow.'

This had its political implication that the country lost its independence. Say, Marx:

> The paramount power of the Moguls was broken by the Mogul Viceroys. The power of the Viceroys was broken by the Mahrattas. The power of the Mahrattas was broken by the Afghans, and while all were struggling against all, the Briton rushed in and was enabled to subdue them all.

Considering that this happened to a country which, once again to quote Marx, 'has been the source of our [Europeans'] languages, our religion', the question naturally arises: why and how did our country fall from its brilliant antiquity to the degradation of pre-British days? The answer is that the defeat of the oppressed castes at the hands of the Brahminic overlordship, of materialism by idealism, constituted the beginning of the fall of India's civilization and culture which in the end led to the loss of national independence.

EUROPE AND INDIA: THE CONTRAST

Having reviewed the evolution of the Shankara philosophy and the socio-political implications thereof, let me now proceed to discuss the relevance of that philosophy to present-day world with particular reference to India.

Shankara lived and worked in an era in which furious battles were being waged all over the world between the idealist and materialist schools of philosophy. India was no exception. There was however, one big difference: the battle did not end in the decisive victory of either in Europe; both schools developed as parallel forces with their mutual conflicts, producing giant personalities in their respective fields, culminating in the nineteenth century giants, Hegel on one side and Feuerbach on the other. Marx and Engels were the pioneers of a new school of philosophy in world history—the school which carried forward the dialectics of Hegel and the materialism of Feuerbach while rejecting the Hegelian idealism and Feuerbachian metaphysics. The theory of Dialectical and Historical Materialism that emerged, with Marx and Engels as its proponents, marked a new stage in the history of world philosophy.

In India, on the other hand, the battle of the two philosophical schools ended in the defeat of one (the materialists) and the domination of the other. This battle, however, was an unequal one, the full force of the socio-political establishment (the regime of caste comination) being made use of in favour of the idealist and against the materialist school. The victor and the vanquished in our country were not two philosophies in the abstract but two social classes—the dominant and oppressed castes—using the two philosophies as weapons in their arsenal. The victory of Shankara and his philosophy therefore was the victory of the Brahmin and other dominant castes, the defeat of the rest of Indian society.

MARXIST ATTITUDE TO IDEALISM

It is therefore unimaginable for any thinking person to consider the Shankara philosophy to be relevant to the present-day world, present-day India. That philosophy, like other schools of idealist philosophy, should in fact be vigorously combated if our country and humanity at large are to keep in step with the world-shaking developments of the present day. For India in

particular, the struggle against Hindu revivalist, against the revival of the Vedic and Upanishadic spirit, is an essential prerequisite for the building of a democratic, secular, new India.

Let me in this context note the enormous harm caused to our national unity by the preaching and practices of the politics of Hindu revivalist symbolized by such 'socio-cultural' organizations as the RSS, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, etc., and political outfits like the BJP. Such movements as on the Ram Janma Bhoomi and other temples are disruptive of the concepts of national unity and communal harmony which were part of our freedom movement. The organizers of these movements are using the names of the Vedic and Upanishadic rishis, the successors of these rishis including Shankara, to buttress their disruptive activities. Combating the pernicious activities of these opponents of national unity is therefore one of the foremost political duties of the left and secular political forces in the country.

In doing this however, we Marxist-Leninists should never adopt a nihilist attitude to the idealist school of which Shankara was the most illustrious representative. This is a mistake committed by a number of Marxist scholars in India and abroad. A Soviet scholar says that some Marxist scholars 'often identified with materialism certain essentially non-materialist doctrines such as the anti-Brahmin attitudes or the rejection of the doctrine of "liberation" . . . . The Lokayata school was arbitrarily pushed into the foreground, while the Vedanta school was placed as the seventh and last.'[7]

The author is of the view that 'the Vedanta was and still is the most influential of the philosophical schools in India' and that 'Shankara occupied in Indian philosophy approximately the same place as Plato's doctrine holds in West European philosophy.'

Let me conclude: Shankara was one of the tallest of India's (and world's) idealist philosophers; his Advaita Vedanta is one of the richest contributions India has made to the treasury of human knowledge. But so are other philosophers and their works in which elements of materialism existed, such as the Nyaya, the Vaiseshika, the Sankhya, the Mimamsa, the Lokayata, etc., not to speak of the Buddha whose near-materialist philosophy gripped the

mass of suppressed humanity. While we are proud that both schools of our Indian philosophy produced geniuses of the intellect, those belonging to the materialist school had to fight an unequal battle and were therefore defeated. Still more unfortunately, the defeat of the materialists in this unequal battle was the beginning of a millennium-long age of intellectual and socio-political backwardness which culminated in the establishment of British rule in our land.

I am, however, not at all pessimistic. The dark age of all-round backwardness has slowly been coming an end; hard knocks have already been given to the socio-political forces which kept the mass of toilers under subjection; the alien rulers who did this job of destroying the old have been forced to quit India; democratic forces have been rising as a united army fighting for freedom; India's freedom movement came to be linked with the forces of the international revolution for peace, freedom, democracy and socialism.

In the wake of all these developments, the Indian working class has been slowly getting organized into the position of vanguard in the struggle for democracy, freedom, peace and socialism; Dialectical and Historical Materialism is naturally becoming the leading ideology of the most significant elements in politically awakened India. This indeed is the situation in which, as Marx observed over a decade and a half ago; 'Philosophy finds in the working class its material weapon; the working class finds in philosophy its spiritual weapon.'

NOTES

1 V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 38, p. 363.

2 Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya, *Indian Philosophy: A Popular Introduction*, People's Publishing House, 1986, pp. 85–86.

3 Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya, *In Defence of Materialism in Ancient India*, People's Publishing House, 1989, pp. 16–17.

4 Ibid., pp. 17–18.

5 Quoted by Chattopadhyaya, *In Defence of Materialism in Ancient India*, pp. 103–04.

6 Ibid.

7 *Social Sciences in the USSR*, No. l, 1989, p. 19(a).

Classes and Class Struggle in Indian History

Irfan Habib, *Essays in Indian History*: *Towards a Marxist Perception*, New Delhi: Tulika, 1995.

When the Socialist-Communist ideology began to spread among our people, ifs opponents advanced two arguments against it. Firstly, that India is a land of spiritualism where materialism of either the capitalist or socialist-communist variety would not strike roots. Secondly, that conflicting classes and their struggle, which is the essence of the politics of Marxism, is alien to Indian society. Whatever social conflicts developed in India were of casteist or religious-communal character.

These two myths regarding Indian culture were exploded by the pioneers of Marxist theory as applied to the concrete conditions of India, Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya and D.D. Kosambi. In a series of original works beginning with *Lokayata*, Chattopadhyaya established that the struggle between spiritualism and materialism was as integral to the ancient Indian society as it was to the Greeks in Europe. He further established that in conflict were in fact two opposing classes—the exploiters and the exploited, championing spiritualism and materialism respectively. He also pointed out that the rise of Buddhism was indicative of the revolt of the exploited classes against the exploiting classes. The latter used the Vedanta philosophy in the furious ideological struggle against Buddhism. The defeat inflicted on the material philosophy championed by the representatives of the brahmana culture started the process of all-round stagnation of the arts and science which made India lag behind western Europe which had been less civilized than India in ancient times. His philosophical works thus constituted a stirring call for struggle against brahmana culture.

Debiprasad's historic discoveries concerning materialism in ancient India, which reflected the class struggle between the exploiting and exploited classes, was followed by the conclusion arrived at by D.D. Kosambi that India's socio-cultural development, like the developments in Greece and

Rome, was the result of developments in technology. The two together led to the emergence of the sciences of philosophy and historiography, based on Marxism.

Kosambi's findings were taken up and further developed by a generation of Marxist scholars like R.S. Sharma, Romila Thapar, Irfan Habib, and a number of their colleagues. Each of them has made his or her contribution individually to the development of Marxist historiography and all of them together have thrown light on the dark comers of Indian history.

Irfan Habib among them has now thought it opportune to bring out a collection of his essays in a book appropriately titled *Essays in Indian History* to which he adds the sub-title 'Towards a Marxist Perception'. Habib explains this sub-title by saying that he does not claim that his collection of essays does constitute the Marxist perception itself; it is only his effort to move towards the development of Marxist perception.

Considering the fact that the Marxist perception of Indian history is a post-independence development, the reader would be grateful to the author that he has used all the findings made by his colleagues in the discipline, together with his own independent findings, and tried to bring out a more or less systematic history of India based on the theoretical principles of Marxism. He modestly claims in the preface of the book that his work is 'only an endeavour towards a Marxist approach, rather than attainment of the application of such an approach in all its fullness'.

The opening essay titled 'Problems of Marxist Historiography' is used by the author for discussing a number of theoretical precepts of the Marxist approach to Indian history; he goes into the essence of the Marxist approach to India's national movement.

Quoting R.P. Dutt's *India Today* and my *History of India's Freedom Struggle*, he says that there is now 'a general understanding that the national movement was a united front of all classes of the Indian people, the peasantry, other petty-bourgeoisie, the bourgeoisie and the working class, to the exclusion of the big landowners and princes. The major nationalist organisation, the Indian National Congress, did not always reflect the united front, although in the late 1930s it came close to such a position.'

Habib demarcates himself from another eminent historian, Bipan Chandra, who belittles the achievements of the left during the national movement. The creation of the organised kisan movement and the trade unions was, says Habib, mainly the handwork of the Communists and their allies; that cannot be forgotten.

He gives a general warning: 'I would urge that we should treat the national Movement (which was always larger than the Congress) as a common heritage. All assessment of individuals playing roles in it must be tempered by the realisation that they stood up in opposition to the British Rule. Dadabhai Naoroji spoke for the millions when he brought the poverty of the Indian people and its removal as a major issue between imperialism and the Indian People. Gandhi succeeded in mobilising those millions—though the forms of that mobilisation may have remained limited. These were undying services in the cause of the Indian people. Marxists should be on guard against efforts to treat this as illusory or insignificant. . . . Today, positive aspects of the National Movement, its bourgeois democratic values such as secularism, women's rights, national unity, freedom of the press, parliamentary democratic need particular emphasis. These can form the initial points for a people's front, in which all classes may be united and carry forward the cause of democracy and socialism. Such a front could be a worthy successor to our national movement.'

This piece also makes some important points regarding the approach which Marxists should take towards the re-construction of history. 'For Marxist historians', he says, 'it is not only important to rescue from oblivion narratives of rebellions of the subjugated classes but also to analyse their nature and the extent to which their participants were aware of their true class affiliations. For there can be class struggle without the participants realising that they are such. Unfortunately, since many of the uprisings are written about by their opponents who were partisans of the ruling classes, we have often no means of knowing what the rebels really thought. Even so, one becomes aware that there was more class consciousness in the peasant rebellions of China or in England in 1881 than in the agrarian uprisings in India of the seventeenth century. The reasons for this backwardness, such as possibly the caste system, must be investigated; these may well have lessons for us today.'

The second essay is titled 'Marx's Perception of India'. It deals with Marx's main writings—not only the 1853 articles which he wrote for an American journal, not only the joint Marx-Engels writings on the 1857 revolt but also observations made in *Capital* and innumerable letters and notes Marx wrote on India. These are valuable for us today, but not because they constitute the 'final truths' on India.

Marx was indeed wrong in many of his observations concerning the facts of Indian history. He was, after all, not an expert on India. His main theme of study was the development of world capitalism. In describing and analysing this process he had to deal with pre-capitalist developments in many countries including India. In doing this he had to make several hypotheses which, on investigation, had to be later abandoned. It may incidentally be stated that this applies not only to India. Marx and Engels, in the course of their theoretical work extending over four decades, had to abandon or replace many ideas when, on later investigation, some of these were found to be wrong.

This happened to a specific formulation made by Marx regarding the Asiatic mode of production. After making a detailed study of the changes that took place in Marx's conception of the Asiatic mode, Habib comes to the conclusion that the Asiatic mode of production was only one of the hypotheses adopted by Marx at one time which, after detailed investigation, was abandoned. Why did this happen?

The formula worked out by him and Engels in *Communist Manifesto*, namely, the development of class society from primitive communism to slavery, then to feudalism and at last to capitalism, does not hold true for India, China and other Asian countries. Subsequent studies made by him and Engels showed that different social formations existed in different Asian countries. The concrete conditions and developments in every Asian country had to be studied. Hence the abandonment of the 'Asiatic' system with which Marx had flirted at one time.

This is an important lesson for Indian Marxists. For many of us (including myself) in some of our writings based ourselves on the presumption that Marx's concept of the Asiatic system is the key to understanding Indian history and society. We later learned that it is not a

question of applying the Asiatic system to India, but of concretely studying the history, economy, polity, sociology and culture of India. The undivided Communist Party of India was told, in a joint discussion with the CPSU leadership headed by Stalin, that Indian Marxists should not try to copy the Russian or the Chinese or any other model, but work out the Indian model. This piece of advice tendered on the political front is equally applicable to the academic study of Indian history.

Habib points out that Marx was wrong also in his assumption that Indian society from pre-historic times to the British conquest of the country has been 'unchanging', as if the Marx-Engels formulation that the history of humanity is history of class struggles does not apply to India. Basing himself on his own original research of socio-economic and political conditions in Mughal India and relying on researches carried out by his colleagues on ancient India, Habib comes to the conclusion that India from time immemorial has been changing, that class struggle in one form or another has been going on in India as in any other country. The essays entitled 'The Peasant in Indian History', 'Caste in Indian History', and 'Forms of Class Struggle in Mughal India' show that Indian society, as its European counterparts, has been changing. These changes are firmly based on class struggle.

Two other pieces, 'Social Distribution of Landed Property in Pre-British India: A Historical Survey' and 'Potentialities of Capitalistic Development in the Economy of Mughal India' explain the objective basis on which changes have been taking piece in India's society—from the Indus valley civilization to the end of the Mughal rule. These pieces put together in the volume are indeed enlightening to those who want to study Indian history from the point of view of dialectical and historical materialism.

It is interesting to note that, having analysed the Mughal empire, Habib comes to the conclusion that class struggles, though clothed in religious and other ideologies, were so strong as to lead to the disintegration of the Mughal empire. He compares the class struggles in Mughal India to the class struggles in China's history to which Mao Zedong had drawn attention. All this does indeed invalidate the idea that the Indian, Chinese and other Asian societies have been 'unchanging', that they started changing only when they

came under the heels of European imperialist powers. What Habib calls 'potentialities of capitalistic development in the economy' were present in India, China and several other Asian countries. These potentialities, however, were not transformed into reality. The reason for this is to be investigated both by academicians as well as by political activists. I hope that Prof. Habib along with his colleagues, the academic historians, will make further investigations and come to definite conclusions.

I may, in the meanwhile, draw attention to a formulation made by Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya that the consequences of the Aryan invasion of India and the struggle waged by the Aryans against the indigenous tribes led to the emergence of what he calls 'lordly power' (kshatriyas) and 'priestly power' (brahmanas). The coming into existence of these two manifestations of state power was the essence of Indian society from the days of the Rig Veda to the conquest of India by the British. This combination of 'lordly power and priestly power' was the concrete form of state power in India against which the common people had to fight and were fighting till the British brought the country under their rule. It may be of some interest in this connection to note that, in my book on the history of Kerala written in 1947, I did not use the term 'feudalism' to describe the pre-British society, because it does not appear to correctly describe the state of society in Kerala. I therefore used the phrase, 'domination of high castes, the landlords, the princes and local chieftains.' The class struggle of the oppressed classes against the oppressors and the political struggle of nationalists against casteism and communalism were countered by the British rulers during the freedom struggle through the extensive mobilisation of caste and communal forces. The same strategy is being used today by our bourgeois rulers. It is therefore obvious that class struggles cannot develop in our country unless the working class takes up the banner of anti-caste and anti-communal struggle.

In the days of the Mughal empire, there was no subjective force—the modern working class—to carryout revolution. Hence the disintegration of the Mughal empire without the flowering of secular democracy. During the freedom struggle too, the modern working class was not powerful enough to make a bid for secular democracy. Hence the capacity of the Indian ruling

classes to come to a compromise with the British rulers on the basis of dividing the country on communal lines.

One of the forms of class struggle in which the Indian people were engaged in history was mass conversions—from Hinduism to Buddhism and Jainism to begin with and to Islam and Christianity later. This was noted in a preliminary way by Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya when he pointed out that the rise of Buddhism and Jainism was a form of class struggle on the part of suppressed castes while the defeat of Buddhism and Jainism by the proponents of the Vedanta philosophy was the defeat of the suppressed castes by the upper castes using their political authority.

Prof. Habib gives innumerable examples of how people protested against the oppression of the Mughal rulers. The formation of new religious sects and the emergence of Marathas as the political rivals of the Mughal rulers are examples of this. While this is good enough as a description of class struggles in the Mughal empire, it seems inadequate to merely describe the role played by these forces. Was it not this that prevented the disintegration of the Mughal empire from leading to the establishment of a democratic regime? I wish the author had gone in detail into all the forms and manifestations of class struggle—economic, political and ideological.

This of course is not easy. It cannot be done by any scholar individually but requires the collective effort of innumerable scholars who have specialised in one or another aspect of the development of Indian society, its economy, polity and culture. Prof. Habib's essays collected in this volume show that if he had been assisted by a number of other scholars who have specialised in aspects of history other than his, it would have helped the production of a connected history of class struggles in Indian history far more comprehensively than the essays brought together in this volume. I hope Prof. Habib will take the initiative in this direction.

In this context I have to point out one failing in the studies made by Prof. Habib himself and several other scholars on whose work he has relied: they are, by and large, confined to the development of Indian history in north and north-western India, the so-called Aryavarta. This area is no doubt crucial for the development of Indian history, since it witnessed the Indus valley civilisation, the subsequent conquest of India by Aryan tribes,

followed by the invasions and conquests of Muslim rulers. There are, however, large areas which by and large lie outside the sphere of Aryavarta. For instance, all the four major nationalities of south India (Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka), have their own history and their own specific features of socio-economic organization, political organisation, cultural make-up and so on. While it is true that all these nationalities were influenced by the developments in the Aryavarta, the concrete manner in which they absorbed the socio-cultural and political make up of Aryavarta were specific to each. It is therefore necessary to properly balance what the specific features of every nationality with the general features of Aryavarta.

Take, for example Kerala. It was no doubt powerfully influenced by the Vedic culture and civilisation, and Jainism and Buddhism, of the north. Kerala, in fact, was the battle-field in which the struggle between the Vedic culture on the one hand, and the Buddhist and Jainist culture on the other, became acute. This ideological battle seems to me to be the source of many specific aspects of the history and culture of Kerala. Unfortunately, however, scholars have not paid sufficient attention to these conflicts. Nevertheless, there is enough factual material to show that many of the present-day Hindu temples had, at one time, been either Buddhist or Jain viharas. Furious battles appear to have been waged between the Vedic culture on the one hand and the Buddhist and Jain cultures on the other. Most of the present-day high-and low-caste Hindus are perhaps the descendants of the victors and the defeated in that furious conflict, those victorious in the battle having become the present-day high castes, while the defeated were turned into low castes. This is, of course, a hypothesis being proposed by a non-expert student of Kerala history like me. But if it is true, the question of class struggles in ancient and medieval Kerala will appear in a new light.

There is another major failing in Habib's book: it ends with the emergence of British colonialism in Indian history. Habib does not deal with the question of the rise of the new opposing classes—the bourgeoisie and the working class—who emerged as independent forces in the very process of the crucial class struggle in the days of colonial domination, the freedom struggle.

It will be recalled that Marx in his writings of 1853 had drawn attention to the birth of the Indian bourgeoisie—the consequence of 'the process of re-generation' which, he said, had begun. The younger generations educated in modern arts and sciences in the schools established by the British rulers and such other institutions as the free press filled the ranks of this nascent Indian bourgeoisie. Marx envisaged this process to go on, though he had not yet seen the emergence of the working class. It was left to Lenin decades later to point out that not only has the Indian working class formed itself but gone into action in defence of the democratic leader Lokmanya Tilak.

The emergence of those two classes, their conflicts, along with their unity in the struggle against British imperialism—these have of course been mentioned in the opening essay in Habib's book. The all-class national movement, including the anti-imperialist sections of the bourgeoisie, but increasingly coming under the hegemony of the working class had been set as the objective of the Marxist vanguard in the national movement. How this process advanced, how the two classes came in conflict with each other on the perspective towards the freedom struggle has not been explained in these essays, except in a general reference to the anti-imperialist united front and the assertion that the force of the working class has played a positive role in the developing anti-imperialist movement.

It is over six decades since the programme of anti-imperialist united front was formulated, with the perspective that the working class unites with, but struggles against, the bourgeoisie. How this unity-struggle pattern developed, how the bourgeoisie threw the banner of anti-imperialist united front away, how it came to a compromise with British imperialism on the transfer of political power, how in the process the bourgeoisie accepted the demand of the Muslim League for the division of India, how the proletariat and its party demarcated itself from and fought the bourgeoisie in the post-independence decades—all these have been left unexamined.

This process has now reached a new stage in which the present-day leadership of the Indian bourgeoisie has abandoned even those elements of the struggle against imperialism which were present in the Nehru line adopted in the mid-1950s. In its place has come the new economic policy of the Narasimha Rao government (with its counterpart in the political sphere,

both domestic and foreign), which as gone far in making India a satellite of world imperialism.

The situation however is not so gloomy as we may fear. For, resistance to the course adopted by the Narasimha Rao government is growing—resistance in which the worker-peasant masses are playing a crucial role. This, in fact, is the essence of the present-day national political situation.

I hope that Prof. Habib, in co-operation with other Marxist historians, will develop this aspect of the history of classes and class struggles in India.

The Class Character of the Nineteenth Century Renaissance in India

K.N. Panikkar, *Culture, Ideology, Hegemony: Intellectuals and Social Consciousness in Colonial India*, New Delhi: Tulika, 1995.

Prof. K.N. Panikkar is a distinguished historian, teaching Modern History at the Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. He has contributed many articles, essays and papers on the problems of modern Indian History. His publications include: *British Diplomacy in North India*; *Against Lord and State*; *Religion and Peasant Uprisings in Malabar*; and *Culture and Consciousness in Modern India*. He has also edited John Malcolm's *Political History of India*; *National and Left Movements in India*; and *Communalism in India*: *History, Politics and Culture*. He has also compiled two Source Volumes: *Peasant Protests and Revolts in Malabar* and *Press Freedom*.

The eight essays he has written on various occasions and read at various seminars have now been brought together in a volume entitled: *Culture, Ideology, Hegemony: Intellectuals and Social Consciousness in Colonial India*. He documents the rise and development of the renaissance movement in nineteenth century India. Covering as the book does the development of renaissance in Bengal from the days of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, it also deals with the origin and growth of renaissance in the author's home State, Kerala.

Sree Narayana Guru was the originator of the most widespread mass movement in Kerala which developed into the spiritual-political (anti-caste) movements and organizations led by the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam. Apart from the reference to the Guru and his contribution to renaissance in Kerala, the author explains the role played by the great visionary P.S. Warrier who founded the Arya Vaidyasala at Kottakkal. The marriage reform movement in the Malabar part of Kerala too has found special mention in the volume.

The author's work therefore has the merit of describing Indian renaissance in general and particularly the renaissance in Kerala. The entire collection is thus a useful aid for the reader to understand the nature of the renaissance in India generally and in Kerala particularly.

RENAISSANCE A PRODUCT OF POPULAR REVOLTS

In the preface to the collection, the author takes up cudgels against the theory that the nineteenth century Renaissance was the prelude to modern nationalism. Says he:

> Colonialism, by selectively appropriating and expropriating the past, tended to privilege the present and to fetishise the future. Overcoming the debilities of tradition and impediments of subjection therefore was a necessary prerequisite for ushering in a new order which, among other things, included the formation of a nation-state. The cultural and ideological struggles in colonial India, expressed through a variety of socio-cultural movements and individual initiatives, were directed towards its realization. This process however was not a uni-linear and undistinguished progression; it was riven with contradictions, contentions and ruptures. *The Cultural-Intellectual 'renaissance' did not necessarily merge with nationalism, nor was the latter a logical outcome of the former. Yet, the social consciousness generated by intellectual-cultural endeavours was integral to the process of the nation in the making.* (Emphasis added.)

While generally agreeing with this assessment, this reviewer is of the opinion that it is inadequate. It does not seize the link between the pre-renaissance popular resistance against British rule, pointing out its strong and weak points and explaining how the renaissance movement sought to and did remove the weaknesses in the earlier-popular resistance to imperialism.

Coming to Kerala in particular, the nature of popular resistance to British imperialism and Jenmi Landlordism, the author himself in his writings on peasant protests and revolts in Malabar has brought out the fact

that the widespread Malabar Rebellion in 1921 was the culmination of a series of militant actions resorted to by the Mopla peasants of Malabar against 'lord and state'.

Such revolts had, in fact, taken place in all parts of the country which culminated in the most coordinated anti-British National Revolt of the Indian people in the latter half of the 1850s. The evaluation of these revolts would show that the ideology which gave rise to the renaissance was preceded by—in fact based on—the earlier spontaneous revolt of the Indian people against British imperialism.

Volumes written by a number of historians show that peasant revolts had broken out immediately after the British established their rule in one part of India after the other, and finally culminated in the Sepoy Mutiny and National Revolt of the 1850s. It would therefore be factually incorrect to say, as the author does, that it was the intellectual-cultural endeavour made by the leaders of the renaissance movement which gave birth to the process of nation-making in India.

While the author is entirely correct in pointing out the role played by the intellectual-cultural movement known as the renaissance in preparing the soil for the subsequent rise and growth of the organized freedom movement, he seems to be ignoring the fact that the very origin of the renaissance ideology should be traced to the spontaneous anti-imperialist revolts that broke out almost for a century since the British established their rule in India.

ORGANIZED FREEDOM MOVEMENT

The intellectual-cultural movement founded by the leaders of the renaissance did undoubtedly sow the seeds of the subsequent freedom movement led by the Indian National Congress. But, long before the ideological-cultural movement struck its roots among the Indian people, the actual mass resistance to British colonialism had taken shape. In fact, it was this actual movement that facilitated the very rise and development of the ideological-cultural phenomenon known as the renaissance.

The earlier anti-British revolts however had a serious weakness; the ideologies that guided the masses in these revolts were revivalist in outlook and were led by the feudal lords who had lost their state political power at the hands of the British rulers. Those who participated in these revolts were therefore moved by the idea of restoring the old society that had been destroyed by the British rulers. Those who led those revolts were naturally the classes that stood at the head of the old society.

In area after area in India, it was the deposed rulers and the dispossessed landlords who led the militant people in anti-British revolts. Naturally therefore, the leaders of the renaissance movement kept away from the 1857 national revolt which shook almost the entire North India.

On the contrary, the renaissance movement was not aimed at the revival of the pre-British Indian society. Its aim was a renewal of Indian society. For the first time in Indian history, the ideology of modern nationalism and parliamentary democracy, together with social (caste) equality, secularism and the scientific outlook, was disseminated by Ram Mohan Roy and other leaders of the renaissance movement. They took up the task of uprooting the old society weakened by the British rulers. They however were not pro-British in the sense of being blind to the oppression and exploitation of the British rulers.

As a matter of fact, the leaders of the renaissance movement (as Prof. Panikkar documents in his essay) exposed the oppression and exploitation which was inherent in British rule. The period of the nineteenth century Renaissance was in fact precisely the time when a galaxy of Indian scholars exposed the exploitative and oppressive character of the British regime in India. The leaders of the renaissance movement named by the author actually became the pioneers of India's own national Political Economy and Political Science. It was they who laid the basis for the first all-India political organization of the Indian people—the Indian National Congress.

To sum up this discussion, it may well be said that, while the renaissance was a continuation and further development of the earlier spontaneous anti-British revolts, the subsequent growth of the freedom movement led by the Indian National Congress was a further development of the renaissance itself.

ESSENTIALLY BOURGEOIS MOVEMENT

It will be clear from the above that, while the earlier revolts were essentially feudal in character, its leadership was constituted by the dethroned feudal rulers and landlords, the rank and file were the masses who were still steeped in the traditions of feudal society. The new renaissance movement, on the other hand, had the perspective of a modern liberal democratic India and was led by the emerging class of the bourgeoisie. That was why the political movement and organization to which it gave birth was essentially bourgeois democratic in character. It however carried with it elements of feudal ideology.

Even in an outstanding leader like Mahatma Gandhi, there were traces of revivalism, while he was a national leader fighting for modern parliamentary (bourgeois) democracy. The bourgeois-led political movement for parliamentary democracy and freedom from British rule was thus the contribution made by the intellectual-cultural forces released by the renaissance movement, though it contained strong elements of feudal ideology. This linkage between the earlier anti-British revolts and the nineteenth century Renaissance, as well as between the latter and the national liberation movement led by the Indian National Congress, should never be lost sight of. The author's description of the content and form of the nineteenth century Renaissance movement however does not bring out these linkages. This, according to this reviewer, is a major weakness of the analysis made by the author.

THE BOURGEOISIE AND THE WORKING CLASS

The Indian National Congress and the freedom movement led by it was, in other words, essentially a bourgeois movement. It was by and large against revivalism, though there were strong elements of the revivalist tendency within the movement.

This is seen in the very personality of Mahatma Gandhi. His ideology and political programme had several elements of revivalism. For example, his advocacy of Rama Rajya as the idea for free India; his fanatical

championing of the *Thakli* and *Charka*, together with the other 'dead and dying' village industries; his insistence on the strict observance of 'Ahimsa' even against the most brutish oppressors and exploiters etc.

At the same time, he fought for the oppressed Harijan, raising the *Daridras* (the poor) to the level of *Narayan*. He was equally uncompromising in the cause of communal unity, Hindu-Muslim unity in particular, making it the point at which he laid down his life. It is this dual personality that made him the leader of the freedom movement which succeeded in winning freedom, but which turned him into a frustrated man when the country was divided into two fighting states based on religion.

Gandhi however was no exception. He closely followed the pioneers of India's freedom movement (bourgeois liberals) who stood for freedom and parliamentary democracy but would not think of adopting revolutionary means. A galaxy of leaders who were anxious to see India liberated but who would not tolerate any revolutionary action—such was the character of the bourgeoisie who gave birth to the nineteenth century Renaissance movement which developed into the modern political movement for Indian freedom—not through revolutionary means but through compromise.

As opposed to this however was the new class—the worker-peasant millions—who became an integral but independent part of the bourgeoisled freedom movement. Lenin hailed the militant political action of the Bombay working class going into a political strike against the arrest of Tilak which, according to him, indicated that the Indian working class had come on its own.

A decade later, he advised the young Indian communists to organize themselves in a class party but strike deep roots in the peasantry and forge relations of united front with the bourgeoisie in the struggle for freedom. That was the point at which, within the Congress-led freedom movement, socialist and communist groups arose and so gathered strength that they became a dynamic force within the freedom movement.

CASTEISM, COMMUNALISM AND NATIONALISM

Prof. Panikkar's analysis however is weak in one respect: it does not relate the growth of casteism and communalism as the twins of modern nationalism. The former two have the same class roots as the latter.

Social reform, cultural renewal and the emergence of modern secular nationalism is directly linked to casteism and communalism whose class roots go to the emergence of the modern class of the bourgeoisie, Casteism, Communalism and Secular Nationalism being the three faces of the very same phenomenon of the growth of the bourgeoisie as a class.

Prof. Panikkar repeatedly mentions as a leader of the renaissance movement Sir Syed Ahmed Khan in North India and Sree Narayana Guru in Kerala. They did undoubtedly rouse modern (bourgeois) consciousness among the Muslims of the North and the oppressed castes in Kerala. Movements that they gave rise to however did not create the casteless and secular nationalist consciousness but the consciousness of the Muslim and lower caste Hindu separatism.

In fact, the Aligarh movements to which Sir Syed gave shape had two phases: in the first phase in was a revolt against the obscurantism of Muslim orthodoxy, a movement for modernising the concepts and practices of the Muslim community. That, in fact, was a phase in which Sir Syed's Aligarh movement was a by and large progressive and modernist movement.

It however gave rise to the second phase in which the emerging Muslim consciousness acted as a barrier to the bringing together of all castes and communities on a platform of secular democratic India. It was in this phase that the All-India Muslim League was born with its central demand for separate electorates.

This latter phase through decades of development culminated in 'the two nation theory' advanced by Mohammed Ali Jinnah which forced the hands of the British and the Congress leaders to concede the demand for the creation of two communally-formed rival states—the Indian Union and Pakistan.

Unlike Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, Narayana Guru was a spiritual leader but behind the cover of his spiritualism was the socio-cultural essence of the new democratic consciousness of the lower castes in Hindu society. The

social reform movement to which he gave birth so roused the millions of suppressed lower caste Hindus that they became a major political force to reckon with.

His call for social equality also roused the upper castes for reforming their social customs and practices. The social reform movement to which he gave shape thus became the first form in which the millions of the suppressed Hindu castes and tens of thousands of progressive elements in the upper castes together gave birth to a social reform movement. The Vedanta philosophy to which he adhered became the cover behind which the idea of castelessness was given birth to.

LIBERAL NATIONALISM TO CASTEISM-COMMUNALISM SEPARATISM

Once the lower castes in Hindu society came to be organized as a socio-political force however, a new bourgeois class arose within that community. The earlier spiritualism of Sree Narayana Dharma thus transformed itself into the socio-political demands of the upper strata in the lower castes of Hindu society.

The formation of the secular Indian National Congress in 1885 was followed by the formation of the All-India Muslim League and the subsequent formation of other caste and communal organizations. The Akali Dal of the Sikhs in Punjab, the Scheduled Castes Federation led by Dr. Ambedkar, various other caste and communal organizations—all these were particular manifestations of those bourgeois sectors within the Communities which gave birth to the secular democratic Indian National Congress.

The subsequent generation of Indian nationalists did, of course in their own way, fight the idea of casteism and communalism. But they could not put up an effective fight against casteism and communalism because their idea of national unity of all castes and religious communities was a unity of the upper sections of castes and communalists; they refused to appeal to the worker-peasant masses to whom particular communities belonged but who have a common class identity with the masses belonging to other castes and

communities. The best specimens of anti-caste and secular nationalists could not appeal to the worker-peasant lakhs of the very castes and communities whom they were seeking to unite. That is why the call for caste and communal unity issued by the national leaders proved ineffective.

MARXIST-LENINIST APPROACH AND ITS WEAKNESS

It was against this background that, in the immediate post-World War years, Marxist ideas began to influence the younger elements of secular nationalists. The pioneers of India's Communist movement like M.N. Roy, Dange, Muzaffar Ahmed, Singaravelu Chettiar and others projected against the Gandhian idea of Hindu-Muslim (*communal*) *unity* the revolutionary idea of *class unity*—the worker-peasant millions belonging to all Hindu castes, non-Hindu religious communities and tribes to revolt against the oppressing classes belonging to all castes and communities in their struggle against British imperialism, the feudal lords and the big bourgeoisie. They pointed out that only the class unity of the masses belonging to all castes and religious communities against the oppressing classes belonging to the very same castes and communities would cement the revolutionary unity and solidarity of the millions of toilers belonging to all castes and communities. Only if class unity breaks the caste and communal barriers will the Indian people get united. Such was the message broadcast among the people by the early pioneers of India's Communist movement.

It was thanks to this groundwork laid by the early pioneers that in the 1940s the far better-organized and stronger Communist Party of India was able vigorously to oppose the Congress concept of a centralized unitary Indian State, as well as the league concept of India consisting of two nations on the basis of the religious communities. They mooted the Marxist-Leninist idea of a multi-national India in which each of the nationalities is composed of Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Sikhs as well as the various castes in Hindu society.

The major contribution made by the Marxist-Leninists on the eve of India attaining independence was that Indian unity can be preserved and strengthened only through the recognition of the reality, namely,

(a) that India consists of several nationalities, each having its own socio-cultural identity.

(b) that each nationality includes within itself different castes in Hindu society as well as different non-Hindu religious communities.

(c) that secular democratic unity of India can be guaranteed only through the secular democratic political unity of all the nationalities that inhabit the country.

No organization or party of the bourgeoisie could advance this idea but the Indian communists representing India's toilers put this forward. If that idea had seized the entire Indian people, the 1947 tragedy of India and its various nationalities being divided into two states on communal lines, could have been averted.

Unfortunately however, the Marxist-Leninists who elaborated this idea were far too weak in the country's political setup. The Congress on the one hand, the Muslim League on the other and various other caste-communal organizations were far stronger than the Marxist-Leninists. Hence the failure of Mahatma Gandhi, the champion of Hindu-Muslim unity, to prevent 'the vivisection of India which is like the vivisection of my own body'. That the cultural-intellectual force generated by the renaissance movement could not outgrow the limitations of the way in which renaissance developed is fundamentally to be traced to the (bourgeois) character of the renaissance itself.

Class Character of the Nationalist Movement

August 15, 1947 marked the final solution of India's national problem if the problem is seen as merely one of investing the accredited leadership of the nation with the governance of the country.

But the manner of the transfer of power showed that the national problem in its wider sense was getting complicated rather than resolved: the unity of the nation cutting across the barriers of castes, religious communities, linguistic-cultural groups and tribes—the unity which was the ambition of the leaders and participants in the national movement to forge when hundreds of them laid down their lives for freedom—was being disrupted. Not only was the country partitioned, but the division between the two major religious communities, which led to the formation of the states, ended in one of the worst carnages in human history. This was so painful to the tallest leader of the nation and the Generalissimo of the national struggle, Mahatma Gandhi, that he publicly expressed his sense of disillusionment by dissociating himself from the countrywide celebrations at the attainment of independence.

Ever since those days of joy mixed with frustration at the way in which independence was won, the relations between the two communities were more severely strained, almost to breaking point. Repeated instances of anti-Muslim riots in India and anti-Hindu riots in Pakistan marked the internal political situation within the two countries while tensions, conflicts and even wars marked the relations between the two states. During free India's first five months, which it was left for Mahatma Gandhi to live, he raised his feeble voice at the tragic turn of events which was capped by the dastardly, murderous attack to which he fell victim.

It was however not merely a question of Hindu-Muslim relations. Other problems of national unity like casteism, linguistic divisions, and the position of the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, also became more and more complex. Unrest broke out on many of these questions: language riots in Assam; anti-Hindi upsurge in Tamil Nadu; separatist Telangana and

Andhra movements in Andhra Pradesh. The situation became so serious that the Government of India thought it necessary to convene what was called a National Integration Conference, form a National Integration Council and set up several NIC sub-committees to deal with specific problems of 'national integration'.

SETTING THE STAGE FOR COLLABORATION

Thus far about the national problem in its internal aspect, of forging national unity. With regard to its external aspect, namely, India's subjection to the foreign rulers being put an end to, post-independence developments were not so rosy as they appeared when power was handed over by the British overlords to the national leaders. For, what was transferred on 15 August 1947 was nothing but formal administrative power which, as is well-known, is different from real power over the national economy. While the new Government of India was formally free to arrange its affairs-internal and external-as it liked, power had been made over on the basis of a compromise between the foreign monopoly capitalists on the one hand and the Indian landlord-capitalist classes on the other.

The latter, being primarily interested in developing the economy, polity and the socio-cultural life of India along capitalist lines, wanted to continue the process initiated under British rule, develop capitalism without shattering the feudal and pre-capitalist institutions at the base and enlist the services of the dominant classes and strata of pre-capitalist society. They also continued India's economic ties with foreign monopolists with the difference that, while the foreigners who controlled the national economy were almost exclusively British, independence meant that monopolies from other capitalist countries, mainly United States and also West Germany, Japan, France and elsewhere, started penetrating the national economy, even though the British hold was retained. The result was that, despite resistance from sections of the ruling classes on occasion and the links that have of late been forged with the socialist countries, the grip of foreign monopoly capitalists on our economy has been getting tighter and tighter.

This increasing control of foreign monopolies on the national economy is reflected in external political relations, since economic dependence obliges the ruling classes to give up their own proclaimed anti-imperialist policies. Many such policies, as on nationalization, are being given up; such restrictions, as on the percentage of shares permitted to be owned by foreigners, are being relaxed. India is in fact unable to adopt those uncompromising anti-imperialist positions which many Asian and African countries are bold enough to adopt.

Both internally and externally therefore, the national problem remains unsolved, leading to the emergence of several problems like casteism, communalism, and separatism—linguistic, provincial and regional. These have, in certain regions (like Kashmir, Nagaland and Mizoram), led to such a deterioration of the situation that the discontented have to be kept in subjection through semi-military means-a situation which is taken advantage of by imperialism. It is therefore necessary for us to examine the essence of the national question in its external as well as internal aspects.

BURDEN OF THE PAST

It should, at the very outset, be borne in mind that the leaders of the national movement, being essentially bourgeois nationalists, were unable to have a comprehensive understanding of the problem as a whole; their class interests, reflected in the socio-economic theories which guided their activities, made them totally incapable of finding a proper solution for any one of the innumerable problems whose totality makes up India's national problem.

Let us begin with the internal aspect of the national question. The problem, after all, is primarily one of so reorganizing the social, economic, cultural and political institutions of the nation as to make it a modern bourgeois nation. The external element of nationalism (the urgency of ending the foreign rule) made its appearance when the internal forces proved incapable of completing the process of modernization.

India, as is well known, has an ancient civilization of which its people are rightly proud. This ancient civilization however is not an unmixed blessing.

It meant that, unlike Europe which, in historic times has had three successive social formations-slavery, feudalism and capitalism-the birth of each being accompanied by an all-round revolution in social life, India has had a relatively unchanging society. (We use the term 'relatively unchanging', since changes were imperceptibly taking place in the social order. These changes however were taking place within the framework of the very same combination of the three distinct social institutions of the caste, the village community and the joint family). As Karl Marx pointed out in one of his penetrating studies on the nature of Indian society before the British overlordship,

> all the civil wars, invasions, revolutions, conquests, famines, strangely complex, rapid and destructive as the successive action in Hindustan may appear, did not go deeper than its surface. England has broken down the entire framework of Indian society, without any symptoms of reconstitution yet appearing. This loss of its old world, with no gain of any new one, imparts a particular kind of melancholy to the present misery of the Hindu, and separates Hindustan, ruled by Britain, from all its ancient traditions, and from the whole of its past history.[1]

This does not of course mean that the forces of modernization (which means the forces of capitalist development) had not made their appearance in India. They had, in fact, started developing and made their impact, as can be seen in such economic developments as the accumulation of trading capital and the partial use of this capital for the development of manufacturing industries. Politically too, the modern state had started rising, albeit in its embryonic form. Long before this process of capitalist development could be completed, foreign capital made its inroads into the economy and from there extended itself to polity and started influencing the socio-cultural life of the nation. The result was that, instead of an indigenous capitalism developing as an independent force, it was foreign capitalism that became dominant and exercised its supremacy over the entire national life.

CONSERVATIVES AND MODERNIZERS

This gave a peculiar character to our national movement: what appeared to be militant nationalism in the early stages of the struggle against foreign rulers was, in fact a conservative force, that is, wanted to conserve all that had become outmoded in the socio-cultural life of the country, while the forces of modernism, that is, capitalist development, were the partisans of compromise with the foreign rulers.

This is illustrated by the visible contrast between the militant anti-British revolts of early days which came to a head in the great national upheavals of 1856-58 (called, among others, by Karl Marx as 'India's War of Independence') and the forces of modern nationalism which made their appearance in the 1870s and culminated in the formation of the Indian National Congress in 1885.

The former were the representatives of the outmoded social order: the dethroned princes, the zamindars and other big landlords who lost their landed property, and the heads of religious and caste institutions who saw in the capitalist transformation brought about by the British rulers a threat to the continuance of their outmoded rule. They were however uncompromising in their opposition to foreign rulers and were using every means, including fire power, against the enemy.

As opposed to them were the modernizers who looked upon the foreign rulers as models for their own country as it would be in future; their only grouse against the British rulers was that their country was being denied the opportunity to go through the same process of (capitalist) modernization as had been gone through in the rulers' own country.

The moderation of those early nationalists can be seen in the scathing criticism of British exploitation made by the venerable father of Indian political economy, Dadabhai Naoroji, who wrote the pioneering work, Poverty and Un-British Rule in India. For him and his contemporaries, exploitation of India by the British rulers was 'un-British', since they looked upon Great Britain as the model for the freedom, democracy and socioeconomic progress which they wanted in their own country. Behind the politically moderate form of their nationalism therefore was the content of their ambition to modernize the nation, that is, to overturn the outmoded Indian society and give it a modern capitalist character. They were therefore

progressive, even revolutionary in the socio-cultural sense, in comparison with the militant nationalists who wanted to defend the outmoded sociocultural and political institutions of the country against capitalist inroads.

Nor was this contrast between militant nationalists who were conservative in their social outlook and moderates who stood for modernization confined to the early years of India's national movement. It was in fact handed down to successive generations of India's nationalists. Revolutionaries in Bengal who drew inspiration from Kali Puja; Tilak who organized Ganesh Puja as part of his militant nationalism; Gandhi who held daily prayers and preached the message of reviving the 'dead and dying cottage industries'—these were the best among the leaders thrown up by the national movement, fighting the 'moderates' and 'liberals' who combined their modernism with an attitude of compromising with foreign rulers. Added to these were the still more outspoken advocates of Hindu revivalism, supplemented by Islamic, Sikh and other waves of revivalism.

ARCHITECTS OF DISUNITY

Such a proliferation of revivalist movements was naturally made clever use of by the imperialist rulers who had perfected the old Roman rulers' guiding line of 'dividing and ruling' in order to perpetuate their domination over the entire country. While positively evaluating the indignation at the diabolical plans of the imperialist rulers in using communalism as a major force in their struggle against the freedom movement, we should be clear that it was the concepts and programmes of bourgeois nationalism, to which the freedom movement was committed, that laid the basis on which the foreign rulers could play one section against the other.

The essential weakness of India's national movement consisted in the fact that it was headed by a class (the rising national bourgeoisie) which in its own interests compromised with the foreign overlords, the feudal princes and big landlords, and the heads of the caste, communal, tribal and other pre-capitalist institutions. Fear of a radical reconstruction of society internally, and of a complete break with the foreign rulers, -this was the

essential character of the bourgeoisie which remained at the head of the national movement till 1947 and has been the ruling class since then.

What has been stated above is equally true of our neighbour Pakistan. It was the same class, or rather the combination of two classes (landlords and capitalists) who stood at the head of the national movement in all the provinces of pre-partition India. The failure of that class to unify all the castes, religious communities, linguistic-cultural groups and tribal communities into a single nation led to the notorious clashes and conflicts between Hindus and Muslims which culminated in partition. It was the very same classes that transformed themselves into the ruling classes in the two countries. The result is that, though differently and in different degree, the same problems of national integration made their appearance and are getting ever more intensified on both sides of the border.

Things reached such a pass in Pakistan that its eastern wing (Bangladesh) has already seceded, while serious conflicts and clashes have occurred in other provinces like the North-West Frontier and Baluchistan. In India too, as noted above, problems like Kashmir, Nagaland and Mizoram assumed serious proportions: so did those relating to the national language, the formation of linguistic states, the lag between the advanced and backward states and regions, the division of power between the centre and the states, lead to tensions and conflicts. All this is over and above the caste and communal riots which have haunted us at every stage in post-independence years.

TOWARDS PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC INDIA

At the root of what are called 'problems of national integration' therefore lies the reality that the bourgeoisie that stood at the head of the national movement and which is in control of the economy and polity of the nation today is incapable of, and unwilling to

a. break with imperialism, make India fully self-sufficient, enable it to stand on its own legs in every respect;

b. sternly deal with those sections of India's capitalists and landlords who want to defend their narrow class or individual interests and are prepared to mortgage the destiny of the nation to foreign monopolies;

c. uproot feudal and other forms of big landlord domination over the rural areas, distribute the land of these landlords among the landless and poor sections of the rural people;

d. emancipate the masses of rural and urban poor from the centuries-old grip of caste leaders, heads of religious institutions and other remnants of an outmoded society and help the mass of the people to shape their own future along the lines of genuine modernism;

e. develop the national economy and modernize the national culture in such a way that, in a few yew years' time, our people can take their place among the most modern nations of the world.

Such a reversal of trends in the socio-cultural, economic and political fields is necessary if the national problem is to be solved as it should be. This is what is envisaged by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) when it calls for the struggle for building a new People's Democratic India[2] which includes, among other things, the following general propositions:

1. The Indian Union shall be a federation based on democratic centralism. All the states in the Indian Union shall have real autonomy and equal powers.

2. The people are sovereign, all organs of state power being elected on the basis of universal, equal and direct suffrage for all citizens who have attained the age of 18; these organs of state power shall be answerable to the people.

3. All national languages shall be equal, every one of them being recognized for use in parliament and central administration. Hindi shall not be made the obligatory official language, it being left to the people, in the course of growing economic social and intellectual intercourse, to develop in practice the most suitable language of intercommunication as between the peoples in different states of India.

4. Unity of India shall be consolidated by fostering and promoting mutual cooperation and paying special attention and rendering assistance to economically backward and weak states, regions and areas.

5. Civil liberties and democratic rights shall be guaranteed and all forms of social oppression shall be abolished. Freedom of conscience, religious belief and worship, together with those of speech, press, assembly, strike, movement and occupation shall be guaranteed. Special facilities shall be provided for scheduled castes, tribes and other backward communities in the matter of services and other amenities.

6. Abolition of inequality between man and woman. The secular character of state shall be rigorously enforced. While education shall be taken over by the state, religious minorities shall be given absolute protection.

Other proposals cover agriculture and the peasant problem, industry and labour. The party also strives for a genuinely anti-imperialist foreign policy which includes withdrawal of India from the Commonwealth, abrogation of all agreements and commitments with the UK and the USA which are against the interests of the nation or not in keeping with national dignity.

All these proposals are calculated to put an end to those compromises which the bourgeois leadership of the national movement had been making in relation to the internal and external aspects of India's national movement. They will provide a real solution for the national problem which is every day being accentuated by the class policies of the bourgeois-landlord regime.

NOTES

1 Karl Marx, 'The British Rule in India,' Marx and Engels, *The First Indian War of Independence 1857–1859*, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, p. 16.

2 Communist Party of India (Marxist), *Programme*, November 1971, pp. 32–41; also 'Note on National Question and Amendment to Party Programme', September 1972, pp. 95–108.

The Indian National Question

Need for Deeper Study

Professor Amalendu Guha's paper (*Economic and Political Weekly*, July 31, 1982) gives what the author claims to be 'A Conceptual Frame' for the discussion of the question of Nationalities in India.

It exposes the two mistakes originating from opposite ends: (a) considering India as a whole to be the 'nation', negating the multinational character of the country; and (b) absolutizing the multinational character, or negating the unity, of the country as a whole. The author, going in detail into the story of how the British colonialists changed Indian society, proceeds as follows:

> Put into the melting pot of colonial oppression, the diverse ethnic elements came closer to each other than in pre-British times. A process of bourgeois class formation, transcending barriers of caste, religion and tribe started. . . . There appeared simultaneously two streams of national consciousness—one pan-Indian and the other regional. The former was professedly based on observed pan-Indian homogeneities of culture such as a common all-India tradition and history, economic life and psychological make-up, and the accepted unifying role of Sanskrit, Persian, English and Hindustani by turn and also calculations of advantages of an India-wide market. The other consciousness was professedly based on the relevant region's homogeneities and demands for substantial or exclusive control by the sons of the soil for its resources and market facilities.

India's national movement, the author goes on, is a combination of these two streams. The same people—collectively as well as individually—are conscious of their being *Indian* citizens as well as citizens of their own particular linguistic-cultural region. By the time the millions of peasants

were brought into the stream of the national movement in the beginning of the present century, the two trends had acquired a well-defined character.

From this arose the two political ideologies and slogans: (*i*) a unitary Indian state and (*ii*) separation of the various linguistic-cultural groups from India to form independent states.

The latter was given a distorted form when the Hindus and Muslims formed themselves into opposing political groups and started fighting within the freedom movement. This culminated in the partition of India, the formation of the Indian Union and Pakistan, on the basis of an acceptance in practice, though not in theory, of the 'two-nation' concept of the Muslim League.

In this general background, the author examines the stand adopted by the Indian Marxists towards the question of nationalities in India. Reference is made to some Soviet academicians, like A.M. Dyakov, who have made painstaking studies of the question. Note is taken of the serious debate in the Indian Communist movement—in the undivided CPI and subsequently in the CPI (M)—on the relevance of the Leninist slogan of self-determination to the point of secession. The amendments made by the CPI (M) to its Programme at the Ninth Congress and other documents of the Party are quoted to prove that Indian Marxists are working for the unity of India under a genuinely federal setup.

While assessing the development of the national movement directed against the British colonialists, and the Indian Marxists' approach, the author examines the process through which 'regionalized communities of culture' developed and "were found in crystallized units immediately before British conquest'. Specific mention is made of Maharashtra, Punjab (Sikhs), Assam and Kerala, among the regions where such 'communities of culture' were crystallized. Concerning the last, *The National Question in Kerala* by the present writer, published in 1952, is mentioned to controvert the idea contained in the book that the people of Kerala had begun to develop as 'a nation' in pre-British times. 'A mere community of culture', the author holds, 'should not be mistaken for a nationality or a nation in the making'.

The above conclusions are in general acceptable. Let us make it particularly clear that the formulations made in the 1952 publication on Kerala do suffer from serious drawbacks. We however desire to point out that Professor Guha's own formulations leave some gaps to be filled and mistakes to be rectified.

Professor Guha makes a valid distinction between 'regionalized communities of culture' which emerged in pre-British days and the nationalities that have been developing in the struggle against the British rulers. The former do not come under the category of nationalities or nations in the making, since the formation of nationalities is a phenomenon which makes its appearance only along with capitalist development.

This however does not answer the relevant question as to why the 'regionalized communities of culture' started developing in the couple of centuries before the British conquest and, why, having emerged as distinct social-cultural entities, these communities failed to develop into nationalities or nations as they did in Europe.

It is one thing to object to the way in which the emergence of the 'regionalized communities of culture' of the pre-British days was confused with 'nations in the making', as was done in the 1952 book on Kerala. It is quite another to fail to note the integral connection between the earlier 'communities of culture' and the later nationalities or nations in the making. Professor Guha fails to go into this question and therefore his study of the development of nationalities in India is inadequate for a proper understanding of the question.

This inadequacy arises from the fact that Professor Guha does not examine the development of capitalism in India in its historical context. It would appear as if there was no capitalism at all before the British conquest, as if it is a product purely of British rule.

Connected with this, it seems to the writer is a mechanical understanding of the link between the development of capitalist economy and the emergence of nationalities and nations. The assumption seems to be that linguistic-cultural development can be ignored as a fact in the

development of the national movement until the economic forces of capitalism attain maturity.

This assumption is neglected by the very reference made by Professor Guha to Lenin's writing, where Lenin points out that at least in one country (Poland), *the nationalism of the gentry* precedes *that of the bourgeoisie* and finally becomes *the nationalism of the peasant masses*.

India's own national movement travelled the same path: (1) *Nationalism of the gentry* beginning with the Velu Thampy revolt in Travancore and similar revolts in other regions ending with the Mutiny and Revolt of 1857 in Delhi, U P, etc; (2) *Nationalism of the bourgeoisie* expressing itself in the liberal politics of the Congress up to 1906-07; (3) *Nationalism of the peasantry* beginning with the 'extremist' politics of the pre-First World War years and developing with the Gandhi-Nehru era.

It should however be noted that the very gentry who revolted against the alien rulers after they established themselves, had earlier collaborated with the Portugese, Dutch, French, and English companies when they were fighting among themselves. There are, in fact, cases in which the same persons who had earlier collaborated with the foreign powers as allies in the struggle against their local rivals, took up the banner of revolt after the foreigners established themselves as rulers.

No study of the growth of nationalities in India would be complete and correct unless the objective forces working towards the earlier collaboration and the subsequent revolt of the gentry in the period of foreign conquest are studied, This means relating the emergence of the modern national movement to the development of society in the entire past, including in the ancient and medieval periods.

It should be noted in this context that though lagging behind Europe in the industrial and technological revolution that ushered in capitalism, India had to its credit enormous development of *commercial* and *money-lending* capital before the British and other European companies came.

Among the financiers of the European companies as well as of Mughal Emperors and their feudal subordinates in their mutual conflicts and wars, were the money-lenders belonging to certain well-known families, while the

Indian traders acted as the importing and exporting agents of the European companies.

India at that time appears to have been in no way behind any European country in the matter of the development of commercial and money-lending capital. It was in the transformation of the commercial and money-lending into industrial capital that she lagged behind.

Marx and Engels catalogued as follows the transformation made by the bourgeoisie first in Europe and then in the whole world:

> The subjugation of the forces of nature, the invention of machinery, the application of chemistry to industry and agriculture, steamships, railway, electric telegraph, the clearing of whole continents for cultivation, the making of navigable waterways, huge populations springing up as if by magic out of the earth. What earlier generations had the remotest inkling that such productive power slumbered within the womb of associated labour?

The Indian counterparts of the European bourgeoisie obviously lagged behind at this stage of development. The question is: where-from came this lag?

To answer this question, one should go to Engels who brought out the inseparable connection between ancient slavery and modern socialism:

> It was slavery that first made possible the division of labour between agriculture and industry on a large scale, and thereby also Hellenism, the flowering of the ancient world. Without slavery, no Roman Empire. But without the basis laid by Grecian culture and the Roman Empire, also no modern Europe. We should never forget that our whole economic, political and intellectual development pre-supposes a set of things in which slavery was as necessary as it was universally recognized. In this sense we are entitled to say: without the slavery of antiquity, no modern socialism.

The development of society in India was different from this.

The slave society of the type that emerged in ancient Europe did not take roots here. Not because, as our chauvinists would have us believe, the Indians are more humane than the ancient Greeks or Romans, but because the break-up of the ancient—primitive communist or tribal—society took place here in a way different from that in Greece and Rome.

The division of society into the exploiters and the exploited assumed here a form which in a way covered up the reality of exploitation. It was not into the minority of the owners and the majority of slaves but into the three *varnas*—the Kshatriya, the Brahmana and the Vis—that society came to be divided first. It was the Vis that came to be divided into the Vaisa and the Sudra, the latter consisting of the mass of toilers. The three superior *varnas* constituted the exploiting sect while the Sudras were the exploited.

This division of society into *varnas* helped the dissolution of tribal society and the formation of a new order. Its development into the *jati* system with its division of labour helped the process of developing the mode of production. The proliferation of castes and sub-castes with a definite occupation or means of livelihood allotted to each is the form in which class division originated and developed in India.

This Indian edition of slavery provided the soil on which the 'glorious civilization' of India was built. We may thus amend Engels to say: 'without the caste oppression and exploitation, no civilization or culture of ancient India.'

While the division of society into the exploiters and the exploited was thus common to the slavery of Greece and Rome on the one hand and to the *varna*-caste system of India, there is a major difference between the two: the exploitation and oppression was open, naked in the Greek and Roman slavery, while it was covered up in the *varna*-caste system of India.

The revolts of the slaves against their masters was quite natural for the Greek and Roman society; the exploited and oppressed castes and sub-castes in India, on the other hand, reconciled themselves to their 'inferior' position in society which was sanctified by religious scriptures. This prevented a repetition of the revolts witnessed in ancient European society—revolts which led to the revolutionary replacement of slavery by a feudal society

which was followed by the anti-feudal revolts out of which arose the modern bourgeois society.

As opposed to this two-stage transformation—slave to feudal and feudal to capitalist—in Europe, India remained tied to the same old order under which the overwhelming majority of the people belonged to the oppressed and backward castes. This is the essence of what Marx called India's 'unchanging' society where the village was not touched by the wars and upheavals at the higher levels, the British conquest being the first revolution.

This however does not mean that Indian society did not undergo any change between the formation of the four *varnas* and the entry of the British conquerors. Within this social and economic framework innumerable changes did in fact take place in the technique of production, bringing about improvements in agriculture and handicrafts. Trade and commerce, too, had been developing, which led to the emergence of influential firms of traders, money-lenders, etc. Down to the last days of the Mughal Empire, let it be noted, India could be compared with any other country in the world in economic, socio-cultural and political development. It is therefore not surprising that the European companies had to come to commercial and financial agreements with the Indian traders and money-lenders and sign political-military treaties with Indian princes.

These developments in the socio-economic fields made it possible in the pre-British centuries for national languages to emerge out of the old folk languages. It would therefore be wrong to dismiss new languages with their literature and culture emerging out of them as 'mere communities of culture', having no relation to the evolution of nationalities in India. The rise of these 'communities of culture' in fact, is an important stage in the evolution of nationalities in India.

The form in which class differentiation originally appeared in the traditional Indian society being the domination of the upper *varnas*, the culture of Indian society remained that of the upper castes. The valuable treasures contained in the classical works on the sciences, philosophy, literature and the arts came to be monopolized by the upper castes. The repository of these treasures was the language of the elite, Sanskrit.

Pali, of course, had this honour in that epoch of history when the revolt against Brahmin domination gave rise to Buddhism whose scriptures were written in Pali. Even then the spoken languages of the people were not used for literary, scientific and philosophical pursuits by the scholars.

The conquerors coming into India from the north-west in the medieval period put Persian on a high pedestal as the language of culture. Even this did not lead to the use of the languages of the people for communication of ideas. Only in the second millennium of the Christian era did some of the spoken languages start acquiring the status of written languages. This is what the emergence of the 'communities of culture' signifies. It was in fact a serious breach in the citadel of *varna*-caste society, the first halting step in the transformation of the various Indian peoples into budding nationalities.

This is not to say that nationalities in the modern sense of the term had started being born, let alone their developing into modern nations. The new effervescence of people's languages as the vehicle of literary creation only indicated that the working people had entered the arena of culture, confined so far to the upper *varna*-caste elite.

The content of the new literature, however, was only a popularized version of the earlier works in Sanskrit. The host of poets and writers that emerged in the various languages during the period of what is known as the *Bhakti movement* merely handed down to the common people the content of the earlier Sanskrit works in the simple language of the people.

The *social* significance of the new literary productions lay not in their popular content but in the fact that these works which had till then been the monopoly of the upper castes, were for the first time in history made available to the people in their own languages. Furthermore, most of the writers in these people's languages belonged to castes which so far had been denied the right to study the scriptures. The common people, who for centuries had been denied access to the valuable treasures of culture, were, in other words, being made partners of the upper caste elite in the enjoyment of literary works produced in their own languages.

Another feature of the new culture that was emerging was that the content being the popularization of the scriptures and other classical works

of Hindu society, it did not draw into its fold the non-Hindu sections of the society. The rise of the new popular culture therefore led to the differentiation of Indian society into a Hindu majority and non-Hindu minorities. Only with the establishment of foreign rule could a composite culture with its literature in people's languages start developing—a culture created in the people's own languages with no difference on a caste or religious basis.

It is thus clear that the emergence of what Professor Guha calls 'regionalized communities of culture' was not an accident of history. The fact that these 'communities of culture' emerged in the second millennium of the Christian era and not before is due to the fact that Indian society had taken the first steps towards the development of commercial and money-lending capital which required a home market wider than that existing in the traditional village society. The emerging capital however failed to develop as industrial capital, making it impossible for these 'communities of culture' to transform themselves into modern nationalities.

The question is: why did capital in India, even after it reached a relatively advanced stage of development in the commercial and money-lending areas, fail to extend itself to industrial and then to agricultural production? The answer is that the rigidity of the *varna*-caste social organization, together with the village community and the joint family system of property ownership, acted as a drag on further innovations in the techniques of production, and changes in socio-economic relations. This prevented original thinking and research, giving the Indian society the relatively 'unchanging' character noted by Marx; the unending chain of the same social organization and cultural life being handed down from generation to generation could not be broken unless a blow was struck from outside against the combination of the caste, the joint family and the village community, which was the hallmark of Indian society for several centuries.

This stagnant social order prevented the development not only of commercial and money-lending capital into productive capital but also of the 'communities of culture' into nationalities. It continued to exert its influence on social life even after the British consolidated their political and administrative power and dealt heavy blows against the old social order.

As a matter of fact, the very growth of capitalism, the rise of the bourgeois and proletarian classes, was and is coloured by the persistence of the old *varna*-caste society. Neither of the two major classes of the emerging capitalist society, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat could shake off the pre-capitalist modes of thinking and culture. The consciousness of caste, religion, tribe, kinship, family etc., dogged individuals and groups belonging to the bourgeoisie as well as the proletariat.

As the modern democratic movement gave rise to organizations and parties of the two classes, a parallel development of caste and communal organizations also took place. This was, of course, made clever use of by the British rulers in their 'divide and rule' game. It should however be noted that Indian society being divided into innumerable castes and sub-castes, as well as between Hindus and non-Hindus, it was easy for the British and following them the bourgeois-landlord ruling classes, to set various sections of the Indian people against one another. As was pointed out by the CPI (M) in its *Programme*:

> Neither the British colonialists whose rule continued for over a century, nor the Indian bourgeoisie into whose hands power passed in 1947, delivered those smashing blows against pre-capitalist society which are necessary for the free development of capitalist society and its replacement by socialist society. The present Indian society therefore is a peculiar combination of monopoly capitalist domination with caste, communal and tribal institutions. It has thus fallen to the lot of the working class and its party to unite all the progressive forces interested in destroying the pre-capitalist society and to so consolidate the revolutionary forces within it as to facilitate the most rapid completion of the democratic revolution and the preparation of the ground for transition to socialism.

The problem of nationalities in India today being part of the question of completion of the democratic revolution, to be followed by the subsequent transition to socialism, its solution is inseparably connected with the replacement of the class rule of the bourgeoisie and landlords by a new People's Democratic state and government in which the working class plays

the leading role. This is the lesson to be drawn from the history of the formation of nationalities. It unfortunately does not emerge out of the 'conceptual frame' provided by Professor Guha.

Castes, Classes and Parties in Modern Political Development

Several scholars, Indian as well as foreign, consider Kerala as being so caste-ridden that every political party is based on some caste or other. The Congress in the old Travancore State, they argue, was based on Christians and Nairs, while the Communist movement had its roots among the Ezhavas, the Scheduled Castes and other backward communities. A whole 'theory' has been built on the basis of such an analysis.

It is not the contention of the author of this paper that there is no substratum of truth in the theory of the interconnection between castes and political parties. It would be totally unrealistic to close one's eyes to the fact that even those political parties which claim to be secular and above all considerations of caste and community, have to take into consideration the caste or communal composition of particular constituencies when they select their candidates for elections. This, however, is only one among the many important factors which have to be considered. Further, it is submitted that with the emergence of classes and political parties which cut across the barriers of castes and communities, the caste or communal factor is being steadily overshadowed by class considerations.

It is necessary for a proper understanding of this problem to note that castes and communities play an important role in all fields of social life including politics, not only in Kerala but everywhere in the country. The Jats, the Khatris and the Brahmins in North India, the Lingayats and the Vokkaligas in Karnataka, the Kammas and Reddys in Andhra Pradesh, are all playing as important a role in the political life of their respective states as the Ezhavas, the Nairs, the Christians and the Muslims do in Kerala. As for Tamil Nadu, it is well known to have been the cradle of the non-Brahmin movement. It would therefore be unrealistic to treat this as a phenomenon peculiar to Kerala.

The real problem lies in explaining why India, unlike the rest of the world, has a social organization based on such a proliferation of castes and sub-castes, that anybody who has to participate in public life, including politics, has to take due note of their impact on the consciousness of the people. The explanation has to be found through a concrete study of the manner in which the old tribal society was disrupted in India, to give way to a new form of social organization which was originally based on what is known as *Chathurvarnya*, but which subsequently developed itself into a hierarchy of innumerable castes and sub-castes.

FROM TRIBAL TO CLASS SOCIETY

Like any other country in the world, India is known to have had a tribal society in prehistoric times. That society neither knew any inequality based on castes, communities or classes, nor did it have any relation of superiority and inferiority between man and woman. Such a society is still living in the folklore of Kerala as 'the regime of *Maveli*'. The memory of that ancient regime is still kept green in the popular song which nostalgically recalls the days when 'the people were all equal'. Every year on a particular day, *Maveli* who once ruled such a society, but was overthrown by *Vamana*, is supposed to come back to Kerala to see how his former subjects are living. Every family in Kerala is expected to celebrate that day (*Onam*) with all the pomp and glory which it is capable of showing.

Such a prehistoric society is known to have existed all over the world and is known in Marxist terminology as 'primitive communism'. The equality of prehistoric society was based on a very low level of production and standard of consumption. Nobody could, under primitive communism, exploit somebody else for the simple reason that no member of that society could produce wealth over and above what he or she required for his or her individual consumption. It took human society centuries and even millennia to outlive this 'primitive' as well as 'communistic' state of social organization. Men and women living their tribal life had, in their incessant confrontation with nature, been obliged to adopt and did evolve new and more effective techniques of production. The result was that social production as a whole steadily increased. It reached a stage when every individual producer was

able to produce something more than he or she could use for his or her own consumption. Under the new conditions, it became profitable to set some individuals (those captured in war for example) to work and to appropriate their surplus produce, after providing them with what is barely necessary for their animal existence. This gave rise to inequality, with a small minority appropriating the surplus produced by the majority. This appropriation of the surplus produce or the majority by the minority gave rise to class society. The overthrow of *Maveli* by *Vamana* is symbolic of this process.

CLASS SOCIETY AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Once the deep division between an exploiting minority and the exploited majority came into existence, human society changed beyond recognition. It is not as if the exploiting minority is the arch devil condemning society to eternal misery and oppression. While the exploited majority is of course subjected to brutal repression and inhuman exploitation, the exploiting minority happened to be the 'unconscious tool' of human civilization. It is the leisure which the exploiting classes can afford to use for all sorts of avocations, which do not directly produce material values, that becomes the basis for the creation of cultural values. The steady development of human civilization with the flowering of literature, the arts and philosophy, leading to the flowering of the sciences and culminating in the Scientific and Technological Revolution of the modern era—these are the social consequences of the emergence of class society. Reference may be made here to Engels' evaluation of slavery in *Anti-Dühring*, where he says, 'without the slavery of antiquity no modern socialism'.

The era of capitalism saw the perfection of this process of social development under class oppression, so that today the productive powers of human society are rapidly reaching so advanced a stage that the acquisition of the best human culture can be made the common property of society as a whole, rather than of a small group of exploiters. That is why Marxism considers that capitalist development will inevitably lead human society to a phase in which a new communism—'communism' which is not 'primitive'—can come into existence, if only the exploited majority overthrows the exploiting minority, takes over state power and utilizes it in the common

interests of society, rather than of a small minority as has been the case in class societies.

THE INDIAN EXPERIENCE

India is no exception to this process of historical development. Here too 'primitive communism' was overthrown and class society established. It was this class society, or rather the ruling classes within this society, that became the purveyor of civilization. The entire heritage of ancient and mediaeval Indian society—all the rich treasures of Vedic, post-Vedic and Islamic culture—was the result of the coming of class society, which is inscribed on social memory in the well known *Maveli* tradition of Kerala. The revivalists who would have us go back to the days of the *Maveli* regime do not realize how dull our social and individual life would be if we were to enjoy the 'equality' and 'absence of exploitation' of the *Maveli* regime, together with the absence of all those good things which have been produced in our country since the symbolic overthrow of *Maveli*.

Karl Marx in his monumental study of pre-capitalist societies—a work which no individual researcher can complete and which therefore Marx too could not complete—has barely indicated the specific circumstances under which the process of disruption of the old 'primitive communist' societies occurred in various countries. It is outside the purview of this paper to cover this ground. It would be enough to point out that the emergence of *Chaturvarnya* was the concrete manifestation of this process in India.

THE CASTE SYSTEM

Although the term '*Chaturvarnya*' means a system of four castes, it originally had only three—warriors or *Kshatriyas*, those performing rituals or the *Brahmanas* and the rest or *Vis* in that order. The division itself was based on the functions allotted to each in a society distinguished by the recurrence of tribal wars. *Kshatriyas* naturally came first in the order of priority, since the waging of wars was the most important task of a particular tribe. Gradually, however, the *Brahmanas* attained equal or still greater importance, since no war could be waged without rituals.

Furthermore, society required the services of those who devoted their leisure for the study of the scriptures, for meditation, and so on, through which it could acquire greater and greater control over nature. As the process of waging wars and capturing territories became more perfected, a still wider mass of people outside the three original *Varnas* became part of the same tribal society—they were the *Sudras*. Further, wars between tribes and the conquest of one tribe by another, gave rise to new institutions in the political field like empires, armies and administrative organs and new methods of production and forms of organization in the socio-economic field. This facilitated all round (social, economic and cultural) advance and led to the formation of ever so many new castes and sub-castes, each of which had a definite place in the social hierarchy.

While this is generally applicable to India as a whole, the exact nature of caste organization varied from place to place. Kerala, for instance, never had one of the four *Varnas*—the *Vis* or *Vaisias*. The reason for this unique feature of social organization in Kerala should be separately considered. The point to note here is that the institution of caste in India conceals the essence of class division in society. This concealment does, of course, create complications. Unlike ancient Greece, Rome and some of the West Asian countries, India did not have an openly-declared slave society. The essence of class oppression characteristic of slave society was hidden behind caste inequality which, in its turn, was sanctified by the authority of the Vedic and post-Vedic scriptures. In a subsequent phase of Indian history when, following the successive invasions from West Asia, a type of feudal—military regime was perfected (of which early farms can be discerned in the military-political set up of the later Hindu empires), feudal oppression too was covered up by the caste and religious conflicts characteristic of that epoch.

In fact, one of the distinguishing features of India's social organization based on the caste system was that it could easily fit itself into the three particular patterns of social organization known in Marxist terminology as primitive communism, slavery and feudalism. Elements of tribal organization and tribal consciousness can be seen in the organization of caste and the caste consciousness arising therefrom. Caste is, in other words, a social organization in which society has not completely outlived the tribal

form of organization. The manner in which caste is superimposed on tribal society and the relations of superiority and inferiority that are established within the caste hierarchy makes it easy for this organization to serve the purpose of the division between owners and slaves. Again, when society is ripe for a transition from the slave to the feudal phase, caste could easily be used to cover up the relationship between lord and serf.

No doubt, there emerged a new complicating factor when the Jewish, Christian and Muslim traders came and settled in the coastal regions of South India and the Muslim soldiers and emperors occupied North India. Groups of people belonging to these non-Hindu religious communities could not be absorbed into the hierarchy of castes as ordained in the Hindu scriptures. These new social groups, however, integrated themselves into Indian (as distinct from Hindu) society and became Indian citizens. The inevitable consequence was that, for all practical purposes, these non-Hindu religious communities became new castes. That is why even the Islamic generals and emperors of North India (not to speak of the Jewish, Christian and Islamic traders of the South) became patrons of an Indian culture which cut across all barriers of caste and community. In other words, upper class elements from these non-Hindu religious communities, together with the upper classes of Hindu society, became the co-creators of a genuinely Indian civilization which could flower into its perfect form only in modern times.

POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE

Thus the institution of caste in India had a positive as well as a negative element. Its flexibility made it possible for it to adjust itself to the two revolutions which in Europe created slavery out of the ashes of primitive communism and feudalism out of the ashes of slavery. This was its positive element, enabling it to continue to be a part of Indian society for centuries. Negatively, however, it created conditions for social stagnation. The uninterrupted repetition of social, economic and cultural life as embodied in the nature of caste organization led to an absence of vigour and continuous change, so that, when Europe began to undergo its transition from feudalism to capitalism, India with its caste hierarchy was unable to catch up with it.

The essence of social organization based on the hierarchy of castes and sub-castes is the monotonous repetition of the same job from generation to generation. Each person is allotted the job which is supposed to be his or her caste's (or sub-caste's). Here, therefore, there is no room for innovation which is the essence of technological development. This is all the more true of a social organization which has, besides caste, the village community and joint family as its two other pillars. This three pillar structure was powerful enough to break the barriers and rigidities of ancient tribal society. It enabled India to have the same socio-economic and cultural advances which Europe had under slavery and feudalism. It however stood in the way of the advances that were witnessed in the Europe of the capitalist epoch. Thus while caste organization did not have much of an adverse impact in the ancient and mediaeval epochs of human history, when India occupied a position more or less the same as, if not better than, Europe in the order of civilisation, it made her lag behind modern Europe—the Europe of revolutionary changes in technology and productivity leading to unprecedented development in the socio-economic, cultural and political fields. The series of revolutions through which mediaeval Europe transformed itself into modern Europe could not take place in India because of the rigidities which were the joint product of the three institutions of caste, village community and the joint family. A complete destruction of this centuries-old pattern of social organization, which replaced the old tribal society, was the essential prerequisite for the revolutionary trans-formation of Indian society. This however, was precluded because the three institutions were too deep rooted to be undermined.

REVOLUTION FROM WITHOUT

It was to such a society that the representatives of foreign capitalism came first as trading companies, then as participants in the continuous wars among the feudal nobles and, finally, emerged as the supreme rulers. We do not propose, nor is it necessary, to narrate here how the Portuguese, the Dutch, the French and the British trading companies allied themselves with one or another Indian ruler against his rivals in India and their rivals from abroad, and how in the end the British established their rule over virtually

the whole country, with small parts left under the control of the Portuguese and the French (the Dutch having completely left India in favour of what is now known as Indonesia). What is important to note is that this process of economic, military and political penetration of European capitalism proved to be the undoing of the centuries-old Indian civilization propped up by the three institutions of caste, the village community and the joint family.

This, of course, was not done easily or at one sweep. Even today, nearly five centuries after the first harbinger of foreign capitalism arrived in India (Vasco Da Gama in Kozhikode in 1448), these three institutions, together with the social consciousness that they jointly generated have not been completely replaced by a modern, bourgeois social order and the consciousness that arises from it. The influence of caste in modern political development, referred to at the beginning of this paper, is sufficient evidence of this reality. It however is indisputable that the expansion of trade between India and the various European countries undermined the very basis of India's social order. No more could the village remain the self-sufficient socio-economic unit that it was throughout the ancient and mediaeval periods of Indian history. No more could the division of labour as between castes and sub-castes remain sacrosanct. No more could the joint family become the unit of social organization on which is built the magnificent superstructure of education, culture and polity.

Every village in India was, in course of time, made part of the world market. Every family and individual purchaser was made a cog in the wheel, producing for sale abroad and consuming what is produced in the world market to an increasing extent. They were permitted, or rather forced, to seek employment in areas other than those prescribed by their caste status. This naturally meant that the occupation allotted to a particular caste came to be increasingly encroached upon by persons belonging to other castes. The two institutions, the village community and caste having thus been completely destroyed, it did not take long for the third institution (the joint family) also to be broken up. Both the patriarchal and matriarchal types of family had, in the course of several decades, to give place to the modern family consisting of the father, the mother and their unmarried children. Karl Marx was therefore entirely correct when he characterized the enormous social changes brought about by the British rulers in India as 'the

only revolution that has ever taken place in Indian history.' This 'revolution', however, had very serious limitations in that it was carried out by a class which, for its own survival as the ruling class in a foreign country had necessarily to seek political allies. Such allies they readily found in the representatives of those very classes and strata whose domination in society was to have been completely eliminated if the revolution was to be full and real.

The very fact that the society of that time was being undermined as a result of its integration into the capitalist world market made it inevitable that the representatives of that society would put up a fierce resistance. Dethroned emperors, feudal chieftains who were made powerless, the leaders of the ancient and mediaeval (Hindu-Muslim) culture—all were up in arms against the new rulers. So were the mass of the rural people who felt that their faith, their way of life, was being attacked by the alien rulers. A series of revolts, local and sporadic as well as more widespread and organized, broke out all over the country and reached their high-water mark in the prolonged Sepoy Mutiny and popular revolt of 1857-58 in North India. South India too had its own share of these popular revolts, Kerala having had its Pazhassi revolt in Malabar, Velu Thampi's in Travancore and Paliyathachan's in Cochin.

The universal character and sweep of these revolts forced the new British rulers to make compromises with the leaders of those movements and the forces they represented. The well known proclamation made by the then Queen Empress, Victoria, after the suppression of the 1857 mutiny and revolt, gave the necessary assurance to the leaders of the caste and other institutions of pre-British Indian society that their powers and privileges would be preserved. Thati proclamation, in fact, was a *de jure* unilateral declaration by the British rulers of a *de facto* peace agreement between the British Crown and the representatives of the old social order in India. While the latter did in practice recognize that they were powerless against the mighty British Empire, the former made it clear, in words as well as in deeds, that it was far from the ruling power's intention to destroy India's ancient social order. Here therefore was an anomalous situation where the new rulers who should normally be considered to be the inveterate enemies of

the old social order committed themselves to be the protectors of that very social order.

However, what was thus a virtual compromise between the foreign capitalist rulers and the leaders of India's social order could not but help unleash new forces which were bound to become a challenge to both. For, in spite of their compromise, the new capitalist rulers from abroad could not prevent the development of capitalism, however stunted and dwarfed it might be due to the pressure exerted by the antiquated social institutions, beliefs and culture. The village became less and less self-sufficient, more and more dependent on the world market. The system of education and culture which was built on the socio-economic basis of a caste-ridden division of labour, became outmoded, and was therefore destroyed; in its place came bourgeois education and culture for which the basis was laid in the well known minute of Macaulay. Caste barriers were therefore necessarily broken when new social relations came to be established. Taboos regarding intercaste dining, inter-caste marriage and so on, were increasingly done away with. All this weakened the hold of those venerated aspects of Indian civilization on the minds of the growing generation who began increasingly to take to new ways of life. Thus was the deathblow delivered to the three institutions of caste, village community and the joint family.

EMERGENCE OF NEW CLASSES

The socio-economic consequence of this epoch-making transformation was the emergence of two new classes—the employers and employees, or rather the bourgeoisie and the working class. The latter half of the 19th and the early years of the 20th century witnessed the emergence of these two classes and their growing consolidation in the socio-economic, cultural and political fields. The movement for social and educational reform of which the pioneers were Ram Mohan and his associates in Bengal and Jotiba Phule in Maharashtra; the new economic organization symbolized by the setting up of modern mills in the 1860s; the evolution of bourgeois Political Economy of which the founding fathers were men like Ranade, Naoroji and Dutt; theformation of socio-political organizations which culminated in the formation of the Indian National Congress—such were the phases through

which the new Indian capitalist class came to get organized as a distinct class. It had its affinity to the foreign rulers in that both were basically the representatives of the same socio-economic order. The Indian bourgeoisie, however, had its conflicts with the rulers in that, coming as the latter did from abroad, they wanted to monopolize for themselves all the fruits of capitalist development in India. But, it also had its conflicts with the ancient social order and was in this respect closer to the foreign rulers, as was clear from the fact that Ram Mohan and others were opposed to the 1857 mutiny and popular revolt.

Alongside this new class of the Indian bourgeoisie emerged the new working class which naturally took longer than the bourgeoisie to get organized as a socio-economic force and still longer to emerge as a political force. While the emergence of the bourgeoisie as a political force may be said to coincide with the emergence of the Indian National Congress in 1885, the working class could organize itself as a socio-economic force only by the 1920s (the AITUC as the elementary organization of India's working class came into existence only in 1920). As for the political organizations of the working class, the socialist and communist parties, their foundation took still longer. Only in the 1930s could the socialist-communist movement become strong enough to act independently. Even then, it could act only as a ginger group within the anti-imperialist freedom and democratic movement, which was under the leadership of the political party of the bourgeoisie, the Indian National Congress.

The result can be seen in the fact that, by the time the British were obliged to hand over political and administrative power to the representatives of India, it was the bourgeoisie that had become strong and organized enough to take over. It was into its hands through its two representatives—the Indian National Congress and the Indian Union Muslim League—that power was transferred when the British left with a divided India. It is, however, necessary to bear in mind that, within just five years of the bourgeoisie taking power from the British, the political party of the working class, the Communist Party, came to occupy the position of the major opposition in Parliament and in four States.

These facts of recent political history are being cited here for no other reason than to indicate that the modern or British period of Indian history, culminating in the decades of the freedom struggle and post-Independence development, is a period in which classes and political parties are acquiring increasing importance in social life. During the several centuries covering the ancient and mediaeval periods of Indian history, we do not have classes and political parties, but castes, religious communities, villages, families, and so on. Social organization began and ended with these institutions, the roots of which go back to the days when *Chaturvarnya* was built on the ashes of ancient tribal society. These institutions of ancient and mediaeval society do, of course persist in modern times and exercise their influence on the classes and political parties which cut across the barriers of castes and religious communities. But as political democracy advances, as social and class conflicts get intensified, the mass organizations and political parties of the various classes and strata acquire increasing importance. Only a proper, balanced appreciation of the role which caste played in the development of classes and political parties and the extent to which the latter overshadow the former will enable us to come to correct conclusions. It is with this approach that we propose in the following pages to deal with the relations of castes, classes and parties in Kerala, as they prevail at the present moment and as they developed over the last few decades.

CASTE IN KERALA

The fact noted earlier, that the innumerable castes and sub-castes in Kerala do not include one which is allotted to the trading profession may appear to be a matter of detail which has no significance for the interpretation of social history. It would however be incorrect to dismiss the issue in this manner. The absence of a trading caste in the traditional caste hierarchy of Kerala shows that, unlike in most other parts of India, production for the market (together with the consumption of commodities bought from the market) was insignificant in the social life of the people in the historical epoch in which social evolution took the form of caste stratification; not that trade as such did not exist in Kerala of the ancient epoch. It did undoubtedly exist as is evidenced by literary references as well as archaeological,

numismatic and other material discovered. They show that there was a certain amount of commercial contact, not only between Kerala and the rest of India but between Kerala and several other countries as well. These commercial contacts however appear to have been confined to a narrow stratum of society, namely the upper class. The people at large were living a life of near complete self-sufficiency.

It is important in this connection to note that, unlike in North India, there were in Kerala no large-scale invasions and conquests culminating in the formation of empires. What is known as the Chera empire in South India (of which present day Kerala is considered to be an integral part) in no way compares with the Maurya, the Gupta and other empires in the North which culminated in the Mughal regime. There was therefore, no occasion for the formation of a standing army as was characteristic of the political-administrative organization in Northern India. Absence of such standing armies and their movement from one place to another, meant that the need to supply them was much less here than in the rest of India. The local chieftains and *Rajas* who did certainly exist all over Kerala in the mediaeval period were provided for by the self-sufficient villages with the rulers of the small principalities having under them then only a limited number of soldiers to protect them.

Such an organization of society which was typical of Kerala did not of course preclude foreign traders coming here in search of certain natural products which were available in abundance, such as timber and sea products. These traders were also able to supply the *Rajas* and their chieftains with certain luxury products brought from abroad. That was how trade appears to have originated in ancient and mediaeval Kerala. As society advanced and contacts at various levels developed between the people of Kerala and those in the rest of India, traders from other parts of India as well as from other countries began to arrive in larger numbers. Locally too production seems to have become much more varied, so that an increasingly greater assortment of commodities became available for trade. The hierarchy of castes and sub-castes had however become so ossified that neither the foreigners who came from other countries, nor the traders from other parts of India, could be absorbed into the system of castes and sub-castes as it existed in Kerala. Nor was it necessary to throw up a new caste or sub-caste

engaged in trading, since the non-Keralite Indians and the foreigners could well look after that job and had sufficiently acclimatized themselves to Kerala.

IMPACT OF COMMODITY PRODUCTION

All this would indicate that the development of commodity production, which after all is the starting point of capitalist development was much weaker here than in the rest of India. This however could not continue in the modern epoch, particularly after Kerala, along with the rest of India, came into direct contact with rising European capitalism.

The Portuguese, the Dutch, the French and the British trading companies undermined the self-sufficient village in Kerala as in the rest of India. The self-sufficient village, the joint family and the caste system came under as fierce an attack in Kerala as in the rest of India. In fact, the impact of all this on the socio-economic and cultural life of Kerala was even greater than in several other parts of the country. For example, the transformation of agriculture, from one geared to the production of food grains and other necessities meant for local consumption, to one producing commercial crops was far greater here than else where. As is well known, the major part of cultivable land in Kerala is used for the cultivation of products like tea, coffee, rubber, and coconut (only a very small proportion of whose product is used for direct consumption, the rest being devoted to the production of oil and other manufactured commodities). One economic consequence of this shift to commercial crops is that not less than 50 per cent of the acknowledgedly inadequate food requirements of Kerala's population is provided for through imports, either from the other states of India or even from other countries. But far more serious than this, is the fact that the producers of these commercial crops—the millions of small cultivators are put at the mercy of the capitalist world market. Any fall in demand for, or in the price of, these commercial crops in the world market would ruin the mass of working people in Kerala. No other part of India has been faced with such a serious problem from the very early days of British rule. In addition, Kerala shares with the rest of India the miseries borne by the hundreds of thousands of families dependent for their livelihood on various

handicrafts. For this class of people, the fact that India was tied to the world market has meant that while they have to face competition from their foreign rivals who can supply the local population with cheaper products, the foreign markets are virtually closed to them.

Besides all this, the transformation of land relations under the aegis of the British rulers, the consequent establishment of new landlord-tenant relations in certain parts of Kerala, the introduction of a rigorous levy and the collection of land revenue as well as other taxes, also added to the misery of the rural population. The people at large were, in other words, made to suffer to an unprecedented extent due to the slow emergence of capitalist relations all over India and as part of it in Kerala too. The pauperisation which came out of this prolonged process did not leave the people belonging to any caste or sub-caste untouched. All were affected by the misery arising from the decline in traditional job opportunities combined with the impossibility of getting any new jobs.

At the same time, the new administrative system and the organization of education made it possible for a small section of the population to get absorbed in government jobs as peons, clerks, teachers, minor officials and so on. Those of them who loyally and faithfully served the regime were also tempted with opportunities for promotion, for being made superior officers with emoluments which would be the envy of the common people. All this resulted in the emergence of classes cutting across castes, sub-castes and religious communities and completely upsetting the centuries-old social set up. No more was caste or community the basis on which the division of labour was determined. Families and groups which, in the ancient and mediaeval epochs, belonged to the same caste or community and therefore played particular roles in social life, came to be divided into different classes.

MODERN INTELLIGENTSIA EMERGES

A small group adopted the new (British) rulers' way of life and culture and became, so to say, 'anglicized'. They were absorbed by the new rulers into their administrative, educational and cultural organizations. They therefore became the nucleus around which a new class, the bourgeoisie, ultimately

took shape. Parallel to this was the large mass of people—the peasants, the handicraftsmen and the professional groups in pre-British Kerala society—who were being steadily ruined and pauperized. Before the former was a wide vista open for systematic and uninterrupted growth towards the position of a partner in the new bourgeois society, dominated by the foreign rulers. They were to become the pioneers of what is known as 'modernisation'. This, no doubt, is an all-India phenomenon. It was, in fact, stronger and more influential in Bengal, Maharashtra and some other parts of the country than in Kerala. The first manifestation of the emergence of this new stratum or class as a vital force in India was the emergence of the Brahmo movement in Bengal in the first quarter of the 19th century. Ram Mohan and his colleagues were the torchbearers of modernisation not only in Bengal but in the entire country. They had utter contempt for the old social order and a kind of qualified veneration for the new British dominated bourgeois social order. That is why, as opposed to other sections, Rain Mohan and his colleagues refused to participate in the historic mutiny and revolt of 1857.

The torch that Ram Mohan lit in Bengal was taken up very soon by Jotiba Phule in Maharashtra and other movements in the rest of the country. Kerala too witnessed the same phenomenon, though with a distinction of its own. The old social system based on castes and communities, however, could not but have its impact on this process of modernisation. Although in the final analysis the emergence of the new classes and the rise of the new movements was a process cutting across castes, sub-castes and religious communities, the fact remains that from the very position occupied by each caste, sub-caste and community in the pre-British social order, some of them took to modernisation quicker than others; they were therefore able to benefit from it to a greater extent. Those who lagged behind were necessarily handicapped in various ways.

The consequent discrepancy as between castes and communities lies at the root of the present distinction between the 'forward' and 'backward' communities.

Syrian Christians were in the most advantageous position in this respect for it was easier for them to adapt themselves to the new bourgeois

community as the new British rulers, although the majority of Christians in Kerala belonged to denominations other than the British. They however were closer to the new rulers from abroad than the former indigenous rulers of the caste dominated feudal society of Kerala. The Christian missionaries became pioneers in using the most potent vehicle of modernisation—the printing press. This was followed by several other measures such as the introduction of modern education, which raised Syrian Christians as a whole to the position of a junior partner in the socio-cultural domination of the British rulers.

CONFLICTS BETWEEN COMMUNITIES

Although a little behind the Syrian Christians, the Nayar and the Tamil Brahmin, who contributed the professional element to the pre-British ruling classes in Kerala, followed them without delay. In their case too, it was relatively easy to take to modernisation. They were after all the cream of the professional element in the old social order. All that was needed in their case was a change in allegiance from the old to the new rulers. From the position of serving as links in the old bureaucracy they converted themselves into elements in the new bureaucracy. Together with the Syrian Christians, they contributed to the process of modernisation, or the growth of modern trends in the socio-cultural and political life of the country. There was however no complete harmony between the Syrian Christian, on the one hand, and the Nayar and the Tamil Brahmin, on the other. For, the pre-British social order and even the political system were dominated by the upper caste Hindus, particularly in the princely states of Travancore and Cochin, whose rulers were devout Hindus. The Syrian Christians were naturally handicapped when compared to the Nayar and the Tamil Brahmin. Even the most advanced Syrian Christian was, in some respects, at the same level as the inferior castes in Hindu society. The Nayar and the Tamil Brahmin could occupy the highest positions in the new political set-up in the two princely States, while the Syrian Christian was excluded from some of them. There was, at the same time, another conflict—between the relatively well-to-do and cultured Syrian Christians on the one hand and the mass of backward Christians on the other. The former were more or less

equal in the socio-political hierarchy with the Nayar and the Tamil Brahmin, while the latter were subjected more or less to the same handicaps as the inferior Hindu castes. This was further strengthened by the fact that the Syrian Christians in Travancore and Cochin (belonging to the Orthodox and Catholic denominations) pride themselves in being the descendants of the high-caste Hindus who were converted by no less a person than Apostle St Thomas. The non Syrian Christians were considered to be of a lower order, since they were by and large converted in recent centuries from the lower castes. The bulk of Christians in the British-ruled part of Kerala (Malabar) belonged to the latter category.

The non-Nayar high caste Hindus, particularly the Namboodiris and the Muslims, were objectively in a position to follow the Syrian Christians, the Nayars and the Tamil Brahmins in adapting themselves to the conditions of modern Kerala. The former were as much part of the professional element in pre-British society as the Nayars and the Tamil Brahmins, while the latter were occupying more or less the same position as the Syrian Christians in trade, land holding and other avocations. All of them could therefore modernize themselves as quickly as the Nayar, the Tamil Brahmin and the Syrian Christian if only they wanted it. They however did not want it. The Namboodiris and other non-Nayar caste Hindus were too proud of the pre-British society of which they were the backbone and therefore contemptuous of the 'up-starts' who dominated the new British-dominated social order. The Muslims too were hostile to and contemptuous of the British ruling classes. Both stuck to their old socio-political outlook and were left far behind in the race for modernisation. The consequent social and educational backwardness resulted in their inability to secure positions of importance in the administration. They however made up for the lag once they woke up to the situation, so that today most of the non-Nayar upper caste Hindus have come to the position of near equals with the other 'forward' communities.

As opposed to these are the former 'inferior' castes which are today included in the categories of scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and backward communities. Having been the most oppressed (in every sense of the term) in pre-British society, the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes are even now in the most disadvantageous position. The other backward

communities including the Ezhavas, the Vishwarkarmas the Latin and other backward Christians, and so on are slightly better. They have been able to take advantage of the provisions made by the new British rulers for educational advancement and for securing posts in Government service. The principle of reservation for backward communities has also helped them to get some important positions in Government service and to get admission in educational institutions. Had it not been for this, they would have remained as backward as in the old society. The scheduled castes and scheduled tribes too have been helped by these measures, but they as communities have not been able to overcome their backwardness to the same extent as the other backward communities have done. There is therefore a discrepancy if not conflict between the other backward communities on the one hand and the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes on the other, and even among the various backward communities themselves.

One cannot leave this subject without referring to another and equally important aspect of modernisation. The formation of the new class consisting of the intelligentsia and professionals—those who took to and benefited from modern education and other opportunities—was only the beginning of the formation of modern class society. From the very castes, sub-castes and communities which threw up the modern intelligentsia and the professional classes, arose the new bourgeois class in the economic sense of the term. Although much later and on a much lower scale than in Bengal, Bombay and Madras, in Kerala too, the entrepreneur class began to take shape. The establishment of factories, the organization of plantations, the introduction of modern techniques in agriculture and industry, reforms in the system of land tenure, changes in the law of inheritance and family property—all these made for the emergence of a class which was bourgeois not only educationally and culturally but economically too. The process began in the later decades of the nineteenth century, and accelerated during and after the First World War

A part of the process of the formation of this bourgeois class was the formation of a class of proletarians and semi-proletarians. The former were interested in completing the process of bourgeois transformation—through the rise of a class of landlords and rich peasants basing themselves on

modern land relations and modern techniques of production—and in the consolidation of the trading and industrial bourgeoisie as a class. The proletarians and semi-proletarians on the other hand were interested in defending themselves against the former. In the ranks of both the classes were people who were drawn from almost all castes, except perhaps from the scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and some of the most backward among backward communities. There was little or no development of the bourgeoisie as an economic category from among the scheduled castes and tribes; bourgeois development touched them only to the extent of the emergence of an educated elite. Social tensions therefore ceased to be based purely on castes, sub-castes and religious communities, as it was in pre-British society. Every caste, sub-caste and religious community contributed its own share (some more and some less) both to the bourgeois-landlord as well as- to the proletarian-semi- proletarian peasant classes. Class society was thus emerging within the very framework of an essentially caste society. Struggles between the two major classes and conflicts between the various castes, sub-castes and religious communities were getting mixed up with each other. It would therefore be totally unrealistic to pose the problem as if it is *either* class struggle *or* caste conflict. The fact is that there is a certain amount of interpenetration of class and caste.

These developments prepared the soil for the formation of modern political parties and the fighting mass organizations of the proletarians and semi-proletarians. But Kerala was behind the rest of India in this respect. The premier political party of the Indian bourgeoisie, the Indian National Congress, came to be formed, as is well known, in the latter half of the 19th century. In Kerala however, it took shape only towards the end of the first World War and that too only in the British administered Malabar region. The Home Rule League formed under the leadership of Annie Besant had its branches established in Malabar. This was followed by the emergence of Mahatma Gandhi in the post-war years as the topmost leader of the freedom struggle. Only at this stage could the Congress get real roots among the people of Kerala, but even then it was confined to the Malabar region. The princely states of Cochin and Travancore were left out of the fold of the Congress movement, due mainly to the Gandhian policy of 'nonintervention in the internal affairs of princely states.' Since this was the

position even in relation to the political party of the bourgeoisie, it is not surprising that the party of the working class, the Communist Party, took still longer to be born and take roots here. While the Communist Party of India was born in the 1920s, it could form its branch in Kerala only towards the end of the 1930s.

CASTE-BASED ORGANIZATION

A still more significant difference between Kerala and the rest of India is the fact that the first form of political agitation, and the corresponding organizations for carrying on such agitations were based on particular castes, sub-castes and religious communities. Tamil Brahmin domination in the princely state of Travancore was resented by the rest of the community which found expression in what is known as the Malayali Memorial. The discontent of the non-caste Hindus found expression first in individual petitions to the Maharaja and then through collective action by some of the backward Hindu communities. The relatively 'forward' community of Nayars also had some grievances in the Brahmin dominated state and gave expression to their resentment. All these agitations and movements led to the formation of caste organizations with definite political demands. None of them, however, can be considered integral parts of the modern democratic political movement, since the demands voiced by them were not of the people as a whole, but of particular communities. Opportunities for educational advancement and share in government service for separate communities, rather than democratic rights for the people—such were the demands for which they fought. This however was the initial form in which the simmering discontent of the common people found expression.

As a matter of fact, these caste-based organizations were, in their outward form, social reform organizations, rather than democratic political parties. The most widespread and most powerful of them is the SNDP Yogam which voiced the grievances and demands of the non-caste Hindu communities in general and the most numerous and most advanced among them, the Ezhavas, in particular. This organization inspired and led by the saintly Narayana Guru, and combining within it elements of Ram Mohan's Brahmo movement, Ramakrishna Vivekananda's spiritualism and Jotiba

Phule's revolt of the untouchable classes. Behind it, however, was the urge of the common people—the peasants, the artisans, the newly-emerging class of manual wage labourers and middle class employees—who were groping towards some outlet for the ventilation of their grievances. Preceded and followed as this was by a number of agitations and movements confined to particular castes, sub-castes and religious communities, this became the model for the common people to express their grievances. Together with this particular form of social-cum-political agitation, other forms like the publication of political news-and-views papers also came into existence. While the use of the modern press for the publication of books, magazines and periodicals began as early as in the 19th century, it began to get the sharp political form of agitational newspapers only in the early 20th century. This, however, was limited to a few cases like that of Ramakrishna Pillai's *Swadeshabhimtani* in Trivandrum. Brought out in the early years of this century and in the end suppressed by the hostile Dewan's administration, this paper and its editor became the torch- bearers of modern political journalism in Kerala more than a decade before the Gandhi-led Non-Cooperation movement began.

The facts mentioned above relate, by and large, to the princely state of Travancore. The then British administered Malabar (which was part of the then Madras Presidency), did not witness the same type of agitations, movements and organizations. The SNDP Yogam was, in fact, more or less confined to Travancore, though its saintly founder, Sree Narayana Guru, established some temples even in the Malabar region of present-day Kerala. The agitational needs of the non-caste Hindu and other communities subjected to various disabilities under the old social order, therefore had to wait for the formation in Madras of the Justice Party whose branches were formed in Malabar as well. All these, however, were overshadowed by the gigantic national upheaval of the post first World War years which witnessed the emergence of Mahatma Gandhi as the supreme leader of a modern bourgeois democratic political movement.

THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT

This period can therefore be considered as the watershed marking the change over from the days of caste-based sectarian political agitations to the modern secular democratic political movement. This is definitely true in one sense: for the first time in the history of our polity, a movement was now born embracing individuals belonging to all castes, sub-castes and religious communities. A common political movement voicing the demands and grievances of all sections of the people, regardless of caste or community was something new for Kerala. This does not mean that the caste factor was non-existent. On the contrary, it continued to play an extremely important role and had its impact on the very functioning of emerging political parties. While the Indian National Congress was, in form, a secular democratic political party and while its leaders tried their best to keep it as such, the fact remains that its leadership was dominated by some and excluded other communities. The movement launched by the Congress under Gandhi's leadership was, in fact, based on a pact between the Congress and the Khilafat Committee. Large chunks of people including the untouchable communities and the Christians were out of the purview of this movement. If this was the situation even in relation to all-India politics, it was all the more so in Kerala where, as has been noted above, castes, sub-castes and religious communities are an important element in the socio-political life of the people.

The interrelation between caste or religious community on the one hand and class and the modern political movement on the other was brought into sharp relief in the well-known Malabar rebellion of 1921, otherwise known as the Moplah Rebellion. The roots of the discontent that broke out into rebellion go back to the changes in agrarian relations made by the British rulers. The absolute right of property conferred on the *Jenmis* (which meant that the tenants by and large were to be at the complete mercy of the *Jenmis*) created acute discontent in the entire Malabar district. It however found clear expression only among the Muslim tenantry in the Muslim majority areas of the then taluks of Eranad and Valluvanad. A series of sporadic attacks on individual Hindu landlords by the Muslim tenants reflected a combination of agrarian discontent with particular grievances of the Muslim community. The outbreaks which first occurred in 1836 and which repeated themselves in subsequent years had not only an agrarian basis but also heavy

overtones of Muslim fanaticism. They were suppressed with an iron hand by the British rulers. This in its turn further accentuated the discontent of the Muslim community which too found expression in various forms of Islamic unity and brotherhood both against the British rulers as well as against the Hindus in general.

Coming as it did against this background of agrarian and Muslim discontent, the Non-Cooperation-Khilafat movement led by Gandhi, the Ali brothers and others stirred the Muslim masses of Eranad and Valluvanad more than any other section. The organized movement for tenancy reform which had, in the meanwhile, taken shape and which came to be integrated with the Non-Cooperation-Khilafat movement added to the sweep of the movement. Here was the first upsurge of the masses in the British-ruled part of Kerala which combined within itself political, agrarian and communal aspects. The movement in the beginning, therefore, had all signs of a modern political-cum-agrarian movement which brought together the two major communities of the area—Hindus and Muslims. This however did not last long. The heavy repression let loose by the British Government which declared martial law not only in the two taluks but in the four neighbouring taluks as well, combined with the political line of eschewing violence by all means pursued by the Congress leadership, gradually turned the Muslim community against the Hindus. The obscurantism of the Islamic outlook which dominated the thinking of rebel leaders added to it. The rebellion became communal in its subsequent phases, though in the beginning it had, by and large, a modern secular democratic outlook.

While the British ruled part of Kerala was thus swept by the modern anti-imperialist movement headed by the Congress-Khilafat leaders, the princely states of Cochin and Travancore remained relatively quiet. Not that nothing happened there. The Non-Cooperation movement had its impact on the people of the States too, but on a much smaller scale. The non-Hindu communities and the non-caste Hindus by and large rallied behind the administration and against the Indian National Congress. But the development of the democratic political movement in the rest of India could not but have its impact on the people of the princely states of Cochin and Travancore. The latter half of the 1920s and the first half of the 1930s witnessed two parallel movements. First, a modern secular political

movement-in the form of the States Peoples' Conference came into existence and started agitation for responsible government. Secondly, the non-Hindu and non-caste Hindu communities began to voice their political demands not in the earlier form of a share in government employment, but in the general form of electoral rights and a share in the policy making sphere of the country's political life. Both drew their inspiration from the discussions that were going on between India's political leaders and the British Government and among the various Indian political parties themselves, which were reflected in the Simon Commission, the all-parties Conference convened by the Congress, the London Round Table Conference, and so on, and culminating in the adoption of the new Government of India Act (1935) by the British Parliament.

While all these quickened the tempo of political development even in the relatively quiet princely states, the new political aspirations found expression not only in the non-sectarian secular political movement (as formally represented by the Indian National Congress and the States People's Conference) but also in the emergence and activities of various caste and community based political organizations. It was this that ultimately led to the formation of the joint political Congress in Travancore which subsequently converted itself into the State Congress. This in its turn influenced the formation of the Cochin Congress, Cochin State Congress, Praja Mandalam, and other organizations. As opposed to the Travancore State Congress, which was by and large dominated by the non-Hindu and non-caste Hindu communities, there arose what was called the Travancore National Congress dominated by the caste Hindus functioning with the open support of the state administration.

RESERVATION ON THE AGENDA

It should be noted that, when the modern political movement took this form in the princely states of Cochin and Travancore, the question that assumed overriding importance was that regarding the position the non-Hindu and non-caste Hindu communities would occupy in the administration when the modern democratic political set-up is established. Reservation for backward communities in government services became a point of acute

controversy. While this was universally demanded by all the backward communities, and while the demand was fully supported by the radical forces which were then taking shape in the state, the leaders of the 'forward' communities took the cover of modern secular nationalism to oppose any such demand. It goes to the credit of a large number of genuine nationalists who belonged to the 'forward' communities that they realized the necessity for acceding to this demand of the 'backward' communities in order to develop a viable political movement against the autocratic Dewan regime.

The acceptance of this principle by the counterparts of the Indian National Congress in the two princely states of Cochin and Travancore—The Travancore State Congress, the Cochin Congress and the Praja Mandalam—and the incorporation of this demand in their policy documents was a turning point in the history of the modern political movement in the state. It shows that, while caste was declining as a factor in the socio-cultural life of society, it was bound, for a long time to come, to play a by no means unimportant role in political life. This, it can be seen, is the origin of the present controversy over 'caste or economic status' as the basis for reservation. Before going into it however, it is necessary to state that, by the time the modern political movement began to spread to the two princely states of Cochin and Travancore, the monopoly of the bourgeoisie in the field of political leadership had come to an end. The working class had become a vital political force. Not only had it formed its own mass organizations like the trade unions and resorted to its own specific form of action—the economic and political strike—but it had also given birth to its own political party. The formation of the Congress Socialist Party in 1934, the contacts established by the leaders of this party with the Communist Party of India, and the gradual transformation of the Congress Socialist Party of Kerala into the Communist Party together with the active role played by the Congress Socialist-cum-Communist cadre in the KPCC of Malabar, as well as in the Travancore State Congress and the Cochin Congress, were a big turning point. It was now clear that, independent of the right wing bourgeois leadership of the Indian National Congress and its sister organizations in the two princely states, there was a growing political force which openly and without reservation declared itself to be the party of the working class. The role played by the working class in the 1938 State

Congress struggle in Travancore and similar struggles in Cochin and Malabar proclaimed the emergence of a new political party which was an independent part of the secular modern democratic political movement. The last four decades have witnessed an unceasing struggle between the right and the left, between the bourgeois and the proletarian trends, in the modern political movement.

THE PRESENT DEBATE

The emergence of these two—bourgeois and proletarian—trends in the modern political movement has not rendered the question of castes, sub-castes and religious communities irrelevant. On the other hand, they still play a very important role. This is clear from the furious controversy that is now raging around the question of reservation for backward communities dealt with in the Kumara Pillai and Nettoor Damodaran Commission reports. The problems dealt with in the two reports, though related to each other, are different. The Kumara Pillai Commission dealt with the question of educational concessions which may be divided into two parts—reservation in respect of admissions to educational institutions and financial provisions for fee concessions, stipends, books, and so on. The Nettoor Commission dealt with the question of reservation in the matter of appointments in government service. Admission into educational institutions and reservation with regard to appointments in government service are of the same category, since whatever concession is given to the 'backward' communities in this respect would obviously be at the expense of the 'forward' communities. The latter therefore have an obvious grievance that they are being denied something for no other 'crime' than that they were born in particular communities. Financial concessions, on the other hand, are such that what has so far been given to the 'backward' communities can be given to the 'forward' communities as well, provided only that the government is in possession of adequate resources for financing the education of both sections. The government has found that it can do so and the grievances have thus been redressed.

On the question of reservation for backward communities in admissions to educational institutions and appointments in government service, the

spokesmen of the 'forward' and 'backward' communities are ranged against each other. The former denounce such reservation as 'unscientific', since it is based on nothing but caste and since caste is no more a relevant factor in modern political life. The spokesmen of the 'backward' communities, on the other hand, demand that the entire scheme of reservation should be kept intact without any change at all. Around this question, a big battle is going on today. It should however be noted that almost every political party—both in the ruling coalition as well as in the opposition—has rejected the demands of both the 'forward' and 'backward' communities. They endorse the recommendations of the Nettoor Commission that, while caste-based reservation should continue for some more time (with provision for periodical review of the extent to which each 'backward' community has been able to overcome its backwardness), those families belonging to the 'backward' communities but whose annual income is above a particular ceiling should be excluded from the enjoyment of the benefits of reservation. Those political parties which frankly base themselves on the modern secular democratic political system endorse these recommendations of the Nettoor Commission, since they combine the perspective of ending all reservation as the 'backward' communities catch up with the 'forward' with the necessity for its continuation for the present, in the case of those who belong to the 'backward' communities but whose annual income is below the fixed ceiling.

The fact that all the major political parties in the State are in agreement with this view shows that the two extreme views held by several scholars and publicists are wrong. Caste is not of such overriding importance that every other political consideration is subordinated to it, as some of them seriously argue. Nor is it true, as some others claim, that caste is no more a relevant factor at all. A proper analysis of all aspects of the existing situation would show that, while classes and political parties are assuming greater and greater importance in the political life of the state, the existence of caste as a social factor and the problems arising therefrom cannot be wished away. Taboos regarding inter-caste dining, inter-caste marriage, and the like are being steadily overcome, while the observance of untouchability is almost nonexistent even in the most remote villages. But what the Nettoor Commission calls the 'social, economic and educational backwardness' leading to backwardness in respect of sharing government appointments

still continues. Furthermore, the consciousness of one's caste, sub-caste or religious community is still a strong force exercising its influence on the functioning of even political parties, with no political party being free to dismiss this particular factor in selecting candidates for election, in making appointments to the ministries and so on. The party of the working class with its advanced ideology has also to take account of this factor; failure to do so would weaken the struggle for uniting and consolidating the proletarian and semi-proletarian forces in the struggle against the bourgeois-landlord forces. In taking it into account however, the party of the working class will not allow itself to be turned into a tailist hanger-on of the bourgeois-landlord elements growing within the backward communities.

Once Again on Castes and Classes

Readers of *Social Scientist* will recall my article on 'Castes, Classes and Parties in Modern Political Development'.[1] Ramakrishna Mukherjee, in a recent article,[2] assumed that I based myself on Beteille's book, *Caste, Class and Power*. In a short letter to the editor[3] I tried to show that the conclusions drawn in my paper were independent of Beteille; in fact, I based myself on what I learnt in the course of my own practical activity, supplemented by what humble theoretical work I have been able to do.

A few weeks earlier, I had come across a booklet, *Class-Caste Struggle: Emerging Third Force*, by V.T. Rajasekhara Shetty, published by the Dalit Action Committee of Karnataka. In the author's introduction to the booklet it was claimed, 'Even EMS for the first time was forced to admit that the CPI (M) had committed a fundamental blunder'.

The 'blunder' apparently was that I have been carrying on my practical and theoretical work on the basis of the Marxist theory of class struggle; the alleged 'admission of my blunder' consisted in the abandonment of the Marxist theory of class struggle in favour of Shetty's own theory of 'Class-Caste Struggle' which is 'superior' to Marxism! In another booklet, *How Marx Failed in Hindu India*, Shetty has propounded his view on the superiority of his own to Marx's theory! I am supposed to have given up Marx and become a disciple of Rajasekhara Shetty!!

Shetty claims to have made this 'discovery' from my article in the *Economic and Political Weekly* (Special Number, 1979). He also refers to B.T. Ranadive's article in the same Special Number to make the claim of the CPI (M) having been forced to acknowledge the superiority of his 'Class-Caste Struggle' theory. As if this is not enough, he claims, in a subsequent booklet, that A. K. Gopalan wrote to him 'endorsing my [Shetty's] thesis'!

I am not interested in, nor have I the time to polemize against Shetty. Let him have the satisfaction of being superior to Karl Marx! I, however, want to make it clear that my 1977 article published in the *Social Scientist* and the

1979 article in the *Economic and Political Weekly* are the result of my own humble attempt at integrating the Marxist theory of social evolution with the Indian reality as revealed to me in the course of my practical-political life.

This, however, requires a fairly detailed account of how my own thinking and the thinking of my party on the question under discussion evolved in the course of the development of the revolutionary political movement in India. This is attempted in this paper.

PATTERN OF DEVELOPMENT

I was in my teens when I started taking active interest in public life. I was deeply influenced by two currents in the modern democratic movement of India, as it was spreading to my home state. The first was the growing revolt against the caste-dominated social life in Kerala—the outmoded customs and manners, superstitious beliefs, family organization, and so on—even of the highest caste (the Namboodiris) in the state to be specific. The second was the freedom movement, which was at that time going through a new wave of mass struggles led by Gandhi, drawing into its fold hundreds of thousands of young men and women.

While in the beginning I was only an interested observer keenly watching all developments in the two currents, I was gradually drawn into the vortex of both in the latter half of the 1920s. By the time the next wave of anti-imperialist mass struggle—the Salt Satyagraha of 1930—swept the entire country, I had already become a radical in both socio-cultural and political fields.

On the social plane, I went forward from the efforts to bring about moderate reforms in the family life of the Namboodiri community to the struggle for a radical restructuring of social life at the top ladder of the caste hierarchy. This took me emotionally to the anti-high-caste movements of the 'lower' castes in Kerala society, particularly of the Ezhavas who had developed one of the most radical movements of social revolt among the oppressed castes. These oppressed caste leaders being linked with the radical

socio-cultural movement led by E.V. Ramaswamy Naikar of Tamil Nadu, I started imbibing the ideas of rationalism and atheism.

Politically too, I became an ardent supporter of the left Congress leaders headed by Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose, even though I had not broken with Gandhism. The years of the Salt Satyagraha and subsequent political developments made me plunge fully into the radical movements of both a socio-cultural and political character. As a college student in those days, fully participated in all political activities calculated to support the freedom struggle. At the same time, I devoted my time to the furtherance of the radical socio-cultural movement. The columns of a weekly of which I was the *de facto* editor in 1930–31 were used to propagate leftist ideas in socio-cultural as well as national-political fields.

These activities as a student subsequently landed me in jail as an active Civil Disobedience volunteer. From then on, I transformed myself from an ordinary social reformer and freedom fighter to a young man fighting for a revolutionary restructuring of the entire society—a Socialist to begin with and subsequently a Communist. The story of my development along these lines has been told in my *How I Became a Communist*.

This particular pattern of development of my political personality gave two distinct trends to my political thinking. As a freedom fighter and radical nationalist, I was opposed to caste and communal politics. As a radical social reformer too, I was all for the total elimination of all distinctions based on the caste and the religious community. However, I could see the reality that, whatever the ultimate goal to which we were moving, we cannot wish away differences and distinctions based on the caste and the religious community. Socio-political organizations dedicated to the cause of serving the lower castes and fighting for reforming the social and family systems of even the upper castes, therefore, had my sympathy. All the more so when some of these caste-based organizations started championing political demands, integrating the movement for political democracy with social justice for the oppressed castes.

An important development of the first half of the 1930s which influenced me was the rise of a particularly radical socio-political movement initiated by some leaders of the oppressed Ezhava caste. The late C. Kesavan

of Travancore unleashed a movement which tried to integrate the aspirations of the democratic people of Travancore for responsible government with those of the oppressed castes and the religious minorities for social justice in the then upper caste-dominated autocratic regime of the state. The majority of nationalists denounced him and his movement as 'casteist' and 'communal' and, therefore, 'anti-national'. The weekly paper edited by me then was one of the two organs of the nationalist Malayalam press (the other being the one edited by that patriarch of Kerala journalism, the late A. Balakrishna Pillai) which extended full support to the movement led by Kesavan.

That movement subsequently developed into what was called the Joint Political Congress—the political alliance of a few castes and communities directed against upper caste domination. This 'caste and communal alliance', it may be added, further extended itself to embrace all the democratic forces in the state and became the Travancore State Congress. 'Responsible Government with adult franchise and reservation for backward communities' was the central slogan of this movement.

The same development was taking place in the adjoining state of Cochin too. The first organization fighting for responsible government in that state, like the Travancore State Congress, included in its basic political demand reservation for backward castes and communities. We of the left had given our full support to this in both states. I myself had in my articles (in Malayalam as well as in English) tried to explain how, in the actual social conditions of Kerala, the development of the democratic movement is bound to be linked with the organized struggle against caste-Hindu domination.

We of the Socialist and Communist movement had, in the meanwhile, gone fully into the work of organizing the workers, the peasants, the students, the teachers and so on. The movements unleashed and the organizations formed in pursuance of this activity were, it goes without saying, all-caste and all-communal in composition. The Marxist call, 'workers of the world, unite', inspired us all. We, therefore, did not allow the caste, the communal or any other consideration to stand in the way of the workers' unity against the capitalists, the peasants' against the landlords,

other sections of the working people for their own demands—all of them against British imperialism and autocratic rule in the princely states. The defence of the interests of the oppressed castes, the championing of the cause of social justice were therefore to be subordinated to the unity of the oppressed classes and of the nation as a whole.

We had then and still have to fight a two-front battle. Ranged against us on the one hand are those who denounce us for our alleged 'departure from the principles of nationalism and socialism' since we are championing 'sectarian' causes like those of the oppressed castes and religious minorities. On the other hand are those who, in the name of defending the oppressed caste masses, in fact, isolate them from the mainstream of the united struggle of the working people irrespective of caste, community and so on.

This two-front battle became all the more bitter in the post-independence years, particularly after the two princely states of Kerala had their irresponsible Diwan regimes replaced by elected governments and then merged into Kerala. While these developments did not make any worthwhile change in the living and working conditions of the common people belonging to the oppressed castes and religious communities, a narrow upper stratum emerged from them and began to grow in influence and power as years passed. At the other end of the scale, however, the majority of the people belonging to all castes and communities (including the 'upper' castes and the majority community) were drawn into the ranks of the poor and downtrodden.

Pledged as we were to the defence of the oppressed castes and religious minorities against caste-Hindu domination and at the same time identifying ourselves with the oppressed sections in all castes and communities, we had to apply our minds to the impact of reservation for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and backward communities, on the poor belonging to 'forward' communities. The solution as formulated over two decades ago—unqualified reservation for not only Scheduled Castes and Tribes but for backward communities as well—had to be modified to keep pace with the reality that growing sections of even the 'upper' castes and the religious majority were no more enjoying their old status, prosperity and privileges.

The demand that reservation should be based not on caste but on the economic condition became insistent.

While we were sympathetic to those who raised this demand, we could not accept it, since we were, and still are, of the view that caste oppression, together with the socio-cultural, economic and political consequences of that oppression, has not been removed. We therefore came to the conclusion, as was explained in my 1977 article, that (a) reservation as it exists should continue without any modification in relation to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes; (b) even in relation to other backward castes and minority communities, reservation on the basis of caste and community should continue at present and until the caste or community concerned has, by and large, overcome its backwardness; and (c) since however narrow sections in all these backward castes and communities (other than Scheduled Castes and Tribes) have been benefited by the concessions they enjoy now, those of them who have annual incomes at or above a fixed limit should be denied the benefit of reservation.

This was denounced by both the 'backwards' and the 'forwards'. The former denounced it as 'abandonment of the caste-based reservation'. The latter was furious for exactly the opposite reason. Big agitations were launched by both but we held our ground.

It will be seen from the above that the party and the movement represented by me in Kerala have been dealing with the problem of caste and communal organizations from the point of view of the role they play in the development of the political and mass movement of the working people in the state. In the course of developing this movement, I had to undertake some theoretical studies and came to some conclusions to which I shall now turn.

TRADE UNION, KISAN MOVEMENTS

Starting as Congress Socialists first and then becoming Communists, we naturally worked hard to develop the trade union and kisan movements. The progress in both was rapid. Within less than half a decade, we were able to form a number of trade unions in the entire Malabar district of the then

Madras Presidency. In Cochin and Travancore too, we were able to forge links with the existing trade unions and organize several new ones. As for the kisan movement, its development was mostly confined to the Malabar part, since the legislation for tenancy reforms had advanced to a larger extent in Cochin and Travancore than in Malabar. The jenmi domination was, in other words, far stronger in the latter.

The growth of the kisan movement in the Malabar area was so rapid that the first Congress government of the then Madras Presidency was forced to appoint a Malabar Tenancy Reforms Committee of which I was a member. Apart from me, there were two other members who adopted the leftist position on question of land reforms. The rest of the committee—over a dozen—were all of the rightist political complexion. The three of us, therefore, had to submit our separate minutes of dissent.

While the suggestions for immediate amendments to the tenancy laws were more or less the same in our three separate minutes of dissent, mine, much longer and more elaborate, discussed the whole question of the origin and development of the jenmi system, together with its socio-economic implications. Basing myself on the studies made by the earlier commissions and committees on the question of land reforms in Malabar, and making some calculations of the burden of rent borne by the tenants, I made a strong case for the complete abolition of the jenmi system; only if this system is abolished, I said, can the economic, socio-cultural and political-administrative backwardness of the people be removed. Since this is a basic objective not immediately realizable, I suggested certain immediate partial reforms, that is, amendments to the existing laws.

This was my first attempt at raising the day-to-day agitations and struggles of the kisans for the realization of their immediate demands, to the level of the basic question of ending the feudal-jenmi system in Malabar. This study and the simultaneous development of the political movement in Kerala, particularly of the democratic movement for responsible government in the two states of Cochin and Travancore, led me to the study of feudalism in its two (socio-economic and political-administrative) forms. The jenmi system in the Malabar part and the princely rule in the Cochin and Travancore states were seen as two sides of the same coin. The tenant

movement in Malabar area and movement for responsible government in the princely states had to be integrated in a common anti-feudal movement

This led our party to the political slogan of the reunification of the Malayalam-speaking people inhabiting the three administrative divisions of the Madras Presidency, Cochin and Travancore. *Aikya Kerala* was added to the abolition of the jenmi domination in Malabar. This was facilitated by the extension of the activities of the Communist Party to the Cochin and Travancore areas which took place on the eve of and during the war.

This made me undertake another work of an agitational-cum-theoretical nature. A booklet under the title, *A Crore and a Quarter Malayalees*, was brought out in 1945, pleading the cause of *Aikya Kerala*. The new state as was visualized therein would be democratic, secular and modern. 'Land to the tiller', the central idea put across in my minute of dissent to the Malabar Tenancy Reforms Committee report, was an important factor in the *Aikya Kerala* as conceived now. Along with it however were other aspects of the modern democratic, secular state serving the cause of the working people as had been worked out by the Communist Party for the whole country.

Similar booklets, it may be noted, had come out at about the same time in Andhra and Bengal—Sundarayya's *Vishalandhra* and Bhowani Sen's *Natun Bangla*. Kerala, Andhra and Bengal are the three states where the Communist Party was then very strong, with a mass political base. It was, therefore, natural for the party in these states to raise the slogan of their own linguistic state as part of the free, democratic and secular India of the party's conception—a state in which the working class, the peasants and other sections of the working people would find their interests safeguarded and defended.

Having thus worked out the general outlines of the new democratic and secular state of Kerala as part of the future free India, I availed myself of the first opportunity to study the historical past of Kerala and its people. The result was the short history of Kerala in Malayalam, written in 1947 and published the following year.

It may be of interest to friends like Ramakrishna Mukherjee and Rajasekhara Shetty that the term used in the book to describe the medieaval

society in Kerala was not 'feudalism' but *Jati-Jenmi-Naduvazhi Medhavitvam*, which means the domination of the upper castes, the jenmis and local chieftains in Kerala society. 'Uplifting the Brahmins socially, the jenmis economically and the Samanta-Nair castes administratively, (it) lowers the position of the overwhelming majority of the people socially, economically and politically; giving birth to a handful of great scholars, poets and artists (from the above top categories), it led to the cultural backwardness of the overwhelming majority'—this was how I described it.

The book brought out then was my first attempt at applying the Marxist theory of class struggle to the history of Kerala. Being the first attempt, it was naturally defective. I received a large number of criticisms and was profited by them. The content of the book, therefore, was subjected to more than one revision. The result was my first work in English under the title, *National Question in Kerala* (1952), followed by its revised version under the title, *Kerala Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow* (1967). Without extensively quoting from either of these two works, I may point out that in the latter work there is a chapter under the title, 'Rise of Feudalism', where I said:

> At the time of or even before the Chera empire, . . . class division had started making its appearance. . . . Class division, however, took the form of caste division; those who were in a position to accumulate the greatest amounts of wealth came to be considered the highest caste; the next in point of the accumulation of wealth became the next highest caste, and so on, till we reach the class that is in a position to accumulate no wealth at all which became the lowest caste.[4]

> Again,

> Each caste assembly had its own temple, the deity of which constituted the reflection and representative of the collective body of the entire caste. And it was in the name of the temple and its deity that the wealth accumulated through generations was held. Gradually, however, the control of the temple and, therefore, of its property narrowed down, first from the entire caste assembly to the collective body and the heads of families, and then to the head of one family. When it had reached this

> stage, it remained only to transform the right of ownership from that of the head of that family as trustee of the temple, and through it of the entire caste, to that of the head of that family in its own right.[5]

The origin and development of the jenmi domination was, therefore, inseparably connected with the existence and development of the caste hierarchy. I had, in fact, statistically proved in my earlier Malayalam history of Kerala that

> 1) The Pulayas, the Parayas, the Kanakkers and other depressed castes are the lowest in the matter of ownership of property. On the other hand, the highest caste, the Namboodiri, stands at the top of property ownership. In none of the four Cochin villages whose statistics were my basis for the conclusion was a single caste whose property was more than that of the Namboodiri nor less than that of the depressed castes.
>
> 2) Next to Namboodiris come the other caste Hindus. Among them the lowest in terms of property ownership and of caste hierarchy are the Nairs.
>
> 3) Next only to the depressed castes, who are the poorest, are the Ezhavas and Muslims, while the Christians are lower than the Nairs but higher than the Ezhava-Muslims.

There was thus a clear correlation between the status in caste hierarchy and the ownership of property at the time of the survey (early 1930) which formed the basis of my conclusions.

The facts mentioned above relate to the medieval Kerala society. Changes which are by no means insignificant have been taking place during the last two centuries, particularly since the First World War and still more after the attainment of independence. As generation follows generation, larger and larger sections of families belonging to the 'upper' castes get pauperized and are thrown into the ranks of proletarians. As for the 'lower' castes, the overwhelming majority of them, including the Scheduled Castes as a whole, continue to suffer the same socio-economic disabilities as earlier. The non-Scheduled but 'backward' castes however throw up from their ranks small groups who are able to improve their lot by taking advantage of the capitalist

development since the days of the British rule. A certain amount of fusion thus takes place of the pauperized sections of the 'upper' castes, the majority of the 'backward' castes and the Scheduled Castes as a whole.

In other words, while the factor of caste still exists and operates in the political life of Kerala (as of course in the rest of India), the mass organizations and political parties based on the unity of classes, and cutting across castes and communities, are acquiring greater and greater importance. The forward-looking elements in public life should therefore base themselves on the classes which are growing, while noting the existence of caste oppression. Uniting of the working people belonging to all castes in the struggle against class exploitation and oppression is therefore the essential prerequisite for the successful completion of the unfinished task of ending the *Jati-Jenmi-Naduvazhi Medhavitvam*. Forward-looking elements in the 'upper' castes for their part cannot afford to adopt a negative approach to the aspirations of the 'lower' castes.

Our party and myself as one of its activists have thus been basing ourselves on the Marxist theory of class struggle and subordinating the problem of caste oppression to the needs of uniting the exploited against the exploiting classes, irrespective of the caste to which each belongs.

AT ALL-INDIA LEVEL

Although initially confined to Kerala as described above, my activities gradually extended themselves to all-India politics. I had therefore to deal in the 1940s and 1950s with several questions of all-India importance in day-to-day agitations and propaganda as well as theoretically. Those were the days when I was working as a functionary of the Communist Party in Kerala and taking up some assignments at the Party Centre too.

By the end of the 1950s and in early 1960s, as is well-known, the Communist Party entered a phase of serious inner-party differences. The character of Indian society, the socio-economic content of the Indian revolution and innumerable problems of policy, tactics and strategy naturally arose. I, on my part, decided to undertake a serious study of the

economic, socio-cultural and political problems of Indian society and revolution.

The result was the book under the title, *Economics and Politics of India's Socialist Pattern*, written in 1963–64 and published in August 1966. That, in fact, was my contribution to the evolution of the fundamental programme of the Indian revolution on the basis of which the differences within the Communist movement were sought to be resolved.

The Programme drawn up by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) in 1964, as is known, resolved these differences, though a section of the undivided CPI did not accept it. That Programme had to deal, along with other questions, with the extent of pre-capitalist influences on current Indian society. The problem and its solution were explained in the Programme in the following words:

> Capitalist development in India is not of the type which took place in western Europe and other advanced capitalist countries. Even though developing in the capitalist way Indian society still contains within itself strong elements of pre-capitalist society. Unlike in the advanced capitalist countries where capitalism grew on the ashes of pre-capitalist society, destroyed by the rising bourgeoisie, capitalism in India was superimposed on pre-capita-list society. Neither the British colonialists whose rule continued for over a century, nor the Indian bourgeoisie into whose hands power passed in 1947, delivered those smashing blows against pre-capitalist society which are necessary for the free development of capitalist society and its replacement by socialist society. *The present Indian society, therefore, is a peculiar combination of monopoly capitalist domination with caste, communal and tribal institutions. It has thus fallen to the lot of the working class and its Party to unite all the progressive forces interested in destroying the pre-capitalist society and to so consolidate the revolutionary forces within it as to facilitate the most rapid completion of the democratic revolution and preparation of the ground for transition to socialism.*[6]

Basing myself on the above understanding of the Party, I discussed the question of caste in my above-mentioned book. It may be useful to give a

few relevant extracts from it:

> It may appear paradoxical but it is true that casteism and communalism are increasingly becoming politically powerful, while their hold on the social life of the people is weakening. These are days when steadily growing numbers of people belonging to all castes and religious groups are breaking the traditional customs and behaviour patterns enjoined on them by their caste and religion. Old taboos are observed less by the present than by the preceding generation, while the preceding generation itself was observing it to a lesser extent than its predecessors. A process of steady disregard in the observance of taboos laid down by caste and religion has thus been going on at least for a century and a half. Rules regarding pollution and untouchability, interdininig and inter-marriage, etc., are more and more losing their hold on the people.
>
> At the same time, however, the caste, the religious community and the tribe are becoming more and more powerful in the political life of the country. The very people who refuse to observe rules and taboos of the caste as a social organization use caste tension in order to influence voters at the time of elections, to pull the string at the right quarters to secure job or contracts, etc.

For properly understanding this paradoxical phenomenon, it is necessary to note two facts:

Firstly, modern capitalism, 'originally through the instrumentality of the British overlords and next of the national bourgeoisie, carried out revolutionary transformations in the various facets of India's socioeconomic, political and cultural life...There is, therefore, no denying the fact that the British rulers, acting though they were in their own narrow selfish interests, were cutting at the root of the so-called 'soul of India'; they were bringing about revolutionary transformations in the centuries-old Indian society'.

Secondly, 'the very fact that they were alien rulers made the British dependent on some classes and strata in Indian society who looked up to the foreign rulers to protect their interests'. Since they could not depend either on the masses of the working people or on the rising capitalist class to support their alien rule, 'support had to be canvassed from the

representatives on the old pre-British regime—princes and landlords, the priestly and other elements of the old outmoded caste-ridden society, the representatives of the religious hierarchy, the leaders of village communities and tribes, etc. They, therefore, have to make compromises with everyone of these strata which represented the old society. They had also to use the backward (caste, communal, tribal, etc.) consciousness of the mass of the people'.

This compromise between the foreign rulers and the representatives of the outmoded social institutions, including caste, reflected itself in the character of the leadership of the freedom movement. Political radicalism combined with socio-cultural backwardness was one face of the emerging bourgeois democratic movement. The other side of the same coin was sociocultural radicalism allying itself with political support to alien rulers. Freedom fighters championing the cause of Hindu or Muslim revivalism, pledging themselves to defend the *Varnasramadharma* or Islamic law as the case may be; radicals and even 'socialists' opposing the freedom movement and joining hands with British rulers—these were the two alternatives presented by the political leadership of the rising bourgeoisie.

These two trends eventually got consolidated in the two doctrines of 'one and indivisible India' (Akhanda Bharat) and 'India consisting of two nations —Hindu and Muslim'. It is a measure of the fiasco of the bourgeois leadership of the freedom movement that the consummation of their cherished goal took the form of two sovereign states being carved out of the old, united and British-ruled India.

We of the Communist movement can proudly claim that we took up the banner of revolt against those sections of the bourgeois leadership which brought this about. It is true that we failed in our effort—also that in making the effort we slipped into certain serious errors. The fact, however, remains that, while every other political party, every other organization and group, participating in the freedom movement rallied behind this or that group of bourgeois leaders, we of the Communist movement fought both. Alone among the political parties, groups and organizations in the country, we championed the cause of uniting the several nationalities inhabiting India and forming a voluntary federation through which the gains of the anti-

imperialist struggle can be consolidated and a new India of the people built. That we were too small a force to have any immediate impact on the total political situation and therefore the country came to be divided leading to the tragic communal carnage, is true. But it is a matter of satisfaction and pride that we made the effort.

Ever since the latter half of the 1930s when the Communist movement in India unified itself and started actively intervening in the national political situation, its leadership, ranks and the masses following it had to fight an incessant battle against the ideologies of the bourgeois-landlord classes which got consolidated in political parties like the Congress, the Muslim League and so on. We had to swim against the current in the 1940s, keeping away from the Quit India movement but still fighting the British policy of repression against the freedom movement; rallying the people behind the Soviet Union and other forces of the world revolutionary movement, even while fighting British imperialism which for the moment happened to be in the anti-fascist camp. The struggle that we waged simultaneously against the Congress brand of Akhanda Bharat and the Muslim League's 'two nations theory' was inseparable from the effort to take India's struggle for freedom, democracy and modernization to a successful conclusion.

This struggle often isolated us from the mainstream of the freedom movement. This, however, tempered our will to fight the bourgeoisie and its class allies, rallying larger and larger sections of the working people under the banner of proletarian revolution in India and abroad. That was why, alone among the left forces in the country, we were able to organize such gigantic militant movements as Bengal's Tebhaga, Andhra's Telengana, Malabar, Maharashtra's Warli area, and so on in the post-war and post-independence years. The fact that certain serious errors were committed in the process did not prevent us from securing the support of still larger sections of the people.

This became clear when, in the first general elections that took place under the new Constitution framed after the attainment of independence, the Communist Party became the major opposition group in Parliament and in four states; in two out of the four, the Party, together with its allies, came almost to the point of securing a majority in the legislature and forming a

coalition government. Just five years later, the Party actually secured a majority in one legislature, following which it formed its own state government.

This is an honour reserved only for the Communist Party. In the subsequent years when the Party came to be split, the stronger of the two became the major constituent of the coalition and government that came into existence consisting of left and other opposition parties. Today too, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) is heading coalitions and governments in three states—a position which is occupied by no other party, group or organization.

The political developments of 1980 once again underscored the truth of what is stated above. The year witnessed the disintegration of all parties of the bourgeois-landlord ruling classes; the strongest of them, though in power at the Centre and in the majority of states, is riven with internal conflicts and rapidly losing its hold on the people. The same fate is overtaking all those opposition parties which refuse to take the principled position of fighting for democracy and in defence of the interests of the working people and for this purpose cooperating with the left. A movement is, therefore, on to unite all the left and other opposition forces on the basis of a modest program of serving the people and fighting the ruling classes.

It is, therefore, surprising that some people, including Rajasekhara Shetty about whom reference has been made in this article, should talk of 'Marx having failed in Hindu India'. Nearly half-a-century of political developments in India have, on the contrary, shown that all bourgeois ideologies, including Shetty's own 'Class Caste struggle', have failed in India; the only ideology which has proved its capacity to stand up to the ruling classes, can find reasonable lasting solutions for India's problems, is Marxism-Leninism.

It is just because we of the Communist movement have been trying to apply this ideology to the specific conditions of India that the united Communist movement till 1964 and the CPI(M) since then have won modest victories in the political field. The attacks launched against the Communist movement (as Rajasekhara Shetty has launched) would only

help those who want to save the ruling classes out of the crisis that is overtaking them.

NOTES

1 *Social Scientist*, Vol. 6, No. 4, November 1977.

2 *Economic and Political Weekly*, 24 January 1981

3 *Ibid*, 28 March 1981.

4 E.M.S. Namboodiripad, *Kerala Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*, Calcutta, National Book Agency, 1967, p 47.

5 *Ibid*, p 48.

6 Communist Party of India (Marxist), *Programme*, 1964 (with amendment by 9th Congress in Madurai June 27 to July 2, 1972), p 33. Emphasis added.

Caste Conflicts vs. Growing Unity of Popular Democratic Forces

The year 1978 which has just closed was characterized by two contradictory features in the development of Indian politics. On the one hand was the growing unity of the working class, symbolized by the coming together of the central trade union organizations against the Bhoothalingam Report and against the Industrial Relations Bill. On the other hand was the disruption of popular unity, as seen in the conflicts between 'backward' and 'forward' castes; increasing attacks on Harijans in various parts of the country; communal riots; etc.

Indications are available that both these features are likely to continue not only in the present year, but also in the years to come. For, Indian society is going through a phase of its development in which the economy and polity of the capitalist system that has been making rapid progress in India have entered a deep and serious crisis, even while the crisis of the pre-capitalist social organizations has in fact been continuing, rather than getting resolved. The two crises have combined to give a peculiarly tragic character to the socio-cultural and political setup in the country.

For a proper understanding of the nature and depth of such an interpenetration of the two crises, we should go into the historical roots of India's 'age-old' society. It should be recalled that the break-up of the prehistoric tribal society—what the founders of Historical Materialism called 'Primitive Communist' society—ending in the formation of class society, took a form in India different from that in countries which developed capitalist society. We should be wary in applying to Indian conditions the formulation with which Marx and Engels opened the first chapter of their *Communist Manifesto*: 'The history of all hitherto existing society [i.e., all written history] is the history of class struggles'. What is meant in the above formulation was made clear in the following para:

> Freeman and slave, patrician and plebian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary re-constitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes.

In place of such an open and clearly demarcated division of 'the oppressor and the oppressed in constant opposition to one another' and carrying on an uninterrupted fight etc., emerged in India a society in which the division of and conflict between the oppressor and the oppressed was covered up by an apparent unity in the common organization of the caste-based village community. Marx himself in his subsequent studies of the social organization in India on the eve of the consolidation of British power had drawn attention to the 'so-called village system which gave to each of these small units their independent organization and distinct life'. Quoting an old official report of the British House of Commons on Indian affairs, Marx went on:

> Under this simple form of municipal government, the inhabitants of the country have lived from time immemorial. The boundaries of the villages have been but seldom altered: and though the villages themselves have been sometimes injured, and even desolated by war, famine or disease, the same name, the same limits, the same interests, and even the same families, have continued for ages. The inhabitants gave themselves no trouble about the breaking up and divisions of Kingdom: while the village remains entire, they care not to what power it is transferred, or to what sovereign it devolves; its internal economy remains unchanged. The potail [Patel] is still the head inhabitant, and still acts as the petty judge or magistrate and collector or rentier of the village.

To these quotations from official sources, Marx adds his own comment:

> These small stereotype forms of social organism have been to the greater part dissolved, and are disappearing, not so much through the brutal interference of the British tax-gatherer and the British soldier, as to the

> working of English steam and English free trade. Those family-communities were based on domestic industry, in that peculiar combination of hand-weaving, hand-spinning and hand-tilling agriculture which gave them self-supporting power. English interference having placed the spinner and weaver, dissolved these small semi-barbarian, semi-civilized communities, by blowing up their economic basis, and thus produced the greatest, and to speak the truth, the only social revolution ever heard of in Asia.

Studies and researches by a host of scholars have subsequently shown that Marx's remarkable insight into the nature of Indian society and the change brought into it by the new British rulers had many gaps to be filled, many lags and shortcomings in the picture that he painted. For, a literally 'unchanging Indian society' was not entirely true. Changes, in fact, were imperceptibly creeping into the society—changes into whose details Marx was not then going or did not intend to go.

What Marx was trying to point out was—and here he was absolutely correct—that the type of 'uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary re-constitution of the society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes', which was characteristic of European countries, did not take place in India. The result is that, instead of a vigorous dynamic society that grew up in Europe through the open slave revolts in ancient times, serf uprisings in the medieval age, etc., India with its caste-based village system had inherited an apparently 'stable' (which means stagnant) society. It was at this 'stability', or rather stagnation, that the heaviest blow was struck by the British rulers. It is impossible to disagree with this basic analysis of the evolution of Indian society through the ages, without necessarily dotting all the 'i's and crossing all the 't's of what Marx wrote on pre-British Indian society.

It will in this context be instructive to refer to the profound analysis made by Marx's brilliant collaborator, Frederick Engels, of the role played by slavery in the development of human civilization. Slavery did, according to Engels, 'become the dominant form of production among all the peoples who were developing beyond the old community but in the end was also one of the chief causes of their decay'.

The 'decay' of the slave society referred to by Engels however led to bitter conflicts which culminated in the replacement of slave society by the feudal society. In this latter too, bitter conflicts developed ending in the substitution of feudal society by bourgeois society.

> It was slavery that made first possible the division of labour between agriculture and industry on a larger scale and thereby also Hellenism, the flowering of the ancient world. Without slavery no Greek State, no Greek art and science; without slavery, no Roman empire. But without the basis laid by Grecian culture and the Roman empire, also no modern Europe. *We should never forget that our whole economic, political and intellectual development presupposes a state of things in which slavery was as necessary as it was universally recognized. In this sense we are entitled to say: Without Slavery of antiquity no modern socialism.* (Emphasis added.)

The brilliant collaborator of Marx was careful to add:

> We are compelled to say—however contradictory and heretical it may sound—that the introduction of slavery under the conditions prevailing at that time was a great step forward. For, it is a fact that man sprang from the beasts, and had consequently used barbaric and almost bestial means to extricate himself from barbarism. *Where the ancient communities have continued to exist, they have for thousands of years formed the basis of the cruelest form of state, oriental despotism from India to Russia.* (Emphasis added.)

In India too, it can be seen, prehistoric barbarian society was broken up. Here too man used 'almost bestial means to extricate himself from barbarism'. But as distinct from Europe where the 'bestial means' took the form of slavery, in India we witness the emergence of caste society.

The caste society of historical times was different from the pre-historic tribal society in that the technique and mode of production had become advanced. Enough was produced for a narrow upper stratum of society to be able to live at the expense of the overwhelming majority of the toiling people. The division of society into the three varnas—the Kshatriya, the

Brahmana, and the Vysia—and the rest consisting of the Sudras, was the first division of society into classes in India. But everyone of the four varnas and the innumerable castes that took shape in the subsequent periods retained, at the level of the particular caste, the same consciousness and organization which had kept the previous tribes together. The ruin and disruption of the pre-historic tribes, in other words, led to the creation of a society consisting of a large number of social groups or castes, each with its own sense of solidarity. The factor of class was thus covered up by caste society.

The great merit of slave society as analyzed by Engels was that (a) it led to the flourishing of culture and civilization; and (b) when the system gradually declined and decayed, the internal conflict within society—between the owners and the slaves, between lords and serfs and so on—led to the further development of culture and civilization. The epoch of modern capitalism which gave birth to the bourgeois renaissance was the logical culmination of this never-ending process.

In India too, the establishment of varnashrama society did lead to a flourishing of culture and civilization. Ancient India could successfully compete with any civilized nation of that time, including Greece and Rome, in the richness of its contribution in the field of philosophy, sciences, arts, literature, etc. Unlike Greece and Rome, however, India did not witness the vigorous social conflicts out of which ancient Greece and Rome paved the way for the emergence of Modern Europe.

In other words, the decay of slave society in Europe did not lead to the decay of society as such; it was rather the decay of slavery against which there were powerful forces, and whose struggle ended in the reconstitution of society. In India, on the other hand, the decay of varnashrama society led to the decay of society. The flourishing of culture and civilization, which was the characteristic feature of the early varna society, came to be disrupted and stagnated. The scientific spirit, the materialist outlook, the closeness to the working people—these were the characteristic features of the philosophers, scientists, technologists, etc., in ancient India. These however were forced into subjugation by the dominant classes or castes who came to occupy positions of power.

Reference may in this context be made to the conclusions arrived at by the eminent Marxist philosopher, Debiprasad Chhatopathyaya, in his well-known works such as *The Lokayata*, *What is Living and What is Dead in Indian Philosophy*, *Science and Society in Ancient India*, and so on. We can see in these works not only ancient India's valuable contribution to world culture but also the impediments put in the way of its further development by the formation and consolidation of the caste-based society that took shape here. No other part of the world perhaps has had such a great promise for the future in ancient times, but such a miserable development in its subsequent days, as India, thanks to the formation and consolidation of the caste-based village community in India.

It is to this past that the bourgeois-led national movement has always appealed in its attempt to rally the masses. It may be noted that the most powerful and dynamic ideology with which the Indian bourgeoisie rallied the masses, the peasants in particular, was the revival of the 'age-old' Indian society based on the caste-based village system. Mahatma Gandhi who made the most significant contribution to the mobilization of the Indian people (peasants in particular) against the British rulers worked out a complete scheme of rejecting the machine age and going back to the charkha and other village industries. The anti-imperialist movement took this ideology of revivalism to its logical end—that of reviving the 'glories' of ancient (which means Hindu) civilization.

How tight is the grip of this revivalist ideology on the people even in this last quarter of the present century, is seen in the fact that the Janata Prime Minister and the leaders of the two Congresses, along with such venerable leaders as Vinoba Bhave, Jayaprakash Narain and Acharya Kripalani, are united in giving top priority, among the social problems facing the country, to the implementation of two Hindu revivalist slogans—ban on cow slaughter and prohibition. To cap it all is the Prime Minister with his preaching of urine therapy!

Continuing his analysis of pre-British Indian society and its destruction at the hands of the British rulers, Marx goes on:

> Now, sickening as it must be to human feeling to witness those myriads of industrious patriarchal and inoffensive social organizations disorganized and dissolved into their units, thrown into a sea of woes, and their individual members losing at the same time their ancient form of civilization, and their hereditary means of subsistence, we must not forget that these idyllic village communities, inoffensive though they may appear, had always been the solid foundation of Oriental despotism, that they restrained the human mind within the smallest possible compass, making it the unresisting tool of superstition, enslaving it beneath traditional rulers, depriving it of all grandeur and historical energies. We must not forget the barbarian egotism which, concentrating on some miserable patch of land, had quietly witnessed the ruin of empires, the perpetration of unspeakable cruelties, the massacre of the population of large towns, with no other consideration bestowed upon them than on natural events, itself the helpless prey of any aggressor who deigned to notice it at all. We must not forget that this undignified, stagnatory, and vegetative life, that this passive sort of existence evoked on the other part, in contradistinction, wild, aimless, unbounded forces of destruction and rendered murder itself a religious rite in Hindostan. We must not forget that these little communities were contaminated by distinctions of caste and by slavery, that they subjugated man to external circumstances, that they transformed a self-developing social state into never-changing natural destiny, and thus brought about a brutalizing worship of nature, exhibiting its degradation in the fact that man, the sovereign of nature, fell down on his knees in adoration of Hanuman, the monkey, and Sabala, the cow.

Marx the revolutionary thus did not shed a single drop of tear for the destruction of the 'age-old' civilization of India, while Marx the humanist had full sympathy for and sense of solidarity with the millions who lost their all at the hands of the British. Marx the revolutionary thinker had the perception to see that all the destruction, all the miseries, all the sufferings, all that myriads of men and women were the signals of a new civilization which was to be ushered in. At the same time, he had the revolutionary vision to see that 'the Indians will not reap the fruits of the new elements of society scattered among them by the British bourgeoisie, till in Great Britain

itself the now ruling classes shall have been supplanted by the industrial proletariat, or till the Hindoos themselves shall have grown strong enough to throw off the English yoke altogether'. He was thus waiting for the day when either a proletarian revolution in England itself, or the freedom struggle launched by the Indian people would create an entirely new socio-cultural, political and economic realignment in India, so that the 'age-old' Indian society would be replaced by a sovereign democratic modern India on par with any other civilized country.

The first of the two eventualities envisaged by Marx, a proletarian revolution in England, has not taken place. But the second eventuality—the Indian people themselves throwing the British yoke off their shoulders—has been realized. It is more than 31 years since India became an independent and sovereign nation, ruled by the elected representatives of the Indian people themselves. Nevertheless, the desirable outcome of such a change over in the political-administrative setup is not visible.

The process begun by the British rulers—the destruction of the 'age-old' village system and the development of new capitalist relations in all walks of social life—has of course been further accelerated. But the consciousness and organizational structure of society leading to conflicts, arising out of the caste-based village system, are still a major factor in the day-to-day life of millions of our people. The very political-administrative system which is apparently based on secularism and democracy is penetrated by the consciousness and loyalties of the caste-based village system. The caste-conflicts, the communal riots, etc., of recent years provide irrefutable proof of this fundamental reality.

It is necessary in this context to be cautious about the idea that is very common among political pundits and leaders—the idea that the influence of caste in socio-cultural life is increasing. On the other hand, caste is today far weaker in the day-to-day life of our people even in remote villages than, say, a generation ago. Inter-dining has become common, even inter-marriages are not so rare as they were a generation ago. 'Lower' castes are today much better off than a generation ago, though the majority of the scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and several other backward communities continue to suffer

from their inferior status in society. They have in general acquired power to organize resistance and to stand up for their rights.

As a matter of fact, it is this capacity of the scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and other backward communities to resist oppression that acts as one of the contributory factors giving rise to tensions and conflicts between 'higher' and 'lower' castes in the villages. The rural gentry, belonging mostly to the 'higher' castes, find that their writ runs no more unchallenged. This 'arrogance' on the part of the 'lower' castes so infuriate them that they decide to organize themselves, even to arm themselves, in order to protest their rapidly-losing grip over village society. The 'lower' castes for their part, either by themselves or in alliance with the poorer sections in the 'higher' castes, and with the assistance of secular democratic and left-minded parties and organizations, defend themselves and assert their rights. This defence of the 'lower' castes becomes effective wherever they fight not merely as particular castes, but as part of a common mass movement embracing within its fold the radically oriented sections belonging to all castes, communities, organizations and parties. On the other hand, wherever they are isolated from the common left and democratic movement, they fall and get crushed by the ruling gentry working in collaboration with the officialdom.

What is therefore significant from the long-range perspective is that the development of capitalism and its inevitable reflection in political life—the development of democratic political institutions—are uniting the mass of the Indian people regardless of the caste to which they belong; whether they belong to the 'high' or 'low' castes, the poor and down-trodden are coming together fighting for democracy and defending their class interests. Common organizations such as Trade Unions and Kisan Sabhas on the one hand and political parties fighting for democracy and national advance in a radical direction on the other are bringing the people together in joint struggles on economic, political as well as social-cultural issues cutting across all differences of castes, religious communities and other sectarian groups. Unity of the working class in action referred to earlier in this article is only one, though a very significant instance of this growing trend.

This however does not mean that the differences based on castes, religious communities, etc., have ceased to exist. On the other hand, while their role in socio-cultural life is gradually declining, their role in politics and administration is growing. Caste and other sectarian considerations are percolating into such secular organizations and movements as the Trade Unions and other mass organizations of the fighting people, as well as political parties which are considered to be above these sectarian considerations. It will not be too much of an exaggeration if one were to state that the role of the castes, religious communities and other sectarian factors in present-day social life is in inverse proportion to their role in political-administrative life of the country.

This is not surprising, considering the circumstances in which the secular democratic institutions and movements had their origin and development in our country. The various streams of the movement for modernizing Indian society, beginning with the socio-cultural reform movement launched in the first half of the last century in Bengal, through its variants in other parts of the country, were all so many attempts at grafting the modern bourgeois culture on to the living plant of the 'age-old' Indian civilization and culture. Even the most radical of these social reform movements made serious compromises with the essential elements of what they were supposed to destroy. They were not based on the recognition that 'age-old' Indian culture in which every Indian patriot is supposed to take pride was a culture of stagnation and decay; that no amount of mending it will lead the country towards genuine modernization. The whole attempt therefore was to preserve as much of the old as could be preserved, while imbibing all those that appeared 'good' in the new.

This however was not confined to socio-cultural life but extended to politics and economy as well. The movements for modernizing the polity and economy of the country initiated by the early nationalists, and carried forward by the subsequent generations headed by such outstanding leaders as Ranade, Naoroji, Tilak, Gandhi and Nehru were, in the final analysis, attempts to compromise with the national enemy—foreign rule—and with the outmoded pre-industrial economy. Nowhere was this more visible than in the philosophy and practice of Mahatma Gandhi based on non-violent, non-cooperation, restoration of the charkha and the village industries,

scrupulous adherence to moral values and loyalty to such moral principles as banning cow slaughter and prohibition. What Jawaharlal Nehru—the apparent rebel against but in reality the disciple of Mahatma Gandhi—did was to give a 'modernist', 'leftist' covering to his preceptor's programme of compromise with the alien rulers outside and with the outmoded sociocultural institutions inside. The Gandhi-Nehru epoch, which is considered to be the most significant from the point of view of national mobilization for all-round modernization, was in short an epoch of compromise with those very forces against which the people were supposed to be fighting.

The natural consequence of this compromise made by the bourgeois leadership with the ideologies and institutions of pre-capitalist society was that, by the time the bourgeoisie took shape and organized itself as a class and proceeded to rally the nation behind it, found its own class unity broken. What are now known as the 'fissiparous' tendencies such as casteism, communalism, etc., are the twin brothers and sisters of nationalism as it took shape in India. It is worth noting that within less than half a century of the birth of the Indian National Congress which aspired to become the representative of the entire nation, it had to face challenges from such rival organizations as the Muslim League; the Justice Party and other organizations of the non-Brahmins in the then composite provinces of Madras and Bombay; the organizations of the scheduled castes and other oppressed sections of Hindu society; etc.

The challenge thrown to the Indian nationalists by Lord Birkenhead, the then Secretary of State for India, in the mid 1920s to produce a united draft constitution for free India; the response to it by way of the all-Parties Committee which produced the Nehru report (of 1930); the bitter quarrels among those represented at the Round Table Conference and between most of them and the Indian National Congress culminating in the fiasco of the Conference; these are the most eloquent facts showing the basic weakness of the national freedom movement headed by the Indian bourgeoisie.

All this was conveniently blamed on the 'wily manoeuvres' of the British rulers and the 'lack of patriotism' on the part of the caste and communal leaders. Mahatma Gandhi made the heroic statement that, if only the British

rulers left India to her fate, all the caste and communal problems would be solved immediately and automatically. The total unreality of this assertion was proved not only by the large-scale massacres that accompanied the partition of India—massacres which are perhaps the most inhuman in the history of mankind—but by the fact that, after full 31 years of independence, India today is as politically divided as it was in the pre-independence days on caste and communal lines. Those nationalists who even today blame caste and communal organizations for all the evils that are overtaking our country should ponder over the question of why they (the caste and communal leaders) are able to release the worst kind of sentiments among the people for inciting the most inhuman atrocities on the scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and backward communities.

Lest it should be thought that this is an attempt to justify all that the British rulers did, let it be made clear that all the British statesmen, from Morley and Minto to Wavel and Mountbatten, deserve the most unreserved condemnation for resorting to the worst kind of manoeuvres against Indian's freedom movement. 'Divide and rule' was the classical strategy of the British rulers, as it has been the strategy of earlier imperialist rulers. They did their utmost to set the various castes and communities against the growing aspirations of the Indian people for freedom, to disrupt the growing unity of the Indian people. Even in the immediate post-independence years, Governor-General Mountbatten and Commander-in-chief Auckinluck, as has now been revealed, made the utmost efforts to set India and Pakistan against each other. The question however remains: why were they able to do so? No genuine nationalist can evade this question.

The answer is implicit in what is stated in the early paras of this article. The national movement, as was sought to be built up by its bourgeois leaders, was primarily a movement for the 'revival' of the 'age-old' Indian civilization and culture. This civilization and culture, let us remind ourselves again, is based on the village community at whose centre is the division of society into a hierarchy of castes. Millions of people who had, out of sheer helplessness, borne the burden of this caste-based society, were for the first time able to see that they need no more be bound by the ideology of varnashrama Dharma. They started imbibing a part of the modern bourgeois ideology—freedom, equality and fraternity. They were not

prepared to tolerate a movement which would culminate in the replacement of the then ruling British imperialism by the old varnashrama society.

At the same time, the driving out of the British rulers was understood by the leaders of the Muslim community as the revival of the 'glorious Mughal empire'. Everyone—the Muslims, the Christians, the depressed classes, non-caste Hindus—raised the question: 'What will happen to us when the British are thrown out and a democratic political system is set up?'

The demand for safeguards for the religious minorities, non-caste Hindus, etc., became part of the general political environment. Separate electorates for the minorities, reservation for backward communities and minorities in services—these became the slogans with which every caste and communal organization challenged the right of the Indian National Congress to represent the whole nation. Mahatma Gandhi, the idol of millions, came to be completely isolated in the Second Round Table Conference from where he had to return empty-handed, to land himself and his colleagues into prison.

Did the bourgeoisie learn any lesson from this? Did it not, on the other hand, persist in the same policy? Has it not become a matter of practice for the most popular leaders of bourgeois political parties to pay obeisance to all that is outmoded and obscurantist in Indian society and culture—sadhus, babas, and so on? Have we not witnessed the shameful sight of naked sadhus —naked not figuratively but literally—making a demonstration in the capital city of the country and one of them being invited to and attending a conference presided over by the then lady Prime Minister? Is it not against the background of such a general obeisance to obscurantism that the slogan of Hindu Rashtra has arisen and been made the rallying cry of a para-military organization?

There are of course several bourgeois leaders who try to be secular, make honest attempts to act in a secular way. It is not the intention of the present writer to underestimate the contribution made by such leaders to the development of the secular democratic movement. But it is one thing to attack some of the anti-secular practices of particular parties, organizations and individuals; it is quite another to make an all-sided attack on the very basis of anti-secularism. If one is to adopt the latter position, one has to

abandon all ideas of paying tributes to the 'age-old' civilization and culture of India. One has to realize that the rebuilding of India on modern democratic and secular lines requires an uncompromising struggle against the caste-based Hindu society and its culture. There is no question of secular democracy, not to speak of socialism, unless the very citadel of India's 'age-old' civilization and culture—the division of society into a hierarchy of castes—is broken. In other words, the struggle for radical democracy and socialism cannot be separated from the struggle against caste society.

Radical nationalists should in other words have a second look at what they contemptuously call 'caste and communal organizations' and the slogans they raise. Like the Indian National Congress and other secular democratic movements led by the bourgeoisie, these caste and communal organizations too have played a positive as well as a negative role in the development of Indian politics. Their negative role is obvious in the fact that all of them objectively and many of them even subjectively, sided with the British rulers against the Indian peoples' demand for freedom and democracy.

It would however be one-sidedness to see this to the exclusion of the fact that they were (though in a distorted form) raising the banner of revolt against the Establishment in the 'age-old' Indian society. They were demanding that the holy of holies in society, politics and administration, should not continue to be the monopoly of the 'high caste' Hindus. They were in fact staking a claim for a share in the power which the 'high caste' Hindus were preserving for centuries'.

However distorted in form, this was a demand for democracy. It became so irresistible that the very nationalist leaders who claimed to oppose all forms of casteism and communalism had to agree to reservation for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes not only in Parliament and state Legislatures but also in government services and educational institutions. In some parts of the country where the non-Brahmin movements had come to be well organized arid become strong—such as the present-day states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Maharashtra—reservation even for other backward communities both in government services and in educational institutions has been built into the political

administrative system. The agitation that is now going on in Bihar, and to a lesser extent in UP, for reservation is in fact a demand for the extension to the northern states of what has been continuing in the above-mentioned southern states for almost half a century.

Mention should also be made of the fact that from the ranks of the caste organizations of the non-Brahmins has arisen what is known as the rationalist movement. The emergence of Ramaswamy Naicker, the leader of the left wing in the Justice Party, was the signal for similar movements in other parts of the country, particularly in South India. Once they took shape however, they were not confined to particular castes. They embraced radical elements from all castes and communities. Many of them found it quite natural to join the socialist and communist movement.

It would thus be erroneous and unhistorical to divide the social and political organizations in the country as 'caste and communal' on the one hand and 'national' on the other—the former being 'black' and the latter 'white'. It would however be equally erroneous and unhistorical to look upon these caste and communal organizations as 'revolutionary'. They in fact are as compromising as the more 'national' organizations of the bourgeoisie, such as the Congress. Their compromising attitude towards British imperialism is obvious from the fact that they were used by the British rulers against the national demand for freedom raised by the Congress.

But their compromising trend is seen also in their attitude to the basic structure of Indian society. While fulminating against the caste system—some of them even against religion in the abstract—they failed to see the connection between the struggle against the Establishment (which they were supposedly waging) and the growing organizations of the working people. As a matter of fact, at the very time when they were raising the banner of revolt against the caste-based Establishment and even religion, the fighting organizations of the working people were rapidly growing and getting consolidated through class struggle. The significance of this for the final victory of their own anti-Establishment struggle was not seen by them. Hence the wide gulf between them and the left democratic political parties and mass organizations in the country.

The political implications of this may be seen in the fact that most of the present-day caste and communal organizations have put themselves outside the pale of the growing left and democratic movement. They use the political leverage they have, the support of the particular caste and communities to which they cater, for making political bargains with this or that bourgeois political party. The leaders of the latter, in their turn, are making opportunist use of such caste and communal organizations, raising or opposing the particular slogans raised by these organizations not on the basis of any principle but for purely temporary political and electoral gains. In such a situation where the bourgeoisie has failed to unite the nation and has landed the people into the utmost political chaos, it is necessary for the working class, as well as all forward-looking radical secular democratic forces, to make a completely objective assessment of the caste and communal situation as part of the overall national situation. They should realize that, in spite of all the distortion that are taking place and may repeat themselves in the future too, the unity of all sections of the working people, all the forward-looking democratic forces in the country, for the total modernization of the country in its socio-cultural, political and economic aspects is growing and is bound to grow. It should be the effort of every honest radical democrat to see that this unity is strengthened day by day.

It is at the same time necessary for them to realize that the struggle waged by the millions belonging to the hitherto-oppressed castes and communities is an integral part of the struggle for secular democracy. Unity of the radical and democratic forces within the 'forward' castes and communities with the 'backward' communities is an essential element both for safeguarding the interests of the 'backward' communities as well as for the advance of democracy in general.

Looked at from this point of view, the demand for reservation made by the backward communities will be found a just demand. It should however be noted that this just demand is being raised and pushed forward in a manner in which the working people belonging to the 'forward' communities are pitted against the 'backward' communities. Class unity on the basis of common slogans and demands for democracy is sacrificed for the sake of 'unity' between the exploiters and the exploited in particular

'backward' as well as 'forward' communities. This is a trend which can endanger democracy.

Before concluding, it may be useful to relate the personal experience of the present writer in dealing with the question of reservation for backward communities in his home state of Kerala.

As was noted above, the demand for reservation of backward communities had become part of the democratic movement in South India. In all the three parts of the present-day Kerala State—Malabar, Cochin and Travancore—this principle had thus come to be accepted both in the political programme of the radical nationalists and in the practices of the governments. The new state of Kerala which was formed in 1956 and of which the present writer happened to be the first Chief Minister therefore had the system of reservation for 'backward' communities written into the administrative system.

However, there were certain 'backward' communities (other than Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes) from whose ranks had arisen small groups of well-to-do elements—landlords, business-men, upper layers of the professionals, top government officials, etc.—though the bulk of the community suffered not only from poverty but also from the hang-over of the centuries-old caste oppression. At the same time, increasingly larger and larger sections from the 'forward' communities were becoming impoverished and forced to seek jobs and work under bosses many of whom belonged to 'backward' communities. It was not an uncommon sight to see that a driver, a peon or a domestic servant belonged to the 'forward' community and therefore did not enjoy the benefits of reservation, while their bosses belonged to the 'backward' communities and were therefore the beneficiaries of the benefits accruing from the reservation system.

It was under these circumstances that the first ministry in Kerala formed an Administrative Reforms Committee one of whose terms of reference was the question of reservation. The committee recommended that:

(a) Reservation for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes should continue unchanged;

(b) In the case of other 'backward' communities reservation should continue but its benefit should be denied to those who were above a particular limit of family income.

Ever since then, the question was hotly debated whether reservation should continue, and if it did, whether the reservation should be based on caste or economic status. The leaders of 'backward' communities naturally demanded that it should be based purely on castes; that the provision proposed by the Administrative Reforms Committee for exempting those having an income above a particular limit from the benefits of reservation should be abandoned. The leaders of the 'forward' communities, on the other hand, demanded that reservation should be purely on economic status. What is today being witnessed in Bihar was witnessed in Kerala almost two decades ago.

The proposal made originally by the Administrative Reforms Committee was not accepted by any political party and had therefore to be abandoned. It however was taken over by another committee appointed a decade later which submitted its report in the early 1970s. By this time the political temper in the state had changed so much that every political party—ruling and opposition—accepted it. The Achutha Menon government declared its acceptance and announced that steps were being taken to implement them.

Both the 'forward' and 'backward' communities however launched a tirade against it. And the present ministry headed by Vasudevan Nair has, under political pressures exerted by the caste and communal leaders, announced its decision to reject the proposal and constitute a new committee to go into the whole question afresh. It is thus obvious that Kerala is going to witness once again what it has been witnessing for nearly quarter of a century and what the northern states like Bihar are witnessing today.

The Marxist Theory of Ground Rent

Relevance to the Study of Agrarian Question in India

The Centenary Year of the death of Karl Marx is coming to an end. The Marxist-Leninists in India, along with their comrades in the rest of the world, have used the occasion for an intensive study of Marxist theory as it is applied to the concrete conditions of the present-day India and of the world as a whole. Various specific problems faced by the practical revolutionary movement have been subjected to study and criticism.

There is however one important aspect of the theory of Marxism which has been left out of this study. That is the theory of *Ground Rent*. Lenin calls the detailed analysis made by Marx in Volume III of *Capital* dealing with *Ground Rent* 'the most important section' of the book. His work Karl Marx gives an extremely valuable summary of the main elements of the *theory of Ground Rent*, its division into differential and absolute rent, the capitalization of the Ground Rent into the price of land and its harmful consequences on the growth of agriculture, etc.

It should be admitted that those who undertook the study and popularization of Marxism in India have not paid any attention to this 'most important section' of Marx's *Capital*. This is true not only of our work during this centenary year but earlier as well. None of the studies made by Indian Marxists on the agrarian question so far made any attempt to base itself on the Marxist theory of *Ground Rent*. This reminds us of what Lenin wrote about the Russian 'Social Democratic press on the question of Agrarian Programme', 'practical considerations predominate over theoretical considerations, political considerations over economic'.

Lenin went on: 'The excuse for the majority of us of course are the conditions of intense party work under which we discuss the agrarian programme in the revolution: first after January 22 (9), 1905, a few months before the outbreak and then on the day after the December insurrection and on the eve of the first state duma. But this defect must at all events be

removed now, and an examination of the theoretical aspect of the question of nationalization and municipalization is particularly necessary.'

In our country too, Marxist-Leninists gave 'predominance to 'practical over theoretical' and 'political over economic' considerations. They too were under 'the conditions of intense party work' and discussed various aspects of the agrarian question in the country as the practical revolutionary activity demanded. A voluminous material on India's agrarian problem has thus accumulated by way of articles, books, party documents, etc. They however fail to make an overall and integrated study of the question from the point of view of Marxist theory as expounded by Marx in *Capital* and creatively developed and applied by Lenin and the Leninists.

The core of the theoretical understanding and practical activity of Indian Marxists on the agrarian question was that the 'feudal' or 'statutory' landlordism was the main enemy of the people acting as the stooge of British imperialism. Abolition of feudalism or statutory landlordism therefore became the central slogan on which was developed the militant kisan struggles of the 1930's and the 1940's. It was to realize this slogan that the glorious struggles of this period were waged, culminating in the Tebhaga struggle of undivided Bengal, Telengana, etc., in 1946–1947.

Connected with this was the radical democratic movement for the abolition of princely rule in what was then called 'Indian India' as opposed to 'British India'. The agrarian peasant movement was, in other words, directed against the non-cultivating, rent-collecting landlords and the autocratic administrations in princely states. This constituted the programme of the militant action against the feudal ruling classes—a part of the struggle for Indian freedom.

Integrally connected as this anti-feudal struggle was with the national political struggle against alien rule, for the realization of the national demand for independence, the withdrawal of British rulers from India helped the Indian people to realize in part the demands directed against princely rule and statutory landlordism. The assumption of power by the Congress rulers at the Centre was followed by the integration of princely states with the Indian Union, the establishment of responsible government in all the former princely states, the integration and merger of all the smaller

princely states into a few larger-sized states, and finally in the reconstitution of the existing 'British' Indian provinces and 'Indian' States to form linguistic states.

In the agrarian sector too, radical reforms were made, such as the abolition of zamindari, jagirdari, talukdari, and other forms of statutory landlordism. Even in the non-statutory landlord regions, tenancy reforms provided for fixation of fair rent, restrictions on ejectments, etc., to be followed by legislative measures fixing ceilings on landholdings and providing for the distribution of surplus land.

These changes in the political-administrative set-up of the former princely states and in the agrarian relations in the whole country raised the question of a new theoretical understanding of the agrarian situation. The questions which came to the forefront and had obvious practical implications were: Has the fundamental demand of the peasant movement raised in the 1930's—the abolition of feudal or statutory landlordism—been realized and, if so, what are the perspectives before the militant kisan movement? Sharp differences arose on these questions within the central leadership of the Communist Party of India in 1948. They continued in one form or another in subsequent years. At every stage in this continuing debate, partial answers were found which however were not related to the Marxist theory of Ground Rent and its applicability to the developing agrarian situation in India.

Convinced and committed Marxist-Leninists however were not alone in this discussion on the significance of the changes in the agrarian scene in India, They were joined by a large number of academic economists, administrators and political leaders of the ruling party who too started using terms borrowed from Marxist writings. Together with many who wanted to be loyal adherents of Marxism but whose understanding of the Marxist theory of Ground Rent was poor, they created the impression that bourgeois democratic reforms in India's agrarian system had been completed. Furious debates started, as early as in 1948, within the Communist Party of India, on the extent to which capitalism had penetrated and was likely to further penetrate into agriculture. This, in fact, had been one of the controversial

issues haunting the Communist Party in the inner-party struggles which culminated in the division of the Party into the CPI (M) and the CPI.

Outside the Party too, a section of the academics, administrators and political leaders held that, with the completion of the legislative process, the old 'feudal' land relations had been abolished and 'capitalist' relations established. They made liberal use of the term *kulak*—a category which arose in Russia after the completion of the revolutionary restructuring of land relations under the Bolsheviks—to denote the rural gentry that had been strengthened under Congress legislation. It was on this understanding that many academics, political commentators and leaders denounced as 'pro-*kulak*' the movement led by the left parties for remunerative prices for agricultural products.

The cobwebs that have thus developed around the question of 'feudal' and 'capitalist' relations in Indian agriculture can be removed only by a serious study of Marx's teachings on *Ground Rent* with a view to understanding Indian reality. For, the central teaching of Marx—and Lenin—is that the development of capitalism is not and cannot be confined to some sectors of the economy, such as industry, trade, etc., leaving agriculture unaffected. Capital is a force which brings about changes in all fields of economic activity and changes the entire social life.

It is therefore futile to raise the question whether, in the latter half of the 20th century, Indian agriculture has been subjected to the penetration of capitalism which had undoubtedly been developing during the whole period of the British regime and is now being still further developed under the Congress rule. The question is not of the development of capitalism as such but of the concrete manner of its development and its impact on agriculture. This makes it necessary for us to assimilate the Marxist theory of *Ground Rent* and apply it to the conditions of capitalist development in India. This is what is being attempted in the following pages.

MARX ON GROUND RENT

Marx, in the opening chapter of that part of *Capital* which deals with *Ground Rent*, says: 'the pre-requisites for the capitalist mode of production

are the following: the actual tillers of the soil are wage-labourers employed by a capitalist, the capitalist farmer who is engaged in agriculture merely as a particular field of exploitation for capital, as investment for his capital in a particular sphere of production. This capitalist farmer pays the land-owners, the owners of the land exploited by him, a sum of money at definite periods, fixed by contract, for instance annually (just as a borrower of money capital pays fixed interest) for the right to invest his capital in this sphere of production. This sum of money is called the ground rent no matter whether it is paid for agricultural land, building land, mines, fishing grounds, or forest etc. . . . Here then we have *all three classes—wage-labourers, industrial capitalists and land-owners constituting together and in their mutual opposition the framework of modern society*.'[1]

Rent-collecting landlords are, in other words, as much a part of capitalist as of pre-capitalist society. A social order does not become pre-capitalist for the simple reason that landlords under it live on the rent collected from tenants. Nor does the legislative abolition of rent-collection by landlords (as is done in most radical land reform legislations in some states of India) mean the end of feudal exploitation. The amounts paid to landlords as 'compensation' are in fact the capitalized form of feudal rent which is now part of the market price of land. Rent, as Marx points out, is one of the three forms of revenue in capitalist society, the other two being wage and profit.

From the definition of *Ground Rent* as one essential part of capitalist society, Marx goes on to analyse the two parts into which Ground Rent is divided—*Differential Rent* and *Absolute Rent*. The examination of these two forms of *Ground Rent* leads him to the 'genesis of capitalist ground rent'. He proceeds step by step and distinguishes between *labour rent, rent in kind* and *money rent* as the stages through which capitalist *Ground Rent* is evolved. *Ground Rent is thus what is appropriated by the landlord in capitalist society*, i.e., rent as a share in the surplus value appropriated initially by the entrepreneur in capitalist society. The rent-collecting landlord is thus as much a part of capitalist as of pre-capitalist society.

What then is the essence of capitalist agriculture, as opposed to agriculture in pre-capitalist society? 'On one hand, it (capitalist mode of production) transforms agriculture from a mere empirical and mechanical

self-perpetuating process employed by the least developed part of society into the conscious scientific application of agronomy, in so far as this is at all possible under conditions of private property; it divorces landed property from the relations of dominion and servitude on the one hand, and on the other, totally separates land as an instrument of production from landed property and landowners—for whom the land merely represents a certain money assessment which he collects by virtue of his monopoly from the industrial capitalist, the capitalist farmer; it dissolves the connection between landownership and the land so thoroughly that the landowner may spend his whole life in Constantinople, while his estates lie in Scotland. Landed property thus receives its purely economic form by discarding all its former political and social embellishments and associations, in brief all those traditional accessories which are denounced as useless and absurd superfluities by the industrial capitalists themselves as well as their theoretical spokesmen in the heat of their struggle with landed property.'[2]

The creation of the zamindari, the jagirdari and other forms of property in land by the British rulers through their land settlements, and then the tenancy legislations carried out by them, were the first step towards such a transformation of Indian agriculture. Together with the later Congress agrarian reforms, these first steps taken by the British rulers served to 'divorce landed property from the relations of dominion and servitude' which was the characteristic feature of the pre-British Indian society. Furthermore, they 'separated land as an instrument of production from landed property and the landowner', making it possible for the landowner to collect from 'the industrial capitalist, the capitalist farmer' a 'certain money assessment as rent'. Landed property in this form (as developed by the British and then by the Congress rulers) 'discarded all former political embellishment and associations'. Rent in these circumstances became a form of income for the landowners like the wage for the worker and the profit for the entrepreneur.

The upshot of all these changes in the form of landownership and use of land as an instrument of production is that, unlike in pre-capitalist society, land now becomes a commodity liable to be purchased and sold in the market. This was, by and large, impossible in pre-capita-list society where

ownership of land constituted either a status symbol for its owner, or represented the community—the village, the kinship, the family etc. Alienation of land by way of mortgage or sale was unthinkable so long as pre-capitalist society continued to exist. Pre-capitalist society had to be destroyed, so that land could be bought and sold in the market and used as an instrument of production. This was the role played by the agrarian reforms brought about by the British and then the Indian bourgeois rulers.

What is stated in the above para does not mean that no manner of purchase and sale of land took place in pre-British society. Evidence in fact has accumulated showing that such transactions had been taking place on a small though increasing scale. This was the natural result of the development of commence and money-lending. Land transactions however were few and far between till the British rulers undermined the basis of India's village society.

Analysing the transformation of labour rent into rent in kind, Marx points out that 'it changes nothing from the economic point of view in the nature of ground rent. . . . It is distinct from the preceding form in that surplus labour needs no longer be performed in its natural form, thus no longer under the direct supervision and compulsion-of the landlord or his representatives; the direct producer is driven rather by force of circumstances than by direct coercion, through enactment than through the whip, to perform it on his own responsibility.'[3] What about the transformation of rent in kind into money rent? Taking place as it does 'first sporadically and then on a more or less national scale', adds Marx, it 'presupposes considerable development of commerce, of urban industry, of commodity production in general, and thereby of money circulation. It furthermore assumes a market price for products and that they be sold at prices roughly approximating their values, which need not at all be the case under earlier forms.'[4]

What about the further development of money rent? Marx answers that it 'leads aside from all intermediate forms, e g, the small peasant—tenant farmer—either to the transformation of land into peasants' freehold or to the form corresponding to the capitalist mode of production, that is, to rent paid by the capitalist tenant farmer.

'With money rent prevailing, the traditional and customary legal relationship between landlord and subjects who possess and cultivate a part of the land, is necessarily turned into a pure money relationship fixed contractually in accordance with the rules of positive law. . . .

'Finally, it should be noted in the transformation of rent in kind into money-rent that along with it *capitalized rent*, or *the price of land*, and thus its alienability and alienation become essential factors and that thereby not only can the former peasant subject to payment of rent be transformed into an independent peasant proprietor, but also urban and other moneyed people can buy real estate in order to lease it either to peasants or capitalists and thus enjoy rent as a form of interest on their capital so invested.'[5]

This final form, i.e., money-rent capitalized into the price of land, becomes a liability not only on the actual cultivators but on society as a whole. For, the price of land is the capitalized form of capitalist Ground Rent which began as labour rent, was transformed into rent in kind, which in its turn was transformed into money-rent. Paying as the cultivator does this accumulated load of all these earlier forms of pre-capitalist rent as the purchase price of the land, the interest on the capital invested for purchasing land becomes part of his cost of production. This inevitably keeps the prices of foodgrains and of raw materials at high levels.

What about the cultivator? Marx says: 'The expenditure of money-capital for the purchase of land is not an investment of agricultural capital. It is a decrease *pro tanto* in the capital which small peasants can employ in their own sphere of production. It reduces *pro tanto* the size of their means of production and thereby narrows the economic basis of reproduction. It subjects the small peasant to the money lender, since credit proper occurs but rarely in this sphere in general.

'Even when such purchase takes place in the case of large estates', Marx goes on, purchase price of land 'is a hindrance to agriculture. It contradicts in fact the capitalist mode of production which is on the whole indifferent to whether the landowner is in debt, no matter whether he has inherited or purchases his land. The nature of management of the leased estate itself is

not altered whether the landowner pockets the rent himself or whether he must pay it out to the holder of his mortgage.'[6]

Capitalist Ground Rent which absorbs all earlier forms of pre-capitalist rent, and which assumes the final form of the purchase price of land, is thus a hindrance to the development of agriculture and puts on society as a whole the burden of high prices. Hence the slogan of 'nationalization of land' raised by Marx and defended by Kautsky and Lenin.

ABSOLUTE AND DIFFERENT RENT

Attention may in this context be drawn to the following explanation of Ground Rent by Kautsky which Lenin approvingly quotes:

'As differential rent, ground rent arises from competition. As absolute rent, it arises from monopoly. . . . In practice, ground rent does not present itself to us divided in parts; it is impossible to say which part is differential rent and which part is absolute rent. Moreover, it is usually mixed with the interest on capital expended by the land-owner. Where the landowner is also the farmer, ground rent is combined with agricultural profit.

'Nevertheless, the distinction between the two forms of rent is extremely important.

'Differential rent arises from the capitalist character of production and not from the private ownership of land.

'This rent would continue to exist even under the nationalization of the land, demanded (in Germany) by the advocates of land reform, who preserve the capitalist mode of agriculture. In that case, however, rent would accrue, not to private persons, but to the state.

'Absolute rent arises out of the private ownership of the land, out of the antagonism of interests between the landowner and the rest of society. The nationalization of the land would make possible the abolition of this rent and the reduction of the price of agricultural produce by an amount equal to that rent.

'To proceed: the second distinction between differential rent and absolute rent lies in that the former does not, as a constituent part, affect the price of agricultural produce, whereas the latter does. The former arises from the price of production; the latter arises from tile excess of market price over price of production. The former arises from the surplus, the extra profit, that is created by more productive labour on better soil, or on a better located plot. The latter does not arise from the additional income of certain forms of agricultural labour; it is possible only as a deduction from the available quantity of values for the benefit of' the landowner, a deduction from the mass of surplus value; therefore, it implies either a reduction of profits or a deduction from wages. If the price of grain rises, and wages rise also, the profit on capital diminishes. If the price of grain rises without an increase in wages, then the workers suffer the loss. Finally, the following may happen—and this may be regarded as the general rule—the loss caused by absolute rent is borne jointly by the workers and the capitalists.'[7]

Lenin then adds: 'Thus the question of the nationalization of the land in capitalist society is divided into two materially different parts: the question of differential rent, and the question of absolute rent. Nationalization changes the owner of the former, and undermines the very existence of the latter. Hence, on the one hand, nationalization is a partial reform within the limits of capitalism (a change of owners of a part of surplus value), and on the other hand, it abolishes the monopoly which hinders the whole development of capitalism in general.'[8]

It will be admitted—nobody can dispute the fact—that the agrarian reforms in India do not amount to nationalization, 'a partial reform within the limits of capitalism', to quote Lenin; no change has taken place in the 'ownership of a part of surplus value'. The purchase price of land is thus the capitalized form of *Ground Rent*, its differential and absolute parts.

THE INDIAN AGRARIAN SITUATION

The question arises whether this Marxist theory of rent and the agrarian question applies to India where capitalism has not developed. The theory of Ground Rent as explained by Marx after all is valid only where capitalism

has brought under its domination other sectors of the economy such as industry, trade, banking and so on, and finally agriculture. *Capitalist Ground Rent*, according to definition, is that part of the surplus value in such a capitalist society which is appropriated by the landlord after the labourer is paid wage at the value of the labour power, and the entrepreneur, i.e., the capitalist farmer, realizes the average rate of profit. In India, on the other hand, the labourer is paid at rates lower than the value of labour power. The agricultural entrepreneur too gets lower than average profit for his investment. The labourer's 'wage' and the entrepreneur's 'profit' in Indian agriculture being thus below the average value of labour power and the average profit respectively, can the landlord's revenue here be considered capitalist *Ground Rent*?

All these features are no doubt part of the Indian agricultural situation today. They indicate the heritage of the pre-capitalist order which has to a very large extent been handed down to the growing capitalist relations. The fact however remains that not only has agricultural production become commodity production but land itself has become a commodity freely bought and sold in the market. The rent appropriated by the landlord has assumed its new capitalized form, i.e., the price of land. The rent appropriated by the landlord in Indian society after the agrarian reforms carried out by the British and then by the Congress rulers thus involves: (a) the lowering of the agricultural worker's wages to a level which is less than the price of labour power; (b) the reduction of the income of the cultivator to a level lower than the average rate of profit; and (c) the addition of the interest on the capitalized form of Ground Rent. Such a situation had' in fact been envisaged by Marx when he said in *Capital*:

> We are not speaking now of conditions in which ground rent, the manner of expressing landed property in the capitalist mode of production, formally exists without the existence of the capitalist mode of production itself, i. e., without .the tenant himself being an industrial capitalist, nor the type of his management being a capitalist one.'[9] He cites Ireland as an illustration and goes on: 'The tenant there is generally a small farmer. What he pays to the landlord in the form of rent frequently absorbs not merely a part of his profit, that is, his own

> surplus-labour (to which he is entitled as possessor of his own instruments of labour) but also a part of his normal wage. Besides, the landlord, who does nothing at all for the improvement of the land, also expropriates his small capital, which the tenant for the most part incorporates in the land through his own labour. This is precisely what a usurer would do under similar circumstances, with just the difference that the usurer would at least risk his own capital in the operation.[10]

The tenancy reforms carried out by the British rulers in their day and the more 'radical' agrarian reforms carried out by the Congress rulers (including those carried out in states where there were for some time governments headed by the Communists) thus helped in bringing about a state of agrarian relations in India similar to what Marx pointed out as the specific feature of Ireland. In present-day India, as in Ireland of Marx's times, 'landed property in the capitalist mode of production formally exists without the existence of the capitalist mode of production itself'; the landlord's rent 'absorbs not merely a part of the profit or surplus labour of the labourer but also a part of his normal wage'. The landlord also robs the agricultural entrepreneur of the small capital he has invested in fixing his rent at a rate which does not allow the entrepreneur to realize average profit for his capital. These deductions from average wage as well as from average profit are part of the landlord's rent. It is this rent that is capitalized into the price of land. *Landlord's rent* in India is thus capitalist Ground Rent in form but continues to retain in its essence the characteristics of all its pre-capitalist predecessors.

The above-mentioned similarities between Ireland of Marx's days and present-day India however should not blind us to the differences between them. Ireland then was the direct colony of a capitalist power in the era before the transformation of capitalism from the initial competitive to monopoly or imperialist stage. India today is in the era of capitalism in its most developed form—State Monopoly Capitalism—which means that:

(a) India is politically free with the formal attributes of a bourgeois democratic republic, with the elected representatives of its people at the head of the administration.

(b) The division of the world into a capitalist and a socialist half—along with a large number of Third World countries, India being one of them—enables the ruling classes here to use the contradictions in world politics in order to assert themselves.

(c) While the above two features of the situation are more advantageous to present-day India than to the Ireland of a century ago, the crisis of world capitalism and its impact on the Indian economy and politics make our ruling classes depend on the major capitalist powers for 'assistance' in India's 'modernization', i.e., in taking this country along the capitalist path. This has made the continuing and ever-deepening crisis—not only economic but political and socio-cultural as well—an inseparable part of development.

(d) The crisis of world capitalism has obliged imperialist powers to resort to new manoeuvres. The formal transfer of political power to the former colonies and dependencies including India is one of these manoeuvres. Here formal political-administrative control is replaced by the economic squeeze. Marxist-Leninists call this a change 'from colonialism to neocolonialism'.

A natural consequence of these changes in the political relations between the Indian ruling classes and world capitalism is a change in the internal relations of the bourgeoisie and the feudalists. The former were, in relation to the colonial power, oppositional, while the latter were on the side of the occupying power. Today however, they are both partners in the joint oppression and exploitation of the common people. Not that the two ruling classes have no conflicts and contradictions; these undoubtedly do exist. These contradictions however are overcome in the common interest of preserving, protecting and strengthening the regime and using it against the external and internal forces, i.e., imperialism abroad and the working people at home. The alliance of the two classes is the class character of the present regime.

A package of measures is adopted by the bourgeois-landlord government since 1947: the integration and merger of princely states to complete the formation of the Indian Union, abolition of the zamindari and other forms of statutory landlordism, reforms of the tenancy laws ending with the fixation of ceilings on landholdings, formation of co-operatives, panchayats and other institutions, adoption of modern techniques of scientific

agronomy leading to the 'Green Revolution'. These and other 'reforms' in the rural areas were calculated to and did integrate the two classes—the landlord allies and the bourgeois opponents of the former colonial power—as partners in the political and administrative set-up of free India.

The apparent transformation of what was formerly pre-capitalist rent into capitalist Ground Rent, the presence in this apparently 'capitalist Ground Rent' of *the essence of pre-capitalist exploitation*, i.e., the denial of average wage to the labourer and the average rate of profit to the entrepreneur, the capitalization of this apparently capitalist Ground Rent in the price of land—these were the basis on which the two classes could form a durable alliance. They also provided the basis on which the multinational corporations and their organs like the World Bank and the IMF could penetrate into Indian agriculture.

This transformation of agrarian relations is in keeping with the general transformation of Indian society as analysed in the programme of the CPI (M), i.e., capitalism, including monopoly capitalism, being built on a pre-capitalist basis. Hence the central political task laid down in the Programme —'to unite all the progressive forces interested in destroying the pre-capitalist society and to so consolidate the revolutionary forces within it as to facilitate the most rapid completion of the democratic revolution and preparation of the ground for transition to socialism'.

CONCLUSION FOR THE KISAN MOVEMENT

From this analysis arise some political-organizational conclusions concerning the kisan movement.

First, the movement cannot advance, become 'the axis of the democratic revolution', unless the political perspective with the correlation of class forces spelt out in the Party Programme are kept in mind, the rural toilers being systematically educated along these lines. Let it be recalled that the AIKS became a political force because it integrated the basic slogans of the anti-imperialist political struggle with the fundamental class demand of the peasantry—abolition of landlordism without compensation—and, on the basis of such a programmatic approach, organized partial struggles for day-

to-day demands. This has to be brought up-to-date by making the struggle for People's Democratic Revolution the *key political task* and subordinating all the specific demands of the peasantry to the general demands incorporated in the Left and Democratic programme—a preparation for the realization of the People's Democratic Programme.

Secondly, arising out of the above central task, the peasant movement should take up every question—political and socio-cultural included—rather than confining itself to economic questions. Defence of political democracy as against authoritarianism, preservation and strengthening of national unity against separatism, emancipation of the oppressed castes from the centuries-old bondage, secularism on the basis of complete separation of religion and the state as well as protection of minorities from majority chauvinists, liberation of women from antiquated social institutions, etc. —these should find prominent place in the Kisan Sabha activities. So should the organization take up the questions of war and peace, neo-colonialist attacks on the Third World and other international questions for broad mass campaign. On every one of these national and international questions, the peasant movement should develop relations of united campaigns and struggles with the Trade Unions and other fighting organizations of the working people.

Thirdly, on the economic questions themselves, the earlier emphasis on the struggle for land distribution as the central slogan of action should be replaced by 'channelising many other agrarian currents like the question of wages for rural workers, the issue of rent reduction, the abolition or scaling down of peasant indebtedness, fair price for agricultural produce, the reduction of tax burdens and the abolition of landlord and police *zoolum*,the removal of corruption etc.', even while projecting 'the land seizure and its distribution as the central propaganda slogan' and while 'organising struggles for waste land, forest land and the so-called 'surplus lands' under the ceiling acts' (CPI (M) Jullunder Resolution). This approach, the Resolution went on, will help in harnessing all currents into one big agrarian stream and achieve 'maximum peasant unity isolating the handful of landlords and their hirelings'.

Finally, the Party should undertake the organizational tasks of (a) building mass Kisan Sabhas and agricultural labour organizations; (b) forging unity of action between the Kisan Sabhas and agricultural labour unions, as well as with other organizations of rural toilers; (c) taking national and international politics to the rural toilers; (d) popularising Marxism-Leninism among the rural toilers and organising groups of advanced militants to become Party sympathizers, developing them into Party members. These organizational tasks are inseparable from the political tasks outlined in the Party programme.

NOTES

1 K. Marx, *Capital*, Vol. III, p. 618. Emphasis added.

2 Ibid., pp. 617–18.

3 Ibid., pp 794–95.

4 Ibid., p. 797.

5 Ibid., pp. 798–802. Emphasis added.

6 Ibid., p. 810.

7 Quoted in V.I. Lenin, 'The Agrarian Programme of Social Democracy in the First Russian Revolution', in *Collected Works*, Vol. 13, p. 299.

8 Ibid., pp. 299–300.

9 Marx, *Capital*, Vol. III, p. 625.

10 Ibid.

The Question of Land Tenure in Malabar

Minute of Dissent to the Kuttikrishna Menon Committee Report on Malabar Tenancy Reforms, 1939.

INTRODUCTION

I would have been extremely happy if I could sign the report without striking a discordant note. But I find that the gulf which separates me from my colleagues is so wide that avoiding this, my separate note, would be shirking my duty to the public.

My colleagues have confined themselves to the problems of immediate importance but have avoided the basic question of land tenure. Whether landlordism as an institution serves any useful social function or whether it is parasitic in nature, whether its continuance is a necessity for society at large, or whether it should be ended with or without compensation, these basic questions of land tenure have been omitted. They proceed on the basis of the existence of landlordism as a fact and the necessity of any legislation, within the four corners of that institution alone as practical politics. That explains why, instead of expressing itself clearly on it, the majority report simply gives a brief description of the various theories about the origin and nature of the several interests held by the jenmis, intermediaries and cultivators. I propose to address myself to these basic questions not because they come strictly within the purview of the terms of reference to the committee, but because an explanation of my viewpoint on the basic questions will help in clarifying the reasons for the changes which I set forth at the end to the concrete proposals made by the committee in Chapters VI to XIV. I also feel that in a world of rapid changes where old systems and institutions are tottering under the irresistible impact of new social forces, where basic questions stare you in the face, demanding rational solutions, avoiding them will simply add to the complications already existing.

The following are, in my opinion, the basic questions whose answers should form the foundations for all proposals of tenancy legislation:

1. Whether the jenmis, in their present form, existed before the British occupation of Malabar.

2. Whether the social, economic, political and other changes brought about in Malabar after the advent of the British justify the creation of jenmis in their present form, if answer to (1) is in the negative or its abolition if the answer is in the affirmative.

3. How far the existence of landlordism as an institution (apart from its abuses) leads to the misery of the people of Malabar described in Chapter IV of the Report.

4. Whether, having regard to the needs of social progress, landlordism as an institution should be allowed to continue in any form.

5. What should be the basic nature of agricultural economy obtaining in Malabar?

After expressing myself on these, I shall briefly explain my difference with the majority on Chapters VI to XIV.

NATURE OF JANMAM PROPERTY IN THE PRE-BRITISH DAYS

I do not presume to have made any original research into the historical aspect of land tenure in Malabar. As every other student of the subject, I have to fall back upon the brilliant contributions of a host of witnesses from Mr. Logan to Sir Charles Turner. And as the majority report itself states, no fresh evidence has been collected during the course of the labours of the present committee. But I believe that if a proper outlook is taken on the subject, the evidence already collected is sufficient to show that *janmam* right, in the present form, and with its present incidents, did not obtain in early days.

Now, what is the proper outlook that should be taken? I feel that most witnesses on either side have taken certain things for granted which are quite unwarranted so far as society in these days is concerned. The most

important of these is that there was a definite written code of laws which was enforced by a specific authority. This is obviously a false assumption. As in all medieval societies it was custom and not law which ruled the country. The very power of custom even in these days in those fields of social activity which are yet unaffected by British rule or British culture shows the enormous lengths to which custom can go in regulating the social relationship of man in a medieval country. I do not think anybody can quarrel with Mr. Logan when he says: 'If it were necessary to sum up in one word the law of the country as it stood before the Muhammadan invasion, and British occupation, that would undoubtedly be the word custom'.

To expect that documents of these days would specifically state the exact relationship between landlord and tenant, would be the greatest mistake. To argue that because the *janmis* are not able to produce documents showing their right to *janmam* property, they had no right whatever in early days would be as absurd as to argue that because the tenant's rights to perpetual and undisturbed enjoyment of the leased land is not mentioned in the documents, he can be evicted at the sweet will of the *janmi.* The fact of the matter is that the rights of both were well defined by custom and accepted universally as a matter of course. We have therefore to fall back upon not any written documents, but on custom.

If this fundamental fact is clearly borne in mind, there will be no difficulty in coming to the conclusion that, whatever other incidents it had, landlords in Malabar had not the right to arbitrary eviction and arbitrary increase of rents with which it has been clothed by British jurists. Whatever the theoretical position, it is undeniable that eviction was most uncommon in practice, even Sir Charles Turner admits that:

'Although a right of occupancy was then unknown, to the law of Malabar, it practically, to some extent, existed'.

For various reasons, like the abundance of cultivable land, no *janmi* could afford to evict a tenant except for non-payment of rent or on other grounds which society at large would justify as sufficient for eviction. Likewise was it the case in respect of rents. Whether or not the *janmi* had the theoretical right to enhance the rent, he could not afford to raise it above a certain customary rate. Rack-renting and arbitrary eviction were not in

practice, the incidents of *janmam* right. Even today, good *janmis* (i.e., those *janmis* who consider themselves above the modern notions of social habits and who would like to have the old customs maintained in their pristine glory) consider it beneath their dignity to rack-rent or arbitrarily evict their tenants. I therefore think that *janmam*, as understood according to ancient custom, is different from *janmam*, as defined by British jurists.

The same fact may be stated in another way. Right of private property as an economic institution is a modern conception. What obtained in medieval days was not a legal relationship between one individual and another, but a social relationship of members of a social organism. It follows from this that right to property (either of the *janmi* or the *kanamdar*) was a right on society which had along with it a corresponding obligation to society. While society would scrupulously protest the rights, it would jealously guard itself against violations of obligations. The jenmis who arbitrarily evicted or otherwise oppressed a tenant would as surely be dealt with by society as the tenant who did not pay the customary rent or pay the customary allegience to the jenmi. When custom as law and society as its guardian gave place to written code and modern courts, the *janmis*, as the stronger party, were not only relieved of their obligations but as Sir T. V. Madhava Rao brilliantly sums up:

Those causes which prevent the dispossession of landed property and which concentrate landed property, and which tie it up in hands of the jenmis have been too rigidly maintained or enforced by the courts. A strictness or rigidity has been imparted to them which they formerly did not possess.

If certain new incidents of *janmam* right were added on by British jurists to the rights already existing according to the old customary law, certain other incidents which obtained as per custom were put an end to by it. The jenmi of old (i.e., pre-British days) was not a mere landlord; his only privilege was not receiving rent. He was the centre of a system around whom the people of the locality gathered to regulate their social conduct. He collected around him a host of scholars who provided the cultural centre for the whole society. That centre itself functioned as the place wherefrom justice was meted out to the people. He was also the agent of the Raja or

Zamorin (whatever it may be) in the matter of collecting an army for the purpose of war. He was, in short, not a rent-receiving landlord, but the head of a social system based on feudal relationship which regulated not only the economic but social, political and cultural life of man. He was more of a *Naduvazhi* or *Desavazhi* than a landlord.

What the British occupation of Malabar did was to wrest from the jenmis all such powers and privileges. The jenmi was no more to act as the agent of the Raja or Maharaja; the redivision of the country into revenue areas and paid officers to look after their affairs placed the whole administrative system on an entirely new footing and the jenmi had no place in it, except that of an influential man of the locality. His hold on the people was slowly but surely being destroyed by modern notions of social relationship. The western culture based on individual liberty and democratic relationship between man and man replaced the ancient native culture which had the jenmi's small selected circle of scholars as its nucleus. All this was not completed in a day. It could not be done even in a few years' time. Much of it remains yet to be done. But the British advent laid the foundation for these things. And no power on earth could stop its uninterrupted operation which would result in the complete elimination of the jenmi from the social and cultural scheme of things. Here is a higher and more advanced form of society and its perfected machinery of state and culture acting as the tool of history in destroying a decadent social system and a dead or dying culture. Feudal society and medieval culture cannot for long resist the triumphant march of capitalist society and modern culture.

Thus, in short, the British rule made a two-fold change in land tenure. (1) It took away certain rights and privileges of the jenmi which were social, political and cultural in character. (2) It gave him new unrestricted rights on the landed property held by him. That is, from a relationship based on status, land tenure was turned into one of contract. The advocates of different interests forget this fundamental fact when they argue that their right in the soil is admitted by history. A relationship based on contract, however natural to us in modern days, was unthinkable in those days.

Accustomed as we are to modern conceptions of property, we are often likely to be misled into the belief that the property in its present form existed

at all times, even as we are likely to be misled into the belief that law, as opposed to custom, ruled our mutual relationships at all times. This assumption accounts for the fallacious arguments on the existence of private property in land in Malabar from very early days. When the advocates of the interests of the jenmis argue that Malabar was never a land of state ownership of land, they may or may not be right; but when they go a step further and say that therefore all land in Malabar was private property, over which the predecessors of the present-day jenmis had an unrestricted right, they are obviously forgetting the basic principles of the history of human development. They forget the irrefutable fact that property, like other social institutions, is ever-changing, over-developing. Property, or the laws which govern its possession and use, is as much prone to changes as any other social institution. It did not practically exist in early days, but it arose at a particular stage in the history of social development and began to develop with society. I do not propose to refer to the writings of the various historians, economists and sociologists in this regard. I would, however, like to quote the following extracts from 'Wealth', by Edwin Cannan, Emeritus Professor of Economics in the University of London, which summarises the development of property in land:

'The idea of property in land does not appear to come quite so early. Primitive mankind was in much the same relation to the land that mankind at present is in relation to the sea. The men were few, the land was big; the number of men using the land was not large enough to make them any appreciable inconvenience to one another. But when numbers grew, each other began to feel itself menaced by and therefore to resent the appearance of strangers in the district over which they were accustomed to roam, and which they had accustomed themselves to call 'their' hunting grounds.

'In regard to land, however, there was much less possibility of sympathy from disinterested persons than in regard to movables. The dispute involved two whole groups, one of which was interested in making, and the other in resisting the invasion. Opinion outside these two groups would be distant (having regard to the facilities of communication) and probably ill-informed, especially if languages differed. Moreover, the causes of disputes were not so simple in themselves. There is not likely to be much difficulty in ordinary cases in deciding who is the person usually in the habit of carrying

a particular bow or spear or of occupying a particular cave or house. But there may easily be great difficulty in deciding whether the one or the other group is the one which usually hunts in some particular valley or on some particular mountain side. Quarrels were frequent and could not be settled by a trail of forces between the two interested groups. If the victory of one side was decisive, it often led to some sort of incorporation of the vanquished which led to the amalgamation of the two territories into one so that now a larger territory would be held under one authority against all invaders. When two territories were amalgamated into one, it would not necessarily or probably follow that the whole territory would be one property; much more often the old line of demarcation would be preserved or in some cases, it would even happen that entirely new divisions of the territory might be made for its convenient use by several groups, each under a subordinate authority or in some way united together and divided from the rest. The land held by each of these groups is 'their' in a somewhat different sense from that in which the land of all the groups now under one authority is 'theirs'. It is their property while the whole land is their country or territory.

'It was long before the difference between property in land and territory was grasped. It is scarcely grasped at the present time in many minds when acquisition of territory by a sovereign state is in question. But in practice the distinction has been recognized over since conquest or other acquisition of territory ceased to carry with it the entire dispossession of the properties of the land annexed.

'While the territories of small groups, defined only by force of arms against external aggression, were thus being transformed into collective property recognized by the governing authority of the larger territory of which they now formed a part, the idea of property in land was gaining strength in another direction, owing to changes within the areas occupied by the small groups. The site of a house with some small curtilage must necessarily be subject to the same idea as the house itself, so far as the 'right' to undisturbed occupation is concerned. It is practically difficult to differentiate the house and its site.

'So people early began to regard the homesteads as 'theirs' and to be supported by the authority of the group in maintaining their position not

only against outsiders but even against other members of the same group. But at first there could be no similar ideas with regard to the rest of the land of the group; land being plentiful and men few, a single person or family would not be likely to claim a particular stretch of land as land which it had occupied, and which, therefore, should not be touched by others. In search of game every man would desire to roam over the whole of the land wherever the quarry happened to take him. So too pastoral people would turn out their flocks and herds with the idea that they should all be able to go where they would in search of pasture. Even arable cultivation could be carried on in common by groups consisting of moderate number of persons without any very great problem of organization being encountered. As time went on, however, it was found practically convenient to allow permanent occupation of plots of land for arable purposes by individuals and their heirs, and eventually, even the pasture was divided up with the small exceptions which we see in the commons of the present day.'

One need not subscribe to every detail of what Professor Cannan says, but all students of the development of economic institutions must admit that property (much less individual and private property) did not exist in early days; that property in land arose much later; that property in other things and the character of property itself is changing with changes in the environment of man. It is this general statement of a historical fact to which I want to draw attention. If this is borne in mind, much that is otherwise inexplicable would become quite clear. The conflicting theories deduced by various writers from seemingly contradictory facts become explicable. That, whereas in most documents collected by research students on Malabar Land Tenures, the character of the property is not mentioned, there are certain of them which go to show, as says the Fifth Report, that 'the lands in general appear to have constituted a clear private property, more ancient and probably more perfect than that of England' becomes no more a contradiction when it is remembered that we are dealing with a society developing through the course of centuries; that gradually the institution of private property is developing in the impact of modern social forces; and that it begins to take deep roots in the people and expresses itself in various ways. Although it was the advent of the British that became the main agent of this development in its modern and perfected form, it should be

remembered that the same forces which operated in Britain since Renaissance, operated in Malabar also, though in a weak and undeveloped form. The forces which gave rise to Reformation, which sent the Pilgrim Fathers to foreign countries, and colonized America and established commercial contacts with India, which waged a relentless struggle against despotism, and wrested political power for the rising middle-class, which carried out the great industrial revolution and changed the whole face of the earth, did operate in Malabar although not in the same form and to the same intensity as in the case of property and as that on land. A rigidity is gradually given to social relationship which was unheard of before. People who would rest content with custom and pledged work begin to emphasize their right not only on the soil but on everything above and below it, including snakes, stones, thorns and caves, as is seen in certain old documents collected by Mr. Logan. When and how this change was brought about, why it had to wait for the British to come before it had completed – these and other allied questions are irrelevant for the moment. What I want to emphasize is that land tenure is not a static phenomenon but an organic institution of a dynamic society.

It should be treated as such. We cannot treat it away from its social backgound and hang it in the air. The forces which lie behind it at this stage must be closely studied if we want to arrive at correct conclusions.

I, therefore, approach the problem, not from a legalist point of view, but from a sociological one. It is not the legality or otherwise of the existing right of present-day jenmis which I am interested in, but the forces which gave rise to it and the forces that work behind it now. That, I feel, would go a long way in the solution of their problem. Because, even if innovations have been made by British Courts, the restoration of the *kanamdar* to his old position is unthinkable today, not because it would deprive the jenmi of his existing rights, but because it would not solve a single problem among the many which have arisen during the last century and a half. I would now address myself to the task of examining these new problems which give the clue to a rational solution of the question of land tenure in Malabar.

EFFECTS OF BRITISH OCCUPATION ON THE ECONOMY OF MALABAR

I have already stated in brief outline how the social and cultural changes brought about by the advent of the British entrenched landlordism in full and unrestricted mastery over agricultural land in Malabar. But that is not the only result of the advent of the British; it brought about a veritable revolution in the economy of the whole country. It has affected every department of man's activity in India and a consideration of the same is intimately connected with an examination of Land Tenure.

The Indian Industrial Commission of 1916–18 in their Report (Chapter 1) after stating that:

The coming of the railway and steamship, the opening of the Suez canal, and the extension of peace and security by the growth of British power have brought about very great changes, and describing the state of things in 'India before Railways' (Paragraph 3), examine in what way the state of affairs has been modified.

About *economic changes in rural areas* they say:

'Turning in the first place to the rural areas, we find an increasing degree of local specialization in particular crops, especially in those grown for export. Cotton is now no longer planted in small patches in almost every village where conditions are not absolutely prohibitive, but is concentrated in areas which are specially adapted to its various types. The dry plains of Central and Western India are admirably suited to a short-stapled but prolific kind; while the canal fed zone of the Punjab, the United Provinces and Sind are producing an increasing quantity of large-stapled types which are also grown in the retentive soil and moist climate of Gujarat and the well-irrigated areas in Madras. The peculiarly favourable climate of Bengal has tempted the ryots to extend their jute cultivation often at the expense of their foodstuffs, while sugarcane is disappearing from tracts not specially suited for it. A visible sign of this movement may be seen in the abandoned stone-cane mills lying near villages in arid plains in central India which now prefer to keep their scanty stores of water for other crops and pay for their sugar by the sale of their cotton. The people have been led to make this

change by the cheap railway and steamer transport and by the construction of roads, which while facilitating the introduction of foreign imports, also render available to the farmer in his distant and landlocked village a large share of the price offered by far-off nations for articles which once merely supplied the needs of Indian rural life. Markets have sprung up on or near the railway, where the foreign exporters or the larger Indian collecting firms have their agencies; and the ryot is now not far behind in his knowledge of the fluctuations in the world prices of the principal crops which he grows.

'Improved means of communications have had another important effect in altering the nature of the famines to which so large a part of India is exposed and in lessening their disastrous results.

The development of irrigation and the improvement of agriculture enable the country in a normal year to grow a much larger quantity of foodstuffs than before, and it is now possible, thanks to the railways, to divert supplies from the export trade to the famine-stricken tracts. Famine now connotes not so much a scarcity of entire absence of food as high prices and a lack of employment in the affected areas. The terrible calamities which from time to time depopulated wide stretches of the country need no longer be feared. The problem of relief has been scientifically studied, and a system worked out which can be put into operation as soon as the recognized signals of the approaching distress are apparent. Failure of the rains must always mean privation and loss of life. It is clear that, if the basis of employment also be widened, crop failures will lose much of the severity of their effects, and the extension of industries, in as great a variety, as circumstances will permit, will do more than anything to secure the economic stability of the labouring classes.

SCARCITY OF CAPITAL FOR AGRICULTURE

'The capital in the hands of country traders has proved insufficient to finance the ordinary movements of the crops and the seasonal calls for accommodation from the main financial centres are constantly increasing. This lack of available capital is one cause of the high rates that the ryot has to pay for the ready money which he needs buy seed and to meet the expenses

of cultivation. On the other hand, money is largely invested in the purchase of landed property, the price of which has risen to very high figures in many parts of the country. Proprietors freely spend their savings from current income on the improvement of land in their own cultivation, but loans from private persons are obtainable as a rule only on terms quite disproportionate to the value of the improvements. These are also most invariably made on land in the investor's own possession, not in that of his tenants. The magnificent irrigation system of India, the drainage works of Bengal, and the relatively small amount that has been advanced by Government as improvement loans are almost the only instances where public funds have been definitely devoted to this end. The demand for capital for land improvement had hitherto perhaps been modest but the stimulus afforded by the various provincial Agricultural and Industrial Departments, especially in Madras, has led to the introduction on a small, but rapidly increasing scale of modern appliances to replace labour, improve cultivation; something has been done by the co-operative movement, initiated and fostered throughout by Government action, and far more may be hoped from it in the future. But the no less urgent necessity of relieving the ryot from the enormous load of debt, with which he has been burdened by the dearness of agricultural capital, the necessity of meeting periodical demands of rent, and his local habits, has hitherto been met only to a very small extent by co-operative organization.

LABOUR AND WAGES IN INDIA

'It is impossible to pass from this brief sketch of the agricultural position without some allusion to the rise in the level of wages and the growing scarcity of labour in most parts of the country. The rise in the cost of labour is due mainly to the increased demand but in some places to the decline in the labouring population consequent on the ravages of plague during the past twenty years and on famine in the last decade of the nineteenth century, although we do not forget that the population as a whole increased by some twenty millions between 1901 and 1911. This period of distress was followed by a sequence of more favourable seasons combined with higher world-prices. This prosperity in its turn led to greater expenditure by Government,

railway companies, and private enterprise, necessitating increased employment. Simultaneously, the increase in world-prices which became effective in India owing to the rapid extension of communications, brought the cultivator some money, and the consequent rise in the cost of living furnished an additional argument to the labourer in his claim for higher wages. This tells heavily on those sections of the population which are not benefited by increased agricultural and industrial production, and has accentuated the tendency of the village artisan to migrate to the towns where better pay is obtainable.'

MIDDLEMAN AND THE EXPORT TRADE

'The export trade from country districts generally suffers from the existence of an undue number of middlemen, who intercept a large share of the profits. The reasons for this are various. In the first place, it must be remembered that a great number of Indian cultivators are indebted to a class of traders who not only lend money, but lend, purchase and sell grain, and sell articles as cloth, salt and oil to small consumers. The position of a peasant farmer, with grains, seeds or cotton to sell, and at the same time heavily indebted to his only possible purchaser eventually prevents him from obtaining a fair market price for this crop. Even where the farmer is not burdened by debt his business with the dealer is still very often on a per contra basis, his purchases and sales being alike reckoned in cash in the dealer's books at a rate which is always known to the customer at the time. The farmer, owing partly to poverty and partly to the extreme subdivision of land, is very often a producer on so small a scale that it is practically impossible for him to take all his crop to the larger markets, where he can sell at current market rates to the agents of the bigger firms. This is especially the case in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa and the United Provinces. Here most of the articles for export are purchased from local dealers by the exporting agencies. The larger markets are usually frequented by an unnecessary number of brokers and touts; and there are almost always one or more intermediaries between the purchaser who moves the grain to the point of consumption or export and the producer or other persons who actually bring the crop into the markets. The market rules and organization do not

usually provide means for preventing or punishing fraudulent trade methods: While the multiplicity of the local weights and measures in many cases it must be admitted the natural desire of the seller not to be the only person defrauded, contribute still further to an undesirable state of affairs. Complaints are frequent but all parties accept what appears to them the inevitable. But, where a better organization has been established the ryots thoroughly appreciate the benefit.'

EFFECTS OF IMPORTS

'Such are some of the far-reaching effects of the increased flow of exports from India. The greater number and variety of imports have also had their influence though in a less marked degree. Vessels and implements of iron, brass and copper are now commonly used in villages and their price is within the reach of almost all classes. Petty articles of domestic use or personal ornament, such as scissors, mirrors, bangles, and the thousand and one cheap and glittering trifles with which the rural huckster decks his stall, have poured in from abroad. Drugs and patent medicines of all kinds, Indian and foreign, command a ready sale. Sewing machines are found nearly everywhere, and bicycles are ever in increasing demand.

'The effect on small industries in India has been considerable, but has not always been in the same direction. The imports of brass sheets, for example, has reduced the demand for the services of the brass founder, but has greatly extended the business of the maker of brass hollowware. Cheaper iron obtainable in convenient sections has helped the cultivator to buy more and better carts, and diminished the cost of many of his indigenous implements. The position of the village artisans is changing. The tendency is for them to lose their status as village servants, paid by the dues of the village community, and to become more and more ordinary artisans, who compete freely among themselves for custom; in some cases, notably that of the village leather-worker, they are disappearing under the competition of organized industries. The influx of mill-made piece-goods not only of foreign, but of Indian manufacture had before the war cheapened the price of cloth in comparison with other commodities and had enormously extended its use by the poorer classes but had at the same time prejudicially

affected the communities of weavers scattered over the country in the towns and larger villages. In India a far greater degree of resistance has been offered by the handloom to the aggressions of the factory than in England. This is attributable to the greater number of specialized types of cloths of which slow-moving Indian custom decrease the use; to the fact that the demand for many of these is on so small a scale, while the types themselves are so special as to render it difficult for the powerlooms to produce them at a profit; to the faithfulness of the weavers as a caste to their hereditary trade, and their unwillingness, especially in the smaller towns, to take up factory work; and to a less extent to the money locked up, on a vicious system, it is true, in the financing of the weaver by his patron and incubus, the money-lending cloth-merchant.'

STANDARD OF LIVING AFFECTED BY IMPORTS

'The effect of the use of imported and factory-made articles on the standard of comfort of the rural population has been however small. The poverty of the Indian peasant precludes most novel forms of expenditure while lack of education and the prescriptions of custom make him slow to accept any innovations in his food or clothing or in the habit of his daily life. But the enormously extended use of cotton cloth, especially of the finer counts, of woollen clothing, the introduction of kerosene oil, matches, collapsible umbrellas, and of better and cheaper cutlery and soap have added appreciably to the comforts of the people.

'The increase of exports and imports has facilitated the provision of funds for communications, the existence of these communications has itself had an educative effect on the people, had gradually helped to render labour more fluid and incidentally more costly and has added to the sense of political unity among the more educated classes'.

The extracts given above go unmistakably to show that the changes brought about in the rural economy of India are fundamental; that, in place of the indigenous and medieval economy based on the close harmony between agriculture and cottage industries, a new economy was built upon the basis of a dominant foreign industry to which the whole Indian

economy was subjected both as a cheap source of raw material as well as a vast market for finished products; that, though the feudal relationship between the various component parts of society was maintained in form (and virtually strengthened as in the case of the intensification of the power of the landlords which we have already observed), Indian economy was, in fact, placed under the subjection of a capitalist system which dominated over feudalism itself. Although modern industries did not spring up in India, although landlordism was not abolished in form, it was the power which smashed feudalism and built up the huge industrial undertakings in other countries that began to control Indian economy. The very landlords created or maintained by British rule came under the way of capital, the very agriculture became a handmaiden of industry, with this difference that this capital which controlled feudalism and this industry which dominated over agriculture were foreign.

Here is the great contradiction in history that while the British power destroyed feudalism in its social, political and cultural aspects, it installed it (where it did not exist) and strengthened it (where it existed) in its legal aspects; that, while the British administrative system dethroned the political power of the native feudal nobility, while it supplanted the old medieval culture with its own culture, while it subjected the native feudalism to its economic domination, it strengthened the landlords who should naturally have been completely done away with by it. To go into the causes thereof is not my purpose here. But I must draw attention to the fact that it has affected our economy to a great extent.

According to the statistics collected by the committee, the jenmis had under their direct cultivation, 171,662 acres of land out of a total of 1,506,992 acres of cultivated land in Malabar in *fasli* 1347. This means that they have leased out 1,335,327 acres to tenants under them. It is difficult to find out how much they receive out of this as rent. Assuming, however (as the Majority Report shows), that the average yield of paddy lands is 150 *paras* per acre, and that the average yield per acre of coconut garden is Rs. 30 worth of nuts, assuming again that the *janmi* gets rents at rates prescribed under the present Act, the *janmis* in Malabar would be getting roughly Rs. 20 lakhs from wet coconut garden lands (352,132 acres in *fasli* 1347 at Rs. 6 per acre) Rs. 225 lakhs from wet land (561,550 acres in *fasli* 1347 at Rs. 40

per acre), another Rs. 63 lakhs on dry land (at three times the assessment on dry land which is, in *fasli* 1347, Rs. 21 lakhs), the total amount on leased land would come to Rs. 308 lakhs. Deducting out of this Rs. 45.5 lakhs for revenue (which is the amount for *fasli* 1347) the *janmis* get a net rent of Rs. 252.5 lakhs or about Rs. 2.5 crores. I am conscious of the inaccuracies in these calculations, but since these are based on the existing provisions in the Act, and since rents actually collected are higher than at this rate, they can be taken as roughly correct. Assuming, however, that this is not correct and the actual rent collected is only Rs. 2 crores, it does not affect my arguments.

If the payment of this amount goes in hand with some social service rendered by the landlords as a class, it would be quite justified. That was the explanation for payments made in medieval days. That is also the justification for Rs. 45 lakhs paid by the cultivators into the Government coffers as land revenue. In the medieval days landlordism was a social, political and cultural institution, as well as economic. But shorn of all these functions, the Malabar jenmis of today are only dead corpse of their own forefathers; and it is this dead corpse that has given added importance to it. But does it justify its economic importance by performing any useful function in that sphere as does the entrepreneur in modern capitalist industry? Does it provide capital, either short-term or long-term, to the cultivator who needs it? Does it construct, and improve irrigation sources and prevent the preventable drought? Does it carry on any research work to make agriculture up-to-date and scientific? Does it do anything towards organizing the marketing of agricultural produce and thereby see to it that the cultivator gets a fair value for his produce? Does it organize or encourage cottage industries so as to provide some subsidiary occupation to the cultivator? In short, if, by an act of legislature, the jenmis of Malabar are today deprived of this Rs. 2.5 crores which they get as rent, will the effect be similar to that on the industry if the entrepreneur is, by an act of legislation, suddenly removed and not replaced by a rational alternative system? The answer to the questions raised above would show sufficiently well that landlordism does not justify itself economically; that it gets its rent for no service rendered to society, that therefore it is parasitic in nature, and that any scheme of economic planning should include its abolition.

ABOLITION OF LANDLORDISM – A PRE-CONDITION FOR ECONOMIC PLANNING

The appropriation by the jenmis of Malabar, as a class, of Rs. 2.5 crores out of the annual agricultural production of the country without any return to the cultivator; this tribute which he pays to this decadent class, is the core of rural economy in Malabar. How does its abolition help our economy to improve itself and develop on up-to-date lines? In other words, how would the tiller of the soil stand to gain if he is allowed, instead of the jenmi, to appropriate this Rs. 2.5 crores?

Lack of finance is notoriously the basic factor which keeps our agriculture so backward. When the cultivator does not get sufficient returns to maintain himself and his family at a reasonable minimum standard of living, he cannot be expected to invest money on improved methods of cultivation. Nor is he in a position to put something by for use in lean years. He is, therefore, not only obliged to keep his cultivation at a very backward stage but to rely on the rural money-lender for credit. Several experts have gone into the question of agricultural improvement and the solution of the problem of rural indebtedness. Excellent schemes have been put forward, but unfortunately all of them lack the essential pre-requisite to carry it through. What is the use of carrying on research into the possibilities of agriculture and giving wide publicity to new attractive schemes, unless the majority of cultivators who should apply them have the wherewithal to do so? And what is the use of scaling down agrarian debts unless the debtor-peasant is in a position to pay it off even after its being scaled down? And, finally, what is the use of Co-operative Societies and Land Mortgage Banks unless the cultivator who is supposed to benefit by it is allowed to have sufficient resources to offer as security? All the grandiose schemes of agricultural improvement and co-operation come to nothing not because our peasant is by nature immune from such influences, not because he is illiterate and dull-witted, but because he is financially unable to make use of them.

By abolishing Landlordism, the Rs. 2.5 crores which he now pays will be available to him. By a judicious use of this, his position can be very much improved. Let us make a rough calculation.

Applying the tests used by the provincial Banking Committee report (Debt per head of population, Debt per acre of land and Debt per rupee of assessment) the total indebtedness of the Malabar peasant would roughly come to Rs. 15 crores. Allowing Rs. 4 crores for the indebtedness of non-cultivating agricultural classes, and Rs. 4 crores for the amounts which could be scaled down under moderate provisions, the peasantry would still have to pay Rs. 7 crores as its debt. If the Government came forward with the bonds to the creditor, to which the land would stand as security, the whole of this debt would be wiped out in 30 years if the peasant was asked to pay at the most 9 per cent including interest and the annual installment towards principal. This would work out at Rs. 63 lakhs. Let us set it apart out of the Rs. 2.5 crores. Let us set apart, out of the balance, Rs. 50 lakhs for the peasantry's contribution to various forms of co-operation (short-term credit, agricultural improvement, dairy and poultry-farming, housing, education, etc.) the co-operative movement would then be taken out of the depths to which it has fallen, a new spirit would pervade the whole countryside, and agriculture will begin to become a business proposition. And, finally, let us lay aside the balance of Rs. 137 lakhs for the actual consumption of the peasant. With more food for himself, his family and his cattle, he will become a sturdy and independent peasant. All the annual Baby-weeks and shows have not been able to make our rural children really healthy, but this one will, because it will make nutritious food available to them. Children will flock to the schools and sick ones will be properly attended to.

The abolition of the appropriation by the *janmis* of this 2.5 crores, therefore, is the key to the whole problem and therefore the pre-condition for any economic planning. But it is not the peasant alone who stands to gain by it. Industries, large and small, will also get their share with the improvement of the countryside. The higher standard of life of the peasant would make industrial labour itself much more efficient than it is today, because the major part of its inefficiency consists in poor physique and a great majority of the workers in India, according to the Whitley Commission (a much higher percentage in Malabar than elsewhere) 'are at heart villagers, they have had in most cases a village upbringing, they have village traditions and they retain some contact with the villages'. Any improvement, therefore, in the condition of the villagers will have its

influence (in most cases perhaps indirect, but in many cases direct) on the efficiency of labour. Much greater than this is the benefit accorded to the industry by the wider market. The Rs. 137 lakhs laid aside for the peasantry's consumption would provide for its products. Special mention should be made of the textile and tile industries, because the first thing that the peasant would, perhaps, do is to house himself and clothe himself better. Above all, this will furnish industry with additional capital. When one is not allowed to take rent out of land which he does not cultivate, capital will not flow towards land as it does today. The man who has grown rich either by profession or business does today invest his earnings in land because, although the capital thus invested is not productive, from the veiw-point of that industry it is as productive of profit for him as it would be if he had invested it in industry. How much money is thus invested every year, it is difficult to find. But the statistics of registration show that, in 1938, 22,601 sale deeds had been registered in Malabar at an aggregate value of Rs. 89,62,288 and 42,077 mortgage-deeds at an aggregate value of Rs. 75,85,359 in North and South Malabar together. This being by no means an abnormal year, let us take that approximately Rs. 160 lakhs is being invested every year in land by new owners. Let us deduct out of this 25 per cent (I personally feel that this is rather high but still for lack of reliable data, I take a high percentage for being on the safe side) or Rs. 40 lakhs for genuine purchases by those who want to cultivate it themselves. Rupees 120 lakhs would still be available for productive investment in industry, trade, banking, etc. Let us take that 50 per cent of this or Rs. 60 lakhs alone will be available for industry as such. Still it will be a great thing and the proverbial shyness of Indian capital will at one stroke be removed. The 'potential capital' of which the external Capital Committee observes as sufficient to 'meet the larger part of India's industrial requirements' will become not potential, but actual and Sir Basil Blacketts observation that 'India could not only supply the whole of her capital requirements, but might also become the leader of capital for the development of other countries' will be justified, provided only that the present flow of capital to unproductive channels is checked by the abolition of landlordism.

The improvement in the standard of life of the village is, in short, the cure of the economic development of our country. Without it, no amount of

planning will bear fruit. It is not, by itself, a socialistic experiment, but a part, an essential part, of the development of capitalism. This is why the French Revolution and other bourgeois revolutions carried out this essential task. India has also to carry it out if she has to develop economically on essentially bourgeois lines.

THE QUESTION OF COMPENSATION

Are the landlords entitled to compensation if they are deprived of what they are now getting, and which many of them purchased in the firm belief that they will be allowed to enjoy it unhindered? It remains for me to answer this question.

I look at it, not from any legalistic point of view, but it is for me a pure question of practicability and expediency. Can the peasantry afford to pay compensation? If compensation is to be paid even at the minimum rate, how will it stand in relation to the appropriation of the existing rental, for re-vitalising agriculture and building up industrial trading institutions? That seems to me the essential question. And, from that point of view, the question of compensation can easily be dismissed as impracticable, since that compensation would raise the same dangers and difficulties which we have at present in a new from. Of course, it will be hard in the case of many families not to get compensation. But, if it is provided that the families of the present landlords will have the first choice of taking a maximum extent of land (say 20 acres) for their own cultivation (this will be reverted if they lease it to others) it will be a great relief in most of such genuinely hard cases. I cannot really think of any other form of compensation.

I know that such a drastic reform will not be undertaken at present. Still, 1 felt it my duty to give expression to my support to it, lest in the mass of detail as to legal and practical questions, the fundamental question should be lost sight of. I also want to draw the attention of the Government to the fact that the reforms suggested even in my notes given below will not be the last word in tenancy reform. There is no use of fighting shy of it.

I, therefore, make certain suggestions with regard to the actual recommendations made by my colleagues. These suggestions are put

forward only because, even for the limited purpose of redressing certain glaring injustices, the majority recommendations do not go far enough.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter Six

The majority report proceeds on the basis that since the tenant in Malabar is entitled to the value of his improvement, it matters little to him whether he is given occupancy right or fixity of tenure. I agree that it is the substance that matters. But I am afraid there is no substance of fixity in the proposals evolved by the majority of colleagues. In fact, the net result of the proposals is not even fixity of tenure, but restricted right of the landlord to evict the tenant. The tenants may feel relieved that arbitrary eviction has been reduced by putting further restrictions on the landlord, but to suggest that the proposals contain fixity of tenure which differs from occupancy right only in name, is to deceive oneself because the fixity conferred upon the tenant is quite illusory.

There are three conditions on which the tenant may be evicted according to the majority report: (1) failure to pay rent, (2) failure to furnish security in case default is made in the payment of rent for one year, (3) necessity of the landlord for bonafide cultivation. Now, the net result of all these is that fixity is nullified in a larger number of cases.

I agree that the landlord should get his rent regularly. But the penalty attached to non-payment of rent, according to the majority report, is, I feel, too severe. I have no objection if the systematic defaulter is evicted or security is demanded of him. What the majority report, however, does is to club together the systematic defaulter with the man who defaults even for a year for reasons beyond his control. Even in the case of a tenant who could not pay his rent because there was sudden calamity in his family (say, the death of a member), even for a year, not only does the engine of eviction begin to operate, but security is demanded of him. The tenant who is not for some reasons able to pay by 30th *Kumbham* will be evicted even if he pays up the arrears by *Medam,* because his failure to pay rent in Kumbham makes

him liable to security and non-compliance with it to eviction. Thus, even a genuine failure to pay at the fixed time makes him liable to eviction.

I suggest the following changes:

1) Failure to pay by the 30th *Kumbham* would entitle the landlord to sue for arrears.

2) Failure to pay one year's rent together with the interest thereon by 30th *Kumbham* of next year will make one liable to eviction.

3) Failure to pay in full or in part for any three years during a decade will make one liable to furnish security.

As regards bonafide cultivation, I have the following suggestions to offer:

1) The limit of 5 acres per individual is too high. I have no objection to make it 5 acres per individual provided a maximum is fixed for the extent of land a landlord may evict the tenant from whatever the number of members of his family. An undivided family consisting of say, 30 members can, according to the majority report evict a tenant from 150 acres. In a majority of cases not more than one or two members of a landlord's family whose members may be staying in Madras or Singapore would evict from lands tenants calculated at the rate of 5 acres for every man, woman and child who does not interest himself or herself in cultivation This is likely to happen in a number of cases. To call this eviction for bonafide cultivation is a misnomer. I therefore suggest that a maximum of 20 acres per family is put whatever the number of members thereof.

2) Restriction of the right of eviction for bonafide cultivation to poorer landlords is not so impracticable as the majority report suggests. If, instead of the assessment basis, the annual income basis is taken, I have no doubt that to distinguish the poor landlords from the rich will not be at all difficult. I would suggest, for instance, that any landlord who gets an annual income (land revenue and interest on debts may be deducted out of the gross income) of Rs. 100 per individual or Rs. 2,000, whichever is higher, by rent or otherwise, should not be entitled to evict the tenant for bonafide cultivation.

If at least the suggestions made above are accepted, i.e. (1) eviction is restricted to failure to pay one year's rent by the next year, (2) security is demanded only on the regular defaulter, (3) only poor landlords are allowed to evict for bonafide cultivation and (4) even that is limited to 5 acres per individual or 20 acres per family whichever is higher I think some real relief will be obtainable for the tenants.

Chapter Seven

Rent and Revenue

With regard to the rates of fair rent, I have these suggestions to offer:

1) The expenses of cultivation should be fixed at 25 Palghat paras instead of 20. For one thing, it has been proved by all witnesses who have any experience of actual cultivation that 3.5 times the seed is the minimum required for cultivation expenses and that, if anything, it should be raised. For another thing, 20 Palghat paras are in most cases less than 3.5 times the seed actually required. It is only in rare cases that 6 Palghat paras are sufficient per acre. The seed actually required varies from 6 to 7.5. Even if 6 is taken as the invariable rule, 20 is less than 3.5 times of 6. I, therefore, feel that it is quite reasonable to raise it to 25.

2) With regard to the sharing of produce, I feel that the net produce should be divided equally between the actual cultivator and his immediate landlord. I do not see how it is reasonable or practical to take the return on investment which the landlord has made on land as the criterion for fixing fair rent. On this basis I am afraid, no fair rent can be fixed because the land has been overcapitalized. Land has been bought and sold at high prices on the basis of the landlord's right to rackrent the tenant and now to go upon the basis of a fair return on investment made on that basis is simply to sanctify rackrenting. The basic question in this connection, is to my mind, whether the productive labour of the tenant gets a fair return and not, whether the non-productive capital of the landlord should get a sufficiently high rate of interest. In this connection, I should also state that the present tendency is for a rise in the rate of wages of both the urban as well as the rural labour. And that tendency should be encouraged in the interest of general economy. The least that can be done to this end is to provide that

half the net produce both on wet lands as also on *punjalol* shall be given to the tenant.

3) It is possible that in many cases, particularly on dry lands, the present contract rate of rent is less than the formula suggested by the Committee. As the majority report itself states in another connection, the return to the landlord from dry land is quite negligible. If, now, the landlord is empowered to take three times the assessment, it will be very hard on most tenants, particularly on the lowest and poorest of them. Hard, indeed, would be the case if those Harijans and other rural labourers, who, instead of getting exemption from rent and revenue as they desire, are suddenly asked to pay much more than they are now asked to. I therefore, suggest that in the case of all pending tenancies, fair rent shall be that calculated on the basis of the several formulae suggested by the Committee or the contract rate, whichever is less. *Laissez Faire* and freedom of contract should be interfered with in the interest of the weaker party. If, for historical reasons, a particular tenant is allowed to pay less than the fair rent, there is nothing unreasonable in allowing him to enjoy that privilege for the future also.

(4) With regard to fair rent on pepper lands, I find that there is a suitable difference in the rate. While the customary rate is 1 to every 5, it has been manipulated as 1 *in* every 5. In other words, 1 : 5 has been changed into 1 out of 5, or 1/6 has been raised to 1/5. I recommend the restoration of 1/6. That is, the year in which the landlord should have his share should be 11th, 17th, 23rd, etc., and not l1th, 16th and 21st, etc., as the majority recommends.

With regard to fixing of fair rent, I feel that it would be most unfair to recover the cost of fixing it from the actual cultivator. I do not object to a nominal fee (say, 4 annas for every application) being levied on every holding. Nor do I object to it if the maximum cost to be recovered from the tenant is fixed at a certain percentage (say, 10 per cent) of the total fair rent fixed for his holding. But to provide that the whole cost of the Rent Settlement Commission should be recovered from him and his immediate landlord is very hard indeed.

The proposal of the majority report that the tenant should pay the whole assessment, even if it exceeds fair rent, is, I am sure, quite unreasonable. Of

course, it is not the fault of the landlord that the Government have assessed unreasonably. But, then, neither is it the fault of the tenant. It is unfair that the landlord who claims absolute ownership on land should ask himself to be relieved of liabilities on it. It is the common obligation of both the landlord and tenant to get the assessment revised. Till that is done, the landlord should bear, at least, half of the difference between assessment and fair rent.

Chapter Eight

Renewals and Renewal Fees

When fair rent is fixed, the *kanamdar* or other intermediary who has made a much more productive investment of land than the landlord stands to lose, because he gets less from his undertenant while he has to pay the same amount to his superior. In all fairness, he should be asked to pay less to his landlord in exact proportion to what he loses by way of reduction in what he gets from his undertenant. If this is not done, it will be some relief to him if at least renewal fee is totally abolished and thus a longstanding demand of his conceded. I therefore do not agree with the majority that renewal fee should be collected even in its reduced form.

Chapter Nine

Intermediaries and Under-Tenure Holders

Although I do not agree with the several arguments used and statements made by the majority, I feel that so far as what could be done practically to protect the under-tenure holders, the proposals in this report are acceptable.

Chapter Eleven

The Majority report says:

'It would not, in our opinion, be just to exempt *kudiyiruppu* holders from the payment of rent altogether'.

I feel that the gentlemen of the majority have not seriously considered the problem of the rural labourer and the Harijan who has no property except his own willingness to work for others. The lot of these people is

deplorable. They are serfs if not actual slaves. To ask them to pay rent and revenue is just to hand them over to the landlord who can treat them in any manner he likes. All the arguments used by the advocates of the tenants' cause with respect to arbitrary eviction and its social consequences in the 1920's apply with much greater force in the case of these rural labourers. Unless they are protected from eviction from their miserable huts on any account, they will be under the village official. I would also like to draw the attention of the Government to the fact that the landlords do not stand to lose much by this, because the rent realized from *kudiyiruppus* is negligible. By making the landlord incur a small loss, the lowest of the low in the villages will be released from social serfdom. I may conclude by saying that I want this exemption from rent and revenue to be granted only to those tenants who have no other property except the *kudiyiruppus* and who have no other occupation but wage labour. In the case of others, I agree with the majority report.

I am for giving fixity to *Ulkudi-holders* also. In a condition where all lands available for house-sites are monopolised by a few people, it will be hard for the poor man who is an *Ulkudi holder* if he is to be turned out from the only habitation which he has. He may be turned out provided the landlord gives him another site whereon to put a house.

Chapter Twelve

Forests, Waste Land and Irrigation Sources

I have only to make the following additional suggestions:

1) In continuing the practice of allowing tenants to take leaves for green manures, and pasture the cattle, 'the restrictions as may be necessary to protect forests from destruction and denudation' should not, it should be made clear, include any levy of grazing or manure fees.

2) Government should control not only sources of irrigation, but channels and small waterways in such a way that no landlord or tenant through whose field water has to pass to another man's field should be entitled to obstruct.

A Short History of the Peasant Movement in Kerala

Dedication

To the kisan family of a father, a mother and six children who sheltered me for twenty months of my underground life; who inspired me with the heroism, courage, resourcefulness and political consciousness characteristic of the toiling masses: who taught me living Marxism through their daily life of intense devotion to the revolutionary cause.

And to so many other families of kisans, known and unknown, who have made the growth of the Kisan Sabha and the Communist Party in Kerala in the period of severe repression possible.

I dedicate this History of the Peasant Movement in Kerala.

Author

April 1943

The peasant movement in Malabar, South India, 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 *organization*. Nevertheless, its essential characteristics as a movement aimed against the jenmi (landlord) system have not changed. Liberating the entire people of Malabar from the iron grip of the jenmi has been likewise the central objective of the spontaneous individual actions of the militant Moplah of the last century; elaborate reports of enlightened civil servants at the close of the last century; organized agitation of the rising middle tenantry of the last quarter of the nineteenth and the first three decades of this century; concerted action of the politically awakened and organized Moplahs of 1920–21; and the modern form of class organization and struggle which had its origin in the thirties of this century and which continues to this day.

THE MOPLAH REBELLION

It is to the illiterate, backward Moplah of the Ernad and Walluvanad taluks 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 whiteman, 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 organize 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.

Between 1836 and 1898, as many as 45 cases of criminal action by Moplahs against Hindus are recorded in the Ernad, Western Walluvanad and North Ponnani taluks (an area with a dominant Moplah population). The official historians of Malabar draw the conclusion that the Moplahs are a fanatical band of lawbreakers. 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 jenmis or their agents or servants or the Adhilgari (village headman) or a revenue official or a police party. And remember that almost all the jenmis 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.

NINETEENTH CENTURY CIVILIANS WHO SPOKE UP

The latter half of the nineteenth century is remarkable in Indian history of the rise of a type of civilian who became the mouth-piece of the rising national movement. One of these, A.O. Home, is supposed to be the Father of the Indian National Congress. He saw the necessity of creating an organization which would prove a safety-valve for the rising national sentiment and confine it within safe limits.

The same tendency is visible in Malabar—not in her national politics but in her agrarian movement. It was Mr. Logan, a civil servant, who first gave form to the anti-jenmi sentiments of the people of Malabar. His report on the causes of Moplah outbreaks (into which he was commissioned to enquire) and the historical chapter of the Malabar Manual which he prepared at the government's instance are two classical documents bearing on the agrarian question in Malabar. They are quoted and re-quoted even today by the supporters of tenancy reform while the opponents of that reforms have taken great pains (with very little success) to refute them.

A few more civilians followed in Logan's footsteps, while some took the other side and opposed any change in the tenancy system. But none of them —neither supporters nor opponents—equalled Logan in the penetrating analysis of Malabar society before and after the advent of the British regime. What were Mr. Logan's chief conclusions?

(1) That the British jurists did not understand the system of landownership in Malabar. They imported conceptions of the British feudal system and absolute property rights into Malabar, thus clothing the old indigenous terms and expressions denoting landed property with a new and alien meaning.

(2) That there was no absolute proprietorship in land in Malabar. The jenmi was only a co-proprietor with two classes of cultivators—tenants and

agricultural labourers. His rights are limited to taking one third of the produce as *jenmabhogam*—which is not rent in the British sense of the word. He cannot raise the *jenmabhogam* above this one-third, nor can he evict his tenant from the land.

(3) That the decisions of Courts making the jenmi absolute owner, the right of eviction at will and with the right of taking as much rent as he can, were a wrong interpretation of the law.

(4) They were also a social and political blunder of the first magnitude. They are the real reasons for the Moplah outbreaks.

(5) The solution is to restore the tenants to their old position, i.e., give them fixity of tenure, fix rent at old rates and give compensation for tenants' improvements.

RISE OF THE KANAMDAR

Meanwhile a new force was slowly evolving in Malabar society. Out of the womb of this old feudal society emerged the elements of the new bourgeois society and this gave a new form, a new leadership and an organization to the hitherto unorganized peasant movements.

The Rajahs and the 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. 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 their economic and social predominance and pooh-poohed 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.

The slogans and demands of this class, however, were very different from those raised by Mr. Logan. They, of course, quoted Logan when it was a question of refuting the arguments of the jenmis, but they did not demand what Logan had demanded.

Now to get a clear understanding of the difference, it is necessary to bear in mind that there are two main classes of tenants in Malabar. One of these is called kanamdar, who had certain privileges, pays less rent and has invested a small sum with the jenmi. The other is verumpattamdar with no privileges, paying the full rent and cultivating on a theoretically year-to-year basis. Many of the kanamdars are themselves not cultivators, but lease their lands to verumpattamdars for cultivation, while most of the verumpattamdars are actual cultivators. All the kanamdars are thus directly under the jenmis while verumpattamdars are both under the jenmis and the kanamdars. It was thus the kanamdar, the prosperous middle tenant, that formed the soil out of which grew the rising bourgeoisie. While many kanamdars remained on the land as actual tillers of the soil, there were few, among the other classes—either jenmis or verumpattamdars—who rose to

the position of the new bourgeoisie. Thus the struggle of the kanamdar for economic equality with the jenmi was the struggle of the bourgeoisie for domination all along the line. This domination naturally necessitated that the verumpattamdar should not have equality with the kanamdar. The rich kanamdar did not mind equality of the poor kanamdar with the jenmi but he did object to the verumpattamdar being equal to himself. So the slogan was 'Fixity of Tenure for the Kanamdar'.

Logan had, however, recommended no concessions to the kanamdar, but only to the verumpattamdar.

This struggle 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 counterpetitions, draft-bills and debates, committees and conferences, vetoes and recommendations 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 four 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. We will, therefore, now refer to this historic rising which was the fiercest struggle against the British authority since 1857.

THE COURSE OF THE REBELLION

It is the fashion among certain 'Marxist' circles (e.g., Soumyendra Nath Tagore's 'Peasant Revolt in Malabar') to speak of the 1921 rebellion as a

purely peasant uprising against the jenmis. Facts, however, tell a different tale. What is more, these 'Marxists' seem to disregard the clear warning of Engels against applying the theory of historical materialism as if it were 'easier than the solution of a simple equation of the first degree'.

Engels says: 'According to the materialist conception of history the determining element in history is ultimately the production and reproduction in real life. More than this neither Marx nor I have ever asserted. If therefore somebody twists this into the statement that the economic element is the only determining factor, he transforms it into a meaningless abstract and absurd phrase. There is an interaction of all these elements (political, legal, philosophical theories, religious ideas, etc.) in which amid all the endless bursts of accidents (i.e., of things and events whose interaction is so remote or so impossible to prove that we regard it as absent, and can neglect it) the economic movement finally asserts itself.

Now there is no doubt about the fact that it was the anti-jenmi struggle of the Malabar peasants that gave birth to the great mass upheaval of 1920–21 which resulted in the five months' rebellion in South Malabar. Since this is not a detailed history of the 1921 rebellion (which, unfortunately, is yet to be written apart from those booklets by official apologists) I cannot give here the innumerable facts and figures to refute the lies and slanders of those who would have us believe that the Moplahs as a community are undesirable law-breakers. I would quote the late C. Gopalan Nair, a government pensioner who wrote a booklet on the rebellion defending the official view. It may be stated that this booklet has been commended to the reader by no less a person than the then Collector of Malabar.

'The house of V. Mohammed, the local Khilafat Secretary, was searched by the police for a gun alleged to have been stolen from the Pookttur Palace of the Nilambur Thirumulpad and this gave the Moplahs the opportunity for which they were waiting, of asserting the authority and force of the Khilafat movement. On the pretext that the search was unjust and uncalled for, a crowd of several hundred of Moplahs armed with knives, swords and spears, collected with astounding rapidity and advanced to the Palace. It transpired that they had been summoned from various neighbouring and outlying villages by a tocsin of drums beaten in local and neighbouring mosques.

They levied blackmail from the landlords on threat of murder and also threatened to murder the Circle Inspector or Police who recognized the necessity of dealing tactfully . . .

'No evidence has yet been forthcoming to warrant the allegation regarding agrarian discontent, but it would appear that there was some trouble—what it was, it is not possible to say—between Pookottur Moplahs and the Manager Thirumulpad of the Pookottur Estate. Their Jack of cordiality was aggravated by the police search instituted at the instance of the manager and V. Mohammed exploited the Khilafat Movement and the factious temper of his co-religionists to wreak vengeance. The Moplahs demanded their wages at 9 o'clock that night, threatened the manager and became turbulent. And in this jungly, remote and fanatical hamlet of Pookottur, the civil administration practically ceased to function from 2nd August, 1921' (pp. 21–23).

On page 30, he says: 'In the realm of industry, the Moplah has no rival, his good qualities in ordinary life are admitted; *during the rebellion several instances have occurred of Moplahs having helped Hindus to escape*, but individual instances do not prove the rule.'

The short biographical sketches that he gives on pages 76–80 of some of the rebel leaders are illuminating.

'Variankunnath Kunhamed Haji, of a family of outbreak traditions, as a lad was transported with his father for complicity in a previous outbreak; on his return 6 or 7 years ago he was not allowed to settle down in his native village but after a time he went up to his village and started life as a cartman.

'On the introduction of the Khilafat movement, he joined it and became one if its chief workers, organized Sabhas and became the guiding spirit of the Khilafat in Ernad. On the outbreak of the rebellion he became King, *celebrated his accession by the murder of Khan Bahadur Chekkutty, a Moplah retired Police Inspector.*

'He styled himself as the Raja of the Hindus, Amir of the Mohammedans and Colonel of the Khilafat Army. He wore a fez cap, wore the Khilafat uniform and badge and he had sword in his hand. He enjoyed absolute Swaraj in his kingdom of Ernad and Walluvanad. *He announced that he was*

aware that the inhabitants have suffered from robbing and looting, that he would impose no taxation on them this year (1921) save in the way of donations to the yudha fund and that next year the taxes must be forthcoming. *He ordered members of agricultural labourers to reap and bring in the paddy raised in the Thirumulpad's lands*, the harvesters being paid in cash and the grain set apart to feed the Haji's forces. *He issued passports to persons wishing to get outside his Kingdom and the cost of the pass was a very flexible figure, according to the capacity of the individual concerned.*

'He was captured on the 6th January and shot on 20th January, 1922.'

This was the most outstanding of the rebel leaders. Now about two of the lesser ones:

'Seethi Koya Thangal of Kumarampathur set himself up as the Governor of a Khilafat principality. *He issued fatwas warning his men against looting, and other depredations pointing out that the country had become theirs. Three of the rioters implicated in Elampalasseri were punished by him holding his own court-martial.* The offenders were ordered to be shot, taking care only to use blank cartridges. The men terrified fell down. When they rose there were no injuries which the Thangal attributed to his own marvellous powers and added that his men will silimilarly be immune from British military attacks. He was captured and shot.

'Chembrasseri Imbichi Koya Thangal held his court about midway between Tirur and Karuvarakundu on the slope of a bare hillock with about 4,000 followers from neighbouring villages. *More than 40 Hindus were taken to the Thangal with their hands tied behind their back, charged with the crime of helping the military by supplying them with milk, tender coconuts, etc., and 38 of these were condemned to death.* He superintended the work of murder in person and took his seat on a rock near a well, witnessed his men cutting at the necks of his victims and pushing the bodies into the well. 38 were murdered, one of whom a pensioned head-constable, to whom he owed a grudge, had his head neatly divided into two halves. Surrendered at Melattur and shot on 20th January, 1922.' (Emphasis added)

FORCES BEHIND THE OUTBREAK

What then was the main force which led to the outbreak of 1921? The so-called Marxists would say that it was agrarian discontent. Nor do I wish to contradict it. Had it not been for the agrarian discontent whose causes and extent had been correctly stated by Mr. Logan half-a-century ago but whose remedy was not applied by the government, the Moplah would not have rallied round the Khilafat and Congress flags in such large numbers and with such firm determination. It should also be remembered that most of the Congress and Khilafat leaders in Malabar (e.g. late K. Madhavan Nair, U. Gopala Menon, K.P. Kesava Menon, etc.) were also leaders of the Tenancy movement. The two most controversial resolutions considered and ultimately passed at the Malabar district Political Conference held at Manjeri were those supporting non-cooperation and Tenancy Reform. And it was after this Conference that Congress and Khilafat Committees sprang up in South Malabar in such large numbers as were not rivalled even in 1938–40. Every speech of every Congress-cum-Khilafat leader was a two-edged weapon aimed against both the British Government as well as the jenmi. It was this that gave a new hope and new slogan to the oppressed Moplahs who joined the movement in such large numbers. It was a fine example of an agrarian political mass movement.

The 'Marxists', however, have to answer certain simple but relevant questions. 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 taluks 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 organization. The number of Congress and Khilafat sabhas organized 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 than I have been able to give to the subject. But the little 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 organization than the Hindus. Their congregational prayers, their common feasts and dinners, their conception of equality among themselves, etc., make them much more amenable to organized work than their brethren of other communities. So when the message of organization 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 organization in the Moplah area, they do not explain the course which the rebellion took. This is much mare 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 nonviolent non-cooperation, indignant against oppressive jenmi yet blind to the demands and aspirations of the verumpattamdars, they went forth to the masses with the message of organization for a struggle. They were with and among the masses, till the latter began to adopt 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, Hajis and other saintly Moplahs. Sincere anti-imperialists, they, however, think and speak in the 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 organizers 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 as 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

wander 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 organization of their own but a different type of leadership.

II NEW PEASANT MOVEMENT RISES

With the passing, in 1930, of the Malabar Tenancy Act, one epoch of the peasant movement of Kerala comes to an end. Almost all the demands which the kanamdars had been making for half-a-century have been conceded. He can no more be evicted by a capricious jenmi at his sweet will and pleasure; his interests in the land get as much as the Jemni's own; the professional and commercial people who accumulate decent amounts seek him out and try to purchase his interests thus converting him into the possessor of almost liquid cash. His rents cannot be enhanced, nor can the jenmi make arbitrary levies on him as he used to do. The renewal fee that he was to pay to the jenmi every 12 years had lost all the terrors of a periodically erupting volcano ruining his entire family as it could now be correctly calculated according to well-known and fixed principles in contrast to the arbitrary and unknown whims of the jenmi, as hitherto.

It was over a decade since exactly the same reforms had been made in the State of Cochin and Travancore. There the kanamdar already became socially and economically independent of the jenmi. The jenmi, in relation

to the kanamdar had ceased to be the all-powerful autocrat that he had been and turned into a mere receiver of rent which itself was fixed. As in the case of other social legislations like the Marumakkathayam and Namboodiri Acts, so in the case of Marumakka too, the feudalistic States of Cochin and Travancore were a couple of steps in advance of the bourgeois state system of Madras. It was the feudalistic system of the two States which dealt the first blow alike on the autocracy of the joint family system as on the autocracy of the system of land ownership.

It was, however, British Malabar which, once it entered the fold of social reform went a few steps ahead of the States. The Madras Marumakkathayam Act, extending as it did to all communities following the Marumakkathayam (matriarchal) law of inheritance, was more comprehensive than the Nayar Regulations of Cochin and Travancore. The Nambaodiris Acts of Cochin and Travancore conferred only limited rights of maintenance to members of families while the Madras Act conferred on them rights of outright partition; what is mare, it brought the women of the community into equality with the men by conferring on them equal rights of property as also by an almost absolute prohibition of polygamy.

So was it in the case of the Tenancy Act. In Cochin and Travancore, it is only the kanamdar who is made independent of the jenmi; the verumpattamdar is entirely out of the picture of Tenancy Reform. The Madras Act of 1930, an the other hand, did confer fixity of tenure and fair rent on the verumpattamdar. Not only the verumpattamdar but any imaginable class of tenants was given the right of fixity of tenure and fair rent. The fair rent fixed was, in other words, the rent payable by the actual cultivating tenant to his immediate landlord whether the latter be the jenmi, the kanamdar, the non-cultivating verumpattamdar or any other intermediate tenant. And everyone, irrespective of the actual tenure on which he holds the land, was made immune from arbitrary eviction by his landlord.

The difference between the feudal states and the bourgeois state is no pure accident although certain comparatively accidental factors were working. The blow struck on the outworn family and land system was, in the States, a blow struck from above by a partially bourgeoisfied feudal

monarchy while the same was done in British Malabar from below by the growing bourgeois popular forces in opposition to a decaying bourgeois state which relies for support more and more on the remnants of tattering feudal society. The Madras Act of 1930 was passed into law after a series of interventions by the Governor in favour of the jenmi (one particular bill was actually vetoed by him) while the Cochin and Travancore Acts were known to have had the personal support of the then Maharajas even before it was drafted. Thus the legislative proposals became law earlier in the states. They were, however, of such a nature that the blow struck would only smash away feudal opposition which the partially bourgeoisfied feudal states might, and sometimes did, encounter but did not smash feudalism as a whole. To create a form of easily negotiable property on land was an economic and political necessity for the 'enlightened' (i.e. bourgeoisfied) States but it could not and should not release the overwhelming majority of peasants from the clutches of the jenmis and the States.

It should not, however, be understood that the verumpattamdar in British Malabar was free from the grip of the jenmi and the intermediary tenant. Far from it. The fixity of tenure and fair rent secured to him under the Act were in actual practice illusory. For, one of the 'reasonable grounds' for eviction was his failure to furnish one year's rent in cash as security. This means that over 95 per cent of the verumpattamdars were liable to eviction at the sweet will and pleasure of their immediate landlords. Nor did it rest at that. Even if one could furnish security, one could be evicted if the landlord wanted that plot of land for his own cultivation which was another of the 'reasonable grounds'. This right of eviction made the provision for fair rent and any other rights almost nugatory for the entire class of tenants other than kanamdars. It, however, made a distinction between the small proportion of rich and powerful verumpattamdars and the poorer and weaker ones of the same class. While the former could make his legal rights real and valid, the latter had as much fixity of tenure and other rights as have the common people civil liberties in a bourgeois democratic state. It is this distinction that is of supreme importance for the future history of Malabar. For, it creates a powerful bloc of jenmis, kanamdars and other classes of rich non-cultivating majority of the cultivating verumpattamdars. It is this bloc,

as we will see, that is the main force which subsequently rallied itself against Kisan Sanghas.

Thus the 1930 Act was the end of the epoch of the kanamdar's struggle against the jenmi and the beginning of the new epoch of his struggle against the verumpattamdar in cooperation with the jenmi. It is his Magna Carta both as against the jenmi as well as against his own subtenant.

It is also the end of the epoch of the struggle of the jenmi for his social authority over all his tenants and the beginning of his struggle for the continuance of his rights of economic exploitation of his tenants. No more does he claim to be the social superior and natural leader of his tenants but only as one who has legitimate rights of getting his rent. No more do we hear him say (as one jenmi witness told the Raghavayya Committee in 1928) that 'if any of his tenants shaves his face (without shaving the head also), he is entitled not only to evict him but even to shoot him'. We heard on the other hand, as we did in his evidence before the Tenancy Committee in 1939, one jenmi witness after another declaring that, if his rents are properly safeguarded and promptly realized, he does not mind whatever legislation is passed into law. The jenmi has, in other words, reconciled himself to his dethronement as jenmi adapted himself to his own bourgeoisfication.

Thus it is the end of the epoch of the feudal jenmi and the beginning of the epoch of the bourgeois rent receiver.

It is also the end of the epoch of the verumpattamdar being the camp follower of the kanamdar and the beginning of an epoch in which he should carry on his struggle on his own or remain as miserable as before. No more can he hope to get emacipated under bourgeois leadership. He has to organize himself on new lines and under a new leadership.

THE RISE OF NEW LEADERSHIP

The new leadership was not long in rising. 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 ill Malabar was predominantly rural middle class. What does this actually mean? It means that, apart from a few individuals from among the progressive jenmi 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 job 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 struggles, 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 proved adequate material for the building up of the Congress Socialist Party. Almost the entire ranks 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 struggles 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 taluk and other actions like the Cannanore Youth Conference gave rise to large numbers of cadres even apart from the 1,000 or so 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, who he met, what they talked about, what they had decided to do. This reading group gradually grew in number and this reading room became ever more and more the centre 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 organizing 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. Kunhambu 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 organizer of itself which was later to come out as the new organizer and leader of the new peasant movement.

Now this was lacking in the South. No doubt the satyagrahis there were as good material as in the North. But, not only did the number of satyagrahis in the North far exceed than in the South, the movement itself created half-a-dozen other Congress workers for every imprisoned satyagrahi in the North, which from the very nature of the struggle was absent in the South. Thus the proportion of cadres was almost 1 to 10 as in South and North Malabar. The result was this: while most of the best cadres in the North set themselves up in their own areas and created other cadres, thus laying the basis of a mass movement here, most of the best cadres of the South became taluka or all-Kerala leaders, thus necessarily neglecting the creation of a local mass movement anywhere. This, among other reasons, led to the interesting result that, in the period of agitation and formulation of demands (1934–36) the southern taluks of Walluvanad and Ponnani were on a level with the northern taluks of Chirakkal and Kottayam, but in the period of actual organization and struggle (1937–42), they were far behind the North.

THE DEPRESSION

While the epoch of kanamdars' struggle was coming to a close, while the new leadership of the ncw peasant movement was slowly evolving, the great economic depression set in. 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 organization. Import of rice from Burma and copra from Ceylon was pointed out as the reason far 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 organization and agitation were visible in Kerala during this period as a direct result of the misery caused to the people by the depression:

(1) Coconut Growers' Assaciation in Travancore led by late Changanasseri Parameswaran Pillai, a retired judge of the Travancore High Court. Its demands were centred round raising the price of coconut. This had some contacts and tried to build up an organization 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 same 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 in far purchasing daily necessaries 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 of the Malabar District Board and the jenmi representative on the Madras Legislative Council, both to ventilate the grievances of the jenmi as well as to lay basis for himself as against the Congress for the future elections. The Gandhist Congress leaders on coming out of jail in 1933, took it up and gave it a mass character; thus effectively foiling Palat's game. The Congress Socialists, for their part, worked it up as Congressmen got experience of mass agitation and organization 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 Cranganare (Kodungallur) 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 slogan 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 organization, 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 filers 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. lbrahim later became a Gandhist and now is a Muslim Leaguer.

CONGRESS FORMULATES DEMAND

As we have seen, Congressmen tried to make the land revenue agitation a mass movement. Meetings and jathas (cross-country marches) were organized in different taluks not only protesting against the enhanced land revenue but also demanding substantial reduction in the pre-settlement revenue itself.

In this movement, naturally, the Socialists were very strong both as regards number as well as energetic activity. Older Congress leaders were 'recouping' themselves from the hardships undergone during the Civil Disobedience. They, of course, graced the occasion when the Land Revenue Conference was organized. It was however, the Younger Socialist Congressmen who went from village to village and popularized the slogans of land revenue agitation. And it was they who, through their reading room and Youth Leagues, took the slogans to the ordinary peasant.

This agitation itself taught them many lessons. It brought them into closer touch with the peasants and thus enabled them to appreciate the actual demands and conditions of the peasantry. It was in this school of practical experience that future leaders like Keraleeyan, Bharatheeyan, K.P.R. Gopalan and A.V. Kunhambu were reared. They found that it was not land revenue that was oppressing the cultivating peasants so much as debt and rent. This led to a recasting of the demands of the Malabar Peasants' Association (the organization set up to demand of the Association but one of the demands). The nature of the demand itself changed from a mere demand for land revenue by introducing a graduated land tax with exemption for the poorer peasants. Other demands included moratorium for debt, drastic scaling down of debts, provision for easy installments of the repayment of the debts thus scaled down, cheap credit and control over moneylenders, irrigation facilities and tenancy reform.

Now what exactly was demanded by way of tenancy reform? They are:

(1) Abolition of the periodical renewal of Kanam lands, an occasion all which the kanamdar had to pay; 2 ¼ years' rent (minus certain minor reductions) as renewal fees to the jenmi. A failure to renew the lease on their term was one of the 'reasonable grounds' for eviction with the result that several poor kanamdars were either actually unable to hold the land or mortgage it for getting it renewed. The richer kanamdars were, of course, agreeable to the abolition of renewal but they were not so anxious for it as their poorer brethren. They were more or less satisfied because the renewal fee has been reduced from the arbitrary amount fixed by the jenmi to an exactly calculable amount. This was, therefore, the last demand of the bourgeois section of the tenantry for which it would not itself fight but would support others when they fought for it. The poor kanamdar, on the other hand, was deeply interested in it as on it depended the question of whether he should continue to hold the land or be evicted. And poor cultivating kanamdar were of a considerable number, some 60 per cent or so of all the kanamdars, being themselves cultivators. The new leadership of the peasant movement, therefore, concluded that the poor kanamdar was the natural ally of the verumpattamdar in his struggle against the jenmi.

(2) The second demand was that the landlord's power of eviction for his own cultivation should be abolished or at least severely curtailed. This was a common demand of all classes of cultivating tenants, and was therefore another link between the poor kanamdar and verumpattamdar. It was a demand which was opposed by the jenmis and non-cultivating tenants and this opposition was therefore a link between all the non-cultivating classes of landowners.

(3) Abolition was also demanded of the provision for one year's rent as security from verumpattamdars which, as has already been pointed out, nullified his fixity of tenure. This was naturally objected to by all classes of non-cultivating tenants and was therefore another link connecting them.

(4) Rent rates were also demanded to be reduced from those fixed under the Act. More important still, it was demanded that *punam* cultivation (a peculiar form of cultivating forest lands which required clearing of the

jungle areas every year) and other cultivations which were exempt from the fair rent provisions of the 1930 Act should be brought under it.

It should not, however, be understood that these demands were brought forward at the very outset. Far from it. They took concrete shape only after a couple of years' practical experience was gained by the Socialist Congressmen. In fact, it was only by the time of the general elections (1937) that they had been put in such concrete form. But, even at the outset, some of these demands were made in a vague form.

Another thing to be noted is that it was as Congressmen that the Socialists formulated these demands. It was the Left Congress Committees that raised the slogans and popularized them. Although peasant conferences were held and even peasant committees set up in some places, it was the Congress that took the lead. It may be remembered in this connection that from 1934 to 1936, the Kerala Provincial Congress Committee had a socialist majority while from 1936 onwards, the Malabar District Congress Committee and 50 per cent of the taluka committees had a socialist majority. It was through these Committees that peasant demands were popularized.

Gandhite Congressmen did not, at this stage, openly oppose this programme. It is true that their affiliation to the kanamdar was very strong. Most of them belong to families of kanamdars themselves and move in that circle. They may therefore be expected to, and did later, oppose this new peasant programme. But, for the moment, they did not consider it dangerous enough to require opposition. They had also an eye on future elections of which a vague peasant programme was useful. Their attitude to it was therefore, one of benevolent neutrality.

ALL MALABAR PEASANTS' UNION

The general election to the Provincial Assembly under the Government of India Act was no mere general election, it was a great peasant rally. The clarion call of the Congress election manifesto roused the peasants in every nook and corner. As one of the popular orators said at the time, the peasant 'refused to consider their vote as one of the innumerable levies that the

jenmi periodically made on them and gave it instead as a contribution to the anti-imperialist struggle.' Congress candidates received thumping majorities in every constituency in Malabar except in the jenmi constituency where Mr. Palat defeated the Congress candidate.

The most remarkable result was that of Ernad-Walluvanad Muslim constituency where Mr. Abdur Rahiman was the Congress candidate, and a rich man and a retired government official were his rivals (it was a double-member constituency for which the Congress put up only one candidate). It was the first occasion since 1921 when meeting and demonstrations were organized in that 'dangerous' area. It was fondly hoped by the enemies of nationalism that the Moplahs who had suffered so much from the 1921 rebellion would be hostile to the Congress which led them to such a pass. It was also feared by the nationalists that this might be the result. The Congress candidate there was, besides, the poorest of all Congress candidates in Malabar. His supporters and propagandists were contemptuously referred to as 'Beedi boys', the most 'respectable' and powerful Muslim being ranged against him. With all this, however, the result was astounding. Mr. Abdur Rahiman got 28,000 votes while one of his rivals got 12,000 and the other 10,000. The leader of the 'Beedi Boys' triumphed over the bigwigs of the two taluks. The Moplah proved that he had learned the lesson of 1921 alright, that he did not hold nationalism responsible for his sufferings, that he had great regard for the fighter against authority that Mr. Abdur Rahiman was reputed to be. The heart of the Moplah peasant beats right; he is still the militant fighter that he had always been; he will not leave the Congress although the Congress leaders left him 16 years ago.

Similar, though less significant, results followed everywhere. Here it was an eminent lawyer and old (i.e. pre-non-cooperation) Congressman that was defeated; there the representative of a very influential Thiya communal organization; in a third place a huge money-bag with great influence among the people. Almost everywhere the Congress candidate was by himself inferior in one or more respects to his rival, but he had immense superiority over him in one respect: he had the enthusiastic support of the awakened peasantry.

1937 was, therefore, the beginning of a new stage in the development of the peasant movement. No more is it the affair of a few young men who have accepted Socialism; its slogans have reached the peasants. No more are the taluk peasant unions semi-independent top organizations working in close cooperation with Congress Committees. No more is their membership confined to a few who stand for the demands of the peasants; they already contain large numbers of actual peasants who are also elected to leading posts in the organization.

1937 was thus the Great Rally of peasants not only around the Congress Election Manifesto but also around the slogans and demands put forward by the Socialist Congressmen during the preceding 2–3 years. Ask any peasant in Malabar what it was that he voted for in 1937. He may or may not speak in terms of the Congress Election Manifesto but he will certainly speak in terms of the demands of the Malabar Peasants' Union.

THE PEASANTS SQUEEZE OUT A BOGUS BILL

The Gandhites got what they wanted, the Congress came out victorious at the polls. The peasants were also determined to get what they wanted; they used the election victory for strengthening their organization and press on the new ministry to carry out their election promises. Demands were made on every platform that the peasant programme formulated before the election by Congress Committees be implemented.

The Congress Ministry came out with a bogus bill for amending the Malabar Tenancy Act of 1930. It touched none of the problems that required solution, but simply made verbal changes in a few places. It was, in other words, not a statesman's amendment but a draftsman's, since it only removed certain 'anomalies found from actual working of the Act' in the drafting of certain clauses. This was to be palmed off as the great Tenancy Act Amending Bill conferring untold blessings on the peasantry. As if it was for a draftsman's amendment that the peasants had rallied round the Congress.

The peasants were determined to foil this game. A series of meetings were held all over Malabar asking the Ministry to bring forward a bill to implement the actual demands of the peasants. Some of the taluk Peasants'

Unions actually drafted amending bills (crude and clumsy drafts, if you like, from a draftsman's point of view; nevertheless, concrete drafts not to be ignored by any legislator) and sent it forward to the government. The objection was not to the bill drafted by the government, but to the pretension that it was the bill which the peasants had been asking for. By all means, pass this bill, the peasants said; improve the present. Act from a draftsman's point of view; but improve it also from the point of view of the majority of peasants.

The agitation was so widespread that the government withdrew the bill immediately. The squeezing out of this bill was the first victory that the peasants secured through their class organization and action while the smashup of the reactionary candidates at the polls a few months back was their first victory secured through their national organization. They were, of course, a very long way from realizing their own demands through a proper amending act, but they have shown that they cannot be duped as hitherto by reforms in their name but ill effect ignoring their demands. This is the significance of the withdrawal of this bogus bill.

BEHIND THE MINISTRY, AGAINST THE JENMIS

The next draft bill published by the Congress Ministry was the Madras Agriculturists' Debt Relief Bill. It really sent a thrill of joy in every peasant's heart just as it evoked the most bitter resentment in the jenmis. The peasants or their leaders were not under any delusion that this would completely emancipate them from the clutches of the moneylenders and the jenmis; it was, nevertheless, a big step forward. The recognition of legislative standards other than the rights of jenmis and moneylenders was the great merit of the bill which endeared it to the peasants just as it made the jenmis bitter against it.

A strong agitation was set up by the jenmis against the bill. The Zamorin and other jenmis poured forth money to organize meetings and deputations. Their scribes began to prepare memoranda against the bill. A subtle form of propaganda was started that it was mostly undeserving debtors that got the benefit while a large class of poor creditors stood to lose by the bill.

The peasant movement set up a much stronger organization in favour of the bill. For every meeting organized by the jenmi, there were 25 organized by the peasants' unions and Congress Committees. For every single member of the audience at jenmi meetings, there were a thousand at kisan conferences. For a couple of deputations that waited on the Prime Minister on behalf of the jenmis, there were a dozen taluk-wide marches of peasant workers exhorting peasants to drown the voice of the jenmi by louder voices raised by thousands of throats. Memoranda prepared by the jenmis' scribes were countered by eloquent agitation and propaganda carried on by eminent organizers like Comrade A. K. Gopalan whose biting sarcasm tore every page of the learned memoranda to shreds.

There was, after all, this difference between the two (jenmis' and peasants') agitations; the former was intended to appeal to the ministers, the powers that be and the latter was meant to rouse the people, the creators of the powers that be. The former, therefore, confined itself to a narrow circle of 'respectable' people who had to put on the pose as spokesmen of the people. The latter's strength lay in effectively annihilating the so-called voice of the people and assert the real voice of the people. This task was brilliantly carried out by a host of propagandists and organizers. What was the result? Certain amendments which the ministry actually gave notice of at the second reading stage in deference to the demands of the Malabar jenmis were ultimately withdrawn. This bill was passed by both Houses practically in its original form. The jenmis got a signal defeat at the hands of the peasants. The people's support saved the measure brought forward by the popular Ministry.

ALL-MALABAR PEASANTS' UNION FORMED

All this was carried on under the leadership of taluk peasants' unions; there was, as yet, no central coordinating organization for peasants' unions in Malabar. The leadership thought that it was useless and unnecessary to have a top organization unless and until the basic units were organized and functioning. Whatever coordinating work there was could very well be done by the Executive of the Congress Socialist Party. This arrangement worked

well so long as agitation for and popularization of peasants' demands was the only task which the peasants' leaders could carry out.

But things changed with the actual formation of functioning units in the villages and taluks. It was necessary that their activities should be coordinated by a central organization serving as a link between the All-lndia Kisan Sabha and the taluk unions. This was set up in May 1938 with Comrade Keraleeyan as the Secretary. Comrade Keraleeyan had already served as the Secretary of the Chirakkal Taluk Peasants' Union, proved his great organizing capacity and became the leading peasant organizer in Malabar. He continued in that post till he had to go undergound two years later. Not a little of the credit for the efficient functioning of the organization goes to him.

The organization had efficient and functioning taluk unions in three northern taluks—Hosdurg, Chirakkal and Kottayam. It had also a very good organization in one of the firkas in Kurambranad taluk. In South Malabar, as a whole, it was much weaker but had some sort of taluk organizations, although there were few lower units. The result was that South Malabar as a whole remained at the pre-1937 stage of agitation for and popularization of the peasants' programme while North Malabar advanced from that to the stage of actual organizational functioning from top to bottom. Every village had its peasant union in Chirakkal and Kottayam and their taluk offices were a veritable beehive of activity. The peasantry looked upon the village Sanghams as the one organization whose decision was the law to them; expulsion from it was a calamity several times worse than imprisonment for an offence awarded by a court of law: enemies of the Sangham were automatically the enemies of every peasant household and lack of cordiality to them was worse than abetment of a serious crime.

It will thus be seen that the peasant union gave them a new code of morality and a new sense of social and political conduct. It is remarkable that this was much more revolutionary in its social implications than the constructive programme of the Congress. Aged peasants long addicted to drink either gave it up altogether or were at least ashamed of this habit. Orthodox peasants gave up their belief in old social codes; a large number of them gave up the observance of untouchability after joining Sanghams

rather than at the time of the great temple-entry campaign. The orthodox peasants of a village in Chirakkal taluk who had beaten up Comrades Keraleeyan and A. K. Gopalan unconscious while they were carrying on temple entry work, later built up a local Karshak Sangham and became its enthusiastic followers. Instances could be multiplied of whole families discarding their old outworn belief and habits after joining the Sangham. And yet the peasant unions had none of these in its programme. A member of the organization could, if he wished, observe untouchability, drink toddy, etc., but the class solidarity built up in the course of struggle and organization inevitably revolutionized the peasants' social conduct.

THE GREAT MARCH

December 1938 saw the historic march of the peasantry of Malabar, a march which symbolized alike the awakening of the peasants as well as the organizing capacity of their leaders. Two streams of the peasantry converged on Calicut on December 18 and held a joint kisan-labour rally on the beach. One batch of less than 200 peasants—old men with tufts on their heads as well as young boys of 18, 20 and 25—marched for a week from Karivellur to Calicut—a distance of about 100 miles. Another batch of less than 100 started from Kanchikode (on the border between Malabar and Coimbatore districts) and made a similar march. A week before that, the peasants of Hosdurg taluk (administratively part of South Canara District but inhabited by Malayalam speaking people) organized a similar march to Mangalore. Over 300 peasants on the whole from all taluks (except Wynad, the jungle area) of British administered Malabar made a great march through the entire district. Over 200 youths all over the district participated in the great movement as organizers of local and central reception to the marchers. As to the number of those who participated in it as audience in the innumerable meetings, local and central, it could not have been less than a lakh.

Such a march is unique in the history of Kerala. Not that this is the first march of any kind here. Kelappan's Salt Satyagraha march from Calicut to Payyannur (1930), A. K. Gopalan's temple entry jatha to Guruvayoor (1931), one more temple entry jatha in 1932, and the great hunger march to Mardas (1936) under Comrades Chandroth and A.K. Gopalan had made Kerala

familiar with marches. But all of them were not only led by but also contained youths of the middle class, while this was the first march which included actual working peasants. All the earlier marches were calculated to do propaganda among the people and to rouse them from their age-long slumber, whereas this was the result of the awakening and organization among the people. The leaders and participants in all previous marches were acting for the masses while the masses were themselves participants in this. No previous demonstration had so many actual peasants in it as this one.

What was the purpose of the march? It was to draw the attention of the government to the grievance and demands of the peasantry and to ask them to take legislative and executive actions far redressing the grievances and conceding the demands. The march also converged in a village in Calicut taluk in the First All-Malabar Kisan Conference presided over by Comrade A. K. Gopalan.

The bureaucracy could not tolerate this. The Collector was very anxious to prevent the March. But he realized that, with the Congress ministry in power, he could not prevent it by force. So he adopted a trick.

Comrade Keraleeyan, Secretary of the Kisan Sabha, had written to him asking for a convenient date on which he might receive the jatha. The Collector said that he would receive him and asked him to fix the date and inform him about it. But Comrade Keraleeyan was on tour and therefore he could answer it only 2 or 3 days later. Meanwhile, the Collector fixed his own programme for the whole of December and wrote to Comrade Keraleeyan that since his programme had been fixed, he could not receive the jatha. He knew that arrangements for the jatha were well advanced and therefore this eleventh hour refusal would cause confusion among the peasantry. Comrade Keraleeyan, however, announced that they were approaching the government through the people if the bureaucracy refused to act as the medium and that the jatha programme would be carried out. The only difference was that, instead of the Collector receiving their memorandum, the people of Calicut would receive it and that is enough since they were under a people's ministry.

And so it was done. As one of the speakers remarked wittily, 'When people try to get out of the way of court peons bringing summons, the

summons is served in absentia, likewise, we are serving our memorandum to the Collector in absentia.' The Collector was ably seconded by his subordinate officials, revenue and police, who went about the villages saying that the jatha would not be received and that, therefore, it was useless to go in the jatha. One of the Deputy Tahsildars in Chirakkal taluk actually issued a circular to the same effect. Some officials went so far as to suggest that jatha would be banned. But the peasants knew what is what. It was for nothing, said they, that they had voted for the Congress so solidly.

OFFICIAL-JENMI CONSPIRACY

Meanwhile, the officials and the jenmis were conspiring against the Kisan Sabha. The Collector's attitude to the jatha was but one of its symptoms. Criminal prosecutions against the kisans (not kisan leaders, for the conspirators had hopes of demoralizing kisans only if the latter were directly dealt with) on various pretexts. Intimidation, looting, social boycott of various sorts—such were the charges levelled against them.

Contrary to the hopes entertained, the conspirators found, however, that this only sharpened the edges of the kisans' weapon of organization. Defence committees were set up everywhere, collections were made, lawyers were engaged and cases fought, with the result that the majority of the cases were found baseless and the accused acquitted. Comrade K.P.R. Gopalan proved that a leading mass mobilizer like him could not only speak eloquently to thousands, shout slogans and sing songs inspiringly but also instruct lawyers and fight out cases. Peasants found that their leader was not only a fine speaker and able organizer of committees but a very competent friend on whom they could rely for support in cases of hardships. In defending these victims of the official-jenmi conspiracy, Comrade K.P.R. Gopalan and his colleagues saved the karshaka sangham and thus dealt a heavy blow to the bureaucracy.

Now a word on the Gandhites. It is remarkable that it was at this time that the Kerala Gandhi Sangham was organized and in many places it was they who spoke for the jenmis. Their leaders like Kelappan issued statements condemning certain aspects of kisan sabhas as contrary to the creed of

nonviolence. Their speakers took up the lead and used all available platforms to carry on a tirade against Karshak Sanghams. Jenmis of Hosdurg and Chirakkal taluks joined the Gandhi Sangham in large numbers. This, however, instead of strengthening the Gandhites organizationally, exposed them in the eyes of peasants as the true agents and allies of the jenmis.

THE TENANCY COMMITTEE

As we have seen already, the centre of the peasants' demands was a proper amendment of the Malabar Tenancy Act of 1930. It was this that had fired the imagination of the peasant masses in North Malabar and made them go all the way to Calicut and Mangalore in jathas. The very progressive recommendations of the Zamindari Committee presided over by Mr. Prakasam raised high hopes that, with this ministry in power peasants could secure their demands.

There was, however, one difference. The upper layers of tenants in zamindari areas had still to fight their battles as they were entirely under the zamindars while kanamdars in Malabar have, by the 1930 Act, already got almost all that they wanted. Any further amendment to the Bill would be dangerous to their interest rather than helpful to them.

Hence the difference in the Ministry's treatment of the agrarian question in zamindari areas and that of Malabar. It took more than six months after the publication of the Prakasam Committee's report far the appointment of the Malabar Tenancy Committee. And what was the position when it was actually appointed? There were on it two avowed jenmis—both the jenmi representatives in the Legislature—but not a single representative of the All-Malabar Peasant Union. True enough, three MLAs had been appointed, who supported the peasant Union through thick and thin, but as against this, there were a dozen others who represented the kanamdars. Thus, it was a committee of kanamdars with two jenmis, three supporters of the Karshaka Sangham, and a dozen kanamdars that the Congress Ministry appointed to enquire and report on tenancy reforms in Malabar.

Though they were dissatisfied with the composition of the committee, the peasants decided to make it a lever for building up a mighty mass

movement around it. At every centre visited by the Committee, there were huge rallies and demonstrations welcoming the committee and urging on it to concede their demands. While there were one or two among the witnesses who tendered evidence before the committee formally, those who supported these witnesses were not less than 25,000. Comrades Narayan Nair Keraleeyan and Bharatheeyan were among the witnesses.

The conduct of members of the committee at its meetings and their recommendations were as expected. The Chairman and members (i.e., all except the three who supported the case of the Karshaka Sangham) were very careful to avoid demonstrations as far as possible. And, in examining the witnesses, they conducted themselves more as lawyers cross-examining in a court of law than as people's representatives arguing the people's case and exposing the enemies of the people. With the exception of K. Madhava Menon, all the Gandhite members on the committee used their skill at cross-examination against representatives of Karshaka Sanghams.

The Committee's recommendations tell the same tale. Mr. R.M. Palat, the jenmi representative, in his minute of dissent, said that he had no idea of dissenting from the majority report but that he was writing it because the representatives of Karshaka Sangham are writing their own dissenting minutes. That is, he is prepared to agree to the majority report. There is nothing to be wondered at in this, for the majority refused to grant the main demands of the peasants. Minor changes in status were of course recommended but the main demands were turned down. No abolition of renewal of kanamdar, no abolition of one year's rent as deposit from verumpattamdar, no reduction in rent rates, etc., etc. If the Karshaka Sanghams were prepared to accept them, said Mr. Palat, he was quite willing to bless them, but if they did not, he would oppose even the minor changes proposed by the kanamdars. The jenmi-kanamdar agreement at the expense of verumpattamdar was thus sealed. The process that began in 1930 was completed in 1940.

III IMPERIALIST WAR AND REPRESSION

Scarcely had the Malabar Tenancy Committee started its work when the Second World War broke out. The Viceroy's declaration of India being in a state of war with Germany, the Wardha Resolution of the Congress Working Committee, the defence of India Ordinance, banning all possible forms of political activity and other political consequences of the war were deeply felt by the kisans. Further they were agitated over the rising prices of all commodities which they had to purchase, without corresponding rise in the price of their own produce. The result of this was that the kisans organized in All-Malabar Peasants' Union were drawn into the political movement. Their demonstrations and rallies before the Malabar Tenancy Committee itself were, to a very great extent, political demonstrations against the war.

KISANS IN THE FOREFRONT OF ANTI-WAR STRUGGLE

Even before the outbreak of the war, the peasant movement in Kerala was largely political. In the taluks of North Malabar where the peasant movement was the strongest, Kisan Sabhas and Congress Committees were, in most places, indistinguishable from one another. Not only were the two organizations manned by the same people, not only did members of the Kisan Sabhas join the Congress *en masse*; but the overwhelming majority of the Congress volunteers in the northern taluks were sons of the kisans who got political consciousness through kisan leaders who were at the same time Congressmen.

The whole of this Congress-cum-Kisan Sabha movement had got educated in the twin slogans of struggle against feudalism and struggle against war. Now that feudalism had died a natural death and war had become no more a distant menace but an immediate reality, the kisans and their volunteers began to feel that it was for them to resist the war.

The first few months of the war, therefore, awakened the whole kisan movement into intensive anti-war activities. Rallies, conferences, jathas, etc., to explain the imperialist character of the war, the attitude of the Congress towards it and the ways and means of translating the Congress declaration into practice were held all over Malabar. The whole volunteer movement got

up on its feet and tirelessly worked to give a conscious form to the political ferment which was spreading in the country.

Elections to the Kerala Provincial Congress Committee and to the Ramgarh Congress were a sure index of the extent to which the kisan movement helped the growth of radicalism in Congress ranks. The elections held that year were the most keenly contested ones in the history of the Kerala Congress. Millowners and capitalists like Samuel Aaron, Shyamji Sundardas, etc., jenmis and feudal reactionaries of all sorts, al1 vied with one another in shelling out money for organizing the election campaign of the Gandhites and to defeat the Socialists. But, in spite of all this, the Socialists swept the polls and captured all the seats in those constituencies where Kisan Sabhas were strong, Equally sweeping and complete was the victory of the Gandhites in those constituencies where the Socialists had failed to organize the Kisan Sabha.

KISAN SABHA MOVEMENT ENTERS COCHIN STATE

All this while, the Kisan movement was confined to Malabar, particularly to North Malabar. However, towards the end of 1939 and the beginning of 1940, it began to spread to Cochin State, too.

It was described in Chapter II of this booklet how Cochin preceded Malabar in the matter of putting a Tenancy Act on to the Statute Book, which, however, did not emancipate the overwhelming majority of those tenants from the clutches of the jenmis. A movement had been afoot for some time to amend this Act in such a way as to afford relief to the verumpattamdars also. This movement, however, had been confined to a few leaders and had not become a mass movement.

The growth of the peasant movement in Malabar, the agitation for the amendment of the Malabar Tenancy Act and the appointment of the Malabar Tenancy Committee drew the attention of people in Cochin State. The movement for fixity of tenure and fair rent for verumpattamdars began to attract wider and wider sections of the people. An organization (Cochin Karshak Sabha) was created to co-ordinate this movement. A jatha was led from all parts of the state to Ernakulam, the capital of the state. The

government itself drafted a bill to confer fixity of tenure on verumpattamdars. After three years of tedious procedure this bill has now been placed on the statute book.

It is true that this Act does not fix the rate of rent which the verumpattamdar had to pay. The existing rents have all been sanctified by the provision in that after the passing of this Act, no increase or decrease in rents will be allowed. Fixity of tenure itself is, therefore, largely farcical, since an overwhelming majority of tenants have no other alternative than to surrender the land in face of the exorbitant rates of rent they have to pay.

It is, however, a great achievement, because this Act has now recognized the verumpattamdars as a class of people whose interests are worthy of protection at the hands of the state. It has, therefore, put hope in the minds of peasants, that, if they go forward and organize themselves, they will be able to get their legitimate rights.

This movement is particularly remarkable since the founder and the present President (now in jail) of the Cochin Karshaka Sabha is a Gandhite while the Secretary (also in jail) is a Communist.

UNITY OF ALL CLASSES AGAINST ECONOMIC EFFECTS OF THE WAR

In April and May 1940, the war entered a new stage. The whole of Western Europe became a theatre of war and the Allies began to suffer successive reverses. This had its immediate reaction on the peasant movement. For one thing, imperialism started repression first against the revolutionary sections of the national movement and later against the entire national movement itself. In Malabar, naturally, it was on the Kisan Sabhas that the heavy hand of repression fell first. The President, Secretary and Volunteer Captain of the Kerala Provincial Congress Committee were arrested. Other kisan leaders too were either arrested or had to go underground as warrants were issued against them. House searches for hunting down the underground leaders and for illegal literature became the order of the day.

Along with this tale of repression against the kisan movement was also the increasing misery of the people as a result of the war. Workers in many places were thrown out of work because the markets for their produce were closed on account of enemy occupation; other sections of workers and salaried employees found it difficult to live on their meagre wages because the cost of living was increasing daily; as for the peasants, the price of what they had to buy was out of all proportions to the slight increase in the price of their own produce. Added to this was the War Fund collection and other things which contributed to the misery of all sections of people.

The working class and kisan leaders from all taluks in Malabar, therefore, took the initiative in starting a movement not against the war as such but against the economic misery caused to all sections of the people by the war. A programme of people's demands was formulated which included, among other things:

1. Dearness allowance to all workers and salaried employees, in proportion to the rise in the cost of living.
2. Cheap grain shops in all towns and villages.
3. Stern action against officials who use coercion in collecting the War Fund.
4. Reasonable prices for agricultural produce.

A committee was set up to organize agitation for these demands. Comrade K.P.R. Gopalan was elected the Secretary of the Committee. A campaign of collecting signatures to a memorandum setting forth the above demands was started. A series of meetings were held all over Malabar to popularize this. Enrolment of members to trade unions and kisan sabhas went on at a rapid pace. The movement seemed to get a new tempo.

THE EVENTS OF SEPTEMBER 15, 1940

It was at this stage that the now well-known incidents of September 15, 1940 took place.

Working class and kisan leaders of Chirakkal taluk 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 taluk 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 taluk 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. Gandhite 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, village in Chirakkal taluk near Keecheri. Since the Conference was banned at Keecheri, its organizers changed it to the adjoining village of Morazha. But the authorities followed suit and prohibited the meeting there too. About 2,000 people—peasants and volunteers—were present and they decided to disobey the other. 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 taluk. All the kisan organizers 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 taluk where, too, there was a clash in which not the police but audience who suffered casualties. Two

kisan volunteers—Abdulla and Chathukutty—were shot dead.

KISANS FACE REPRESSION

These incidents naturally led to severe repression. Meetings and other forms of protest were prohibited. Police and MSP (Malabar Special Police)—a semi-military organization formed at the time of the Moplah Rebellion of 1921—started a reign of terror in all the villages in Chirakkal and Kottayam taluks. 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 were 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 taluks. 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 organization 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 taluk not only kept the organization 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 organization rather than save their own skins.

It was the heroism and resourcefulness of the peasants—men, women and children—of North Malabar in this period that enabled the Socialists of Malabar to build up an illegal organization worthy of the Communist Party, whose political and organizational leadership, as opposed to the leadership of the Congress Socialist Party, they had accepted towards the beginning of 1940. Not only were they able to build up a sound illegal apparatus, but, basing themselves upon this organization, they could save the whole kisan cadre and kisan masses from demora1isation. Through illegal literature, through small but organized groups of kisan militants, through occasional illegal tours of underground leaders, all the former volunteers and local organizers of the kisan movement were kept in regular and systematic contact with one another. New leaders and organizers of the kisan movement were thrown up; old ones were steeled in the face of repression; the character of the whole kisan leadership underwent a basic transformation. The kisans of North Malabar had to go through severe ordeals in these months but they came out of it not only unscathed but also tremendously strengthened.

THE OFFENSIVE OF THE JENMIS

The jenmis of North Malabar thought that repression against the kisan movement was so severe that they could do what they pleased with them. They had to yield, in 1938, 1939 when the Kisan Sabhas were strong, on many issue before the united will of the kisans. None of their feudal oppressive activities would be tolerated by the kisans when they were well organized and led by their well-known and beloved leaders. But now that their leaders were in jail, their organization had no freedom of speech, and assembly, they could take back whatever concessions they were forced to give in 1938, 1939 and 1940.

They, however, soon learned that they had made a grave mistake. The absence of their leaders did not smash the Kisan Sabhas, nor did the lack of

civil liberties deprive them of ways and means to act in an organized manner. The moment the jenmis started their offensive, the peasant hit back with devastating effect.

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 kisan 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 mobilized all the peasants for their demands. The kisans resolved that they would cultivate the lands in spite of the jenmis' ban. The jenmi got the police and the MSP to enforce his ban. But he found that the kisans were so united in their organization 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 organized 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 organized offensive of the jenmis was thus averted by the organized 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.

THE KAYYUR INCIDENT

It was in this background that the now well-known Kayyur incident took place.

Kayyur is a village in the Hosdurg sub-taluk of Kasaragod taluk of South Canara district. Adjoining as it is to Chirakkal taluk of North Malabar, and having an overwhelming majority of Malayalam speaking people, this sub-taluk 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 admisnistratively 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 taluks in regard to organization. In spite of the fact that the jenmis were legally entitled to do what they pleased with their tenants, the organization 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 Sabba took steps to see that this does not take place. They sent volunteers to protect the crops 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 Februrry 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 repressions and against this particular incident, a meeting was fixed for March 28 at Kayyur. A procession or 200 to 250 people—kisans and volunteers—was marching to the place of the meeting. A police constable who bad 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 fleeing 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 is unexampled in the history of Kerala except in South Malabar in 1921–1922. Whole villages were deserted; men, women and children left their hearths and home and took shelter in the jungle. A correspondent of the *Mathurbhoomi*, the Gandhite daily, who reported one of the innumerable instances of high-handedness of the MSP was punished for this 'sin' by being beaten up by Jamedar. The jenmis themselves found that, instead of extorting rent and other levies, from the kisans, this sort of repression held them united to such an extent that not even the usual rent could be collected. Individuals and organizations of all sorts joined in the demand for the immediate withdrawal of the MSP from the area and the restoration of normal life.

Such severe repression was a blow to the kisan movement in this taluk from which it has not yet completely recovered. It was not so much the reign of repression which smashed the Kisan Sabha. It was the fact that all the leading kisan organizers of the taluk—60 of them—were involved in this case and all of them were arrested at the first blow. Unlike Chirakkal and Kottayam taluks where a large number of taluk-level leaders and a majority of local organizers were saved from arrests and were thus able to move about and infuse confidence and courage in the people, Hosdurg taluk had a complete blackout of all its kisan leaders and militants.

It, however, does not mean that this was the end of the Kisan Sabha in that taluk. Peasants came to know that, in spite of repression the kisan movement was going on vigorously in all taluks. They were perhaps doubtful whether anything could be done in their taluk, but they had no doubt in their minds that the Kisan Sabha was their own movement which should be strengthened. They were afraid of giving shelter to underground leaders coming from outside; still they knew that they were working for the cause which is dear to their hearts. It was this loyalty to the Kisan Sabha and their leaders that stood in good stead in later months when attempts to rebuild

the kisan movement could be made. Steady though slow progress is being made today by the kisan leaders and organizers.

KISAN SABHA BANNED

The Government of Madras took this opportunity to deliver the final blow to the kisan movement in the province. It issued an order declaring the All-Malabar Peasants' Union and all its branches illegal organizations. The reason stated for this action of the government was the Kayyur incident. It also stated that the Peasant Union was 'communist controlled'.

This ban did not, in fact, make much difference, because, since September 15, 1940 Kisan Sabhas were practically unable to function legally. What had been a *de facto* ban on kisan Sabhas became a *de jure* ban—that was all the difference which the government order meant. The kisans refused to be cowed down by the *de jure* ban just as they had not been crushed by the *de facto* ban.

DISTRESS RELIEF COMMITTEES CHAMPION THE CAUSE OF KISANS

Ten days after the government communiqué declaring the Peasants' Union an illegal body, a terrible cyclone played havoc all over Kerala. This was followed, a fortnight later, by a flood. Both these affected all parts of Malabar, Cochin and Travancore.

Damage to persons and property was terrible. In Malabar alone, according to government's reports, over 160 people had died on account of this. The value of houses fallen, gardens and paddy fields destroyed, cattle and other animals killed came to several lakhs. An equal amount of damage was done to person and property in Cochin and Travancore.

The three governments in Kerala, the Congress and the Muslim League made enquiries into the extent of damage, gave publicity to their reports and made some arrangements for relief. Relief funds were collected from Bombay, Madras and other cities outside Kerala and handed over to

voluntary citizens' committees which supplemented the relief work done by the governments.

All this, however, did not touch the real problem of kisan's distress because it did not dare touch the all-important question of remission of rent and debt. The government gave some partial relief in the matter of land revenue but did not insist that what it was prepared to do in respect of revenue should be done by the jenmis in respect of rent. Nor did it declare a moratorium on debts.

It was these and other demands that were formulated by the underground leaders of the kisan movement. They were appreciated by the kisans who responded to the call for agitation behind these demands. A series of meetings were held in all taluks to ventilate these demands. Processions and demonstrations were led to local officials to ask them to move the government along these lines. Out of this agitation were formed local Distress Relief Committees which became the rallying points in the countryside for all classes of the rural poor. These local committees were later coordinated into taluk committees and ultimately into district committee in Malabar.

These Distress Relief Committees took up price control and other questions—in fact, all questions which were of vital concern to the people. They, therefore, functioned in place of Kisan Sabhas in rural areas, while in towns they were united organisations of workers, employees and other sections of the people. They continued to function till very recently when Kisan Sabhas themselves began to function and when Food Committees were formed to tackle the question of food.

IV PEOPLE'S MOBILISATION FOR PEOPLE'S WAR

DEFEND THE SOVIET LAND

Within a few weeks after the All-Malabar Peasants' Union was banned, Hitler attacked the Soviet Union. The one country where the peasants had been freed not only from feudal landlords but also from moneylenders, profiteering merchants and other sections of capitalists was attacked. News

of gigantic battles between the Nazi hordes and the heroic army workers and peasants began to pour in every day.

These events naturally moved the kisans of Kerala as they moved all sections of toilers the world over. Not only did they feel concerned over the fate of the Socialist Fatherland but they got inspired by the heroic deeds of the Soviet soldier, the guerrillas, men and women, the worker in the Soviet factory, the peasant on the collective farm and all other sections of Soviet citizens who were sacrificing their all to defend their Fatherland.

Demonstrations of solidarity with the Soviet Union were, therefore, started all over the country. Trade unions which were still legal, reading rooms and clubs which were functioning in several places, Distress Relief Committees, individual admirers and supporters of the Soviet Union—all these took the initiative in organizing meetings and passing resolutions extending solidarity with the heroic Red Army and the Soviet government. Newspaper articles, small pamphlets and booklets describing the different aspects of Soviet life began to appear. These activities began to crystallize themselves organizationally in Soviet Aid Committees which not only popularized the Soviet Union in the country but made collections for the Soviet Aid Fund.

Kisans all over Kerala naturally took part in all this. They, however, could not do it from their own platform since their organization was illegal. In some places in the interior, even other organizations or individuals could not convene meetings because of repression. (In one or two places, purely Soviet Aid meetings were prohibited.) But they overcame all this difficulty by holding 'guerrilla meetings' attended by 50 to 100 people. Evading police informers, the kisans would individually or in small groups collect at the time and place previously fixed, one comrade would speak for half an hour on the Soviet Union, the audience would perhaps put questions to him and then the meeting would disperse.

While this was possible where organization had reached an advanced stage, the technique of group discussion was adopted to educate the people on the Soviet Union. One comrade would sit at a local tea-shop or other rendezvous of the public, read the day's newspapers, explain each item of the news, etc. This was most effective in removing many doubts created by all

sorts of rumours deliberately spread by enemies of the Soviet Union and in correcting the impressions created by the wrong lead given by daily newspapers.

The result of all this was that, at a time when Hitler was boasting of his smashing victories, when the local enemies of the Soviet Union were spreading the 'news' that there was no more a Soviet Union, when learned men all over the country were crediting Hitler with superhuman powers of invincibility, the 'illiterate' and 'backward' kisans knew that Stalin and the Red Army were digging the grave for Hitler and his men. They also realized that digging Hitler's grave was in fact delivering a smashing blow to world imperialism.

DEFEND OUR MOTHERLAND

While all this was being done, there was no change in the attitude of the kisans to war as a whole. They still regarded the British war efforts as efforts of an imperialist power to carry on an imperialist war for the maintenance and extension of its imperialist interests. Opposition to war efforts in India, therefore, continued as before. The only difference was this: instead of the previous attitude of neutrality in the world war, even if India was declared independent, and an independent government came to power, the new attitude was one of opposition to war efforts only so long as Britain continued her imperialistic hold on India.

But developments both in the international situation as well as in India led to a radical change in the whole attitude to war. The Anglo-Soviet Pact, the Atlantic Charter, the Moscow Conference, etc., as well as the declarations of leading Soviet statesmen like Stalin, Molotov, Litvinov and Maisky showed that the entry of the Soviet Union into the war meant the biggest opportunity to the peoples of the world to unite among themselves and with the Soviet people and win freedom for all in the very course of winning the war. The Jap declaration of war against America and Britain as well as the lightning speed of the Jap advance in the Far East brought India herself into the orbit of Fascist invasion.

The release of Congress leaders and unequivocal statements of Congress leaders in favour of a people's defence of India against Fascist invasion, the new line of national unity for the formation of a National Government of National Defence popularized by the Communist Party of India, the visit of General Chiang kai-Shek to India, etc., clearly indicated that it was not a question of defending Soviet land but one of forging national unity in India with a view to the effective defence of her own borders that was on the agenda. The path of national unity and national defence became marked out as the path of National Freedom.

The resolution of the Patna Session of the All-India Students' Federation in January 1942, the resolution of the Nagpur Session (February 1942) of the Central Kisan Council, the speeches made by Communist leaders at the AICC, AITUC and other meetings—all helped in crystallising the attitude of the kisan movement in Kerala to the World War which had entered a new phase in 1941.

Briefly stated, it was summed up in the following statements:

(1) That the war has, since the Nazi attack on USSR become a People's War. It can be won only as a war of liberation all round. For any people to lose the war means themselves getting back fascist enslavement. On the other hand, for every people to unite themselves and with each other on the common issue of winning the war and to progressively strengthen national defence means strengthening themselves and marching forward to their own freedom. National freedom through the war, fascist enslavement outside it.

(2) That, since the Jap attack in the Far East, the war has directly become a war of defence of India.

(3) That, for these reasons, it is for the Indian people to mobilize themselves for the war of national defence against the Fascists.

(4) That such a mobilization of the Indian people can be effective on a nationwide scale only by the declaration of Indian independence and the formation of a Provisional National Government in India.

(5) That, for the defence of the country and for compelling Britain to form a National Government in India, Congress–League unity should be

built up on whose basis all-in National Unity should be brought about.

(6) That, for facilitating such a unity, Congress should accept the principle of self-determination for nationalities in India.

A countrywide campaign was carried on to popularize these basic ideas. Anti-Jap conferences, processions, rallies, etc., were held all over the country. Songs, games, dances of all sorts, pantomime plays, dramas, cartoons—in short every form of art was used to make this programme sink in the minds of the people.

Out of this agitation and propaganda arose the Anti-Jap Committees and volunteers. In every village where there was a nucleus of the kisan movement, an anti-Jap Committee was set up, volunteers were thrown up and trained, women and children were approached and organized, Jap agents were isolated and exposed. Activities of Distress Relief and Price Control Committees were coordinated and linked up with mass mobilization for National Defence, National Government and the principle of self determination to nationalities.

It was this campaign which saved the province from the tragic incidents which followed the arrest of national leaders on August 9 in other provinces.

Not a single case of collective fines, not a single case or firing on the people, very few minor cases of sabotage, comparatively few number of lathi-charges, a series of meetings demanding release of national leaders and the starting of negotiations with the Congress for the formation of National Government, intensive campaign for the principle of self-determination of nationalities—this was the record of Kerala during the National Crisis, thanks to the intensive anti-Jap campaign that was carried on since the beginning of the year.

RELEASE OUR LEADER—LEGALIZE OUR ORGANIZATION

As part and parcel of this campaign for National Defence, a campaign was run for the release of all leaders of the people, for the legalization of all people's organizations for the restoration of all civil liberties.

In the first period of the campaign, it was only the communists and those congressmen who worked in close collaboration with them who were in jail. It was the Communist Party and the Peasants' Union which were illegal. All Congressmen in Kerala who were not suspected to be sympathetic towards communists had come out in December 1941 and January 1942. And Congress was functioning legally. Naturally, therefore, in this period the release and legalization campaign took the specific character of a campaign for the release of communist leaders and legalization of the Communist Party and the Peasants' Union.

In the second period, not only communists but congressmen were also in jail. The Communist Party had been legalized but Congress was declared illegal. Although the ban on the All-Malabar Peasants' Union was not formally lifted, units of the All-Kerala Kisan Sangham could function legally. In this period, therefore, the campaign was for the release of communist and congressmen from jail and for the legalization of the Congress.

Reviewing the whole campaign, one finds three specific campaigns which united the whole country.

(1) The 'Release K.P.R. Gopalan' Campaign.

This was, in fact, the first mass campaign which united all sections of the people not only in Kerala but also throughout India. Although this was not effective in the sense of getting him released, it was sufficiently strong to get the death sentence passed on him commuted into one of transportation.

(2) 'Release the Kayyur Comrades' Campaign.

This also began as an all-parties' campaign with the right-wing Congressmen at the head of the Kayyur Defence Committee. This, however, could not be continued since, a week after this committee was set up, the national crisis of August 9 began and the Congress leaders were arrested. Still, the kisans and other sections of the people carried on a countrywide campaign, collected funds for filing the appeal before the Privy Council, tried every possible legal means to save them. They themselves wrote to Comrade Joshi that they were prepared to go in suicide squads, and sacrifice themselves at the altar of national defence. But their death sentence had been confirmed and they were boldly and cheerfully awaiting the gallows.

(3) The third was the 'Release Gandhiji' campaign which was started soon after Gandhiji began his fast. This had united all sections of the people and broken the wall of distrust and suspicion which existed between the different sections of the patriots.

FEED THE PEOPLE

All this, however, was not a specific kisan programme. It was a national programme in which kisans as part of the people participated.

But the kisans have their own programme in this period of people's war —to 'grow more food'.

The Bitha Session of the All-India Kisan Sabha put that programme before the kisans in every province; the stoppage of export of rice from Burma on which people of Kerala lived for 4–5 months in the year underlined the importance of that programme. The absolute lack of rice from the markets, which began to manifest itself in several places in Kerala as early as October 1942, put this as the single item on the agenda of the kisan movement.

It was to this that kisan leaders bestowed their attention when they were comparatively free to organize the Kisans.

In the last week of September a representative meeting of delegates from all taluks in Malabar as well as from Cochin and Travancore was held.

The meeting decided to form an All-Kerala Kisans Sangnam with Comrade Narayanan Nair as Secretary. It appointed taluk organizers for every taluk in Malabar and for Travancore and decided to take steps to get the Cochin Karshaka Sabha affiliated to the All-Kerala Kisan Sangham which itself was to be affiliated to AIKS.

The main item on the agenda of the Sangham was how to implement the Bitha programme of the A. I.K. S. with regard to the 'grow more food' campaign. Ultimately it came to the conclusion that it should approach the government with concrete proposals to be taken immediately. Local units of the Kisan Sanghams should, on their part, approach local jenmis and others

and ask them to cooperate with the Sangham in making the programme of 'grow more food' a success.

The Sangham, therefore, submitted a memorandum to the Government of Madras suggesting that immediate effect be given to the majority report of the Malabar Tenancy Committee. Now the majority report was signed by all the members representing the jemnis and the kanamdars (the minority being supporters of the Kisan Sabha) and were, therefore, agreeable to every section of landed interests. These recommendations included, among other things, one to the effect that the Collector should be empowered to assign any plot of waste land which was in possession of jenmis to any cultivator and that, in such cases, the cultivator need not pay any rent for 5 years, nor should he be liable to eviction under any circumstances.

The government, however, did not agree to this. It was not prepared to implement a unanimous report of the Tenancy Committee even when it was necessary to increase the quantity of food available for the people in these times of food scarcity.

But the local units of the Sangham began to work on their own to move the local jenmis and other sections of the people.

They asked the jenmis to give waste land for cultivation, to make necessary concessions to tenants with respect to payments, to see that stocks of foodgrains were not allowed to go out of the locality unless and until the local requirements were satisfied.

They asked the local merchants to take a patriotic view of things, refuse to be a party to hoarding of grain and to sell necessaries at a reasonable rate of profit. They came forward with programmes of how to distribute the things that were available to all the people in the locality and organize such distribution. They took a census of the local needs of the people and approached the authorities with demands for adequate supply of necessaries.

In this work the Kisan Sangham is not alone, because it is not done in the sole interests of kisans. Production and distribution of food and other daily necessaries are equally in the interests of the jenmis, the moneylenders, the middle class and the peasants.

All these sections of the people are, therefore, cooperating in forming food committees, organizing food volunteers and otherwise taking effective steps to tide over the crisis

The jenmis too have begun to see that the policy of insisting on their pound of flesh is, in reality, one of killing the hen that lays the golden eggs. In several villages therefore, they have agreed to make the concessions as demanded by the Kisan Sangham.

While the programme of growing and properly distributing food is thus building the widest possible unity in the village, it is the Kisan Sangham units that play that most vital role in this village unity. Not only do they represent the most numerous section of the people in the village but are also the best organized section. Kisan Sabhas, therefore, are growing into the organs which represent and lead the entire people of the village.

Marxism-Leninism and the Bourgeois Judiciary

Your Journal in its issue dated August 24, (1970 *Kerala Law Times* 588) has published the judgement of the Supreme Court in the case in which I figured as the applicant in an appeal against the conviction and sentence by the High Court of Kerala.[1] While I do not intend to say anything about the confirmation of conviction by the Supreme Court and reduction of sentence from a fine of Rs. 1,000 to Rs. 50, I am prompted to write this letter only by way of explanation to that part of the judgement in which the Supreme Court purports to 'expose' my 'error' about the teachings of Marx and Engels.

Let me confess that, though I have devoted three-and-a-half decades to the study and assimilation of the teachings of Marx and Engels, I do not claim that I have studied *all the writings* of Marx and Engels. I am referring to this because the judges seem to 'expose' my 'error' on the basis of a claim that they have studied *all the writings* of Marx and Engel. The judgement says '*in all the writings* [of Marx and Engels] there is no direct attack on the judiciary selected as the target of people's wrath.' I can only salute the courage of anyone who claims to have studied *all the writings* of Marx and Engels. May I also point out that all the writings of the founders of Marxism are yet to be made available in English. Is it claimed that the Hon'ble Chief Justice or the other judges have read *all the writings* in their original German? In any case, let me give a brief quotation from a celebrated work written by Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844*:

> At the root of all laws lies the idea that the proletariat is an enemy which must be defeated. This can be seen from the way in which the law is administered by the judges. This is particularly true of the Justices of the Peace—themselves members of the middle classes—and it is with these that the proletariat for the most part comes into contact. The Justices of the Peace have no hesitation in regarding the administration of the law as a means of keeping the working classes down. Let a prosperous

member of the middle classes be summoned—or rather, politely 'invited to appear'—before a magistrate. The court naturally expresses regret that he should have been troubled to appear at all. The magistrate does everything in his power to smooth the path of the accused. And if the charge against the rich man is conclusively proved then the magistrate, with profuse apologies, merely imposes a trifling fine. The rich man flings the money contemptuously on the table and takes himself off. But if some poor devil of a worker appears before a magistrate it is quite a different story. He has nearly always had to spend the previous night—with other prisoners—in the lock-up. The magistrate shouts at him and assumes from the first that he is guilty. His defence is contemptuously brushed aside with the remark: 'We have heard that sort of excuse before'. Then he is fined and since he has not got enough money to pay the fine, he has to go to prison for a month (or even longer) and suffer on the treadmill. If nothing specific can be proved against the poor devil he can still be sent to the treadmill on the ground that he is 'a rogue and a vagabond'[2]—the two nearly always go together. The prejudice of the Justices of the Peace—particularly in rural areas—against the working classes beggars description. Public opinion accepts this state of affairs and it is only the really scandalous cases of judicial prejudice that arouse any comment in the newspapers. Generally, the facts are reported without comment. And this is what one might expect. These 'Dogberries',[3] in fact interpret the law as it was always intended that it should be interpreted. And the Justices of the Peace are, of course, themselves members of the bourgeoisie and really believe that the interests of their own class are the true cornerstone of law and order.

Let me also respectfully point out that in the very judgement is quoted the following sentence from Engels:

> The centralized state power, with its ubiquitous organs, standing army, police, bureaucracy, clergy and judicature organs brought after the plan of systematic and hierarchic division of labour originates from the days of absolute monarchy, serving nascent middle-class society as mighty weapons in its struggle against feudalism.

Here is enough evidence to show that Engels did not make any distinction between the various 'organs of centralized state power' such as the standing army, police, bureaucracy, clergy and judicature.

I do not know whether it is the function of the Court to 'expose' the 'errors' committed by an accused before it with regard to the systems of political philosophy of which the teachings of Marx and Engels is an important one. To my mind, the function of the Court is to interpret and administer law as it is, and *not* to pronounce their verdict on the various systems of philosophy in which litigants repose their faith. It will be an extraordinary state of affairs if the judges are asked to become interpreters of systems of political philosophy. I would, on the other hand, submit that it is the function of the Courts to come to a decision on whether the particular act committed is, contrary to the law as it is, regardless of whether the person committed is loyal to his declared principles.

Coming to the present case, it was certainly the Court's duty to examine whether my speeches and statements were against the law and to give a verdict on this specific *legal* question. I wonder whether the judges should be concerned with the question whether my claim to have been faithfully following the teachings of Marx and Engels is correct or not. I must be punished if I have acted against the law as the judges interpret it, even if my claim with regard to the teachings of Marx and Engels is correct. On the other hand, even if I am making a false claim, I cannot be punished if I have not transgressed the law as it is interpreted by the judges.

But since the highest judicial authority in the country has taken upon itself the task of trying to find out what the true teachings of Marx and Engels are and to 'expose' my 'error' with regard to them, may I crave the indulgence of your columns to point out that it is not me who is in 'error about the true teachings of Marx and Engels'.

A good part of the judgement is devoted to an examination of my claim on this point and to 'expose' my 'error'. With due respect to the erudition, wisdom and authority of the Hon'ble Court, I should say that the Court is far from right in its understanding of the matter. Discussing the Marxist-Leninist teachings on the State and its withering away, the judges say:

Marx, Engels and Lenin thought in terms of 'withering away of the state'. Although Lenin thought that Engels' doctrines were an adulteration of Marxism, he was not right. Marx himself believed in this. In his *Poverty of Philosophy,* Marx says:

'. . . The working class, in the course of development, will substitute for the old bourgeois society an association which will exclude classes and their antagonism, and there will be no more political power properly so-called, since political power is precisely the official expression of antagonism in bourgeois society'. Marx and Engels in the *Manifesto* had considered the true state to be 'the proletariat organized as the ruling class. It was the Kautskyistes (Dictatorship to the Proletariat), who, misunderstanding the doctrines of the proletariat needed a State which must wither away leading to the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Anyone who is familiar with the classics of Marxism-Leninism would find that everything in the above passage is incorrect except the quotation from Marx and a clause in the penultimate sentence which says that Kautsky misunderstood the doctrines of Marx. On this last point again, let it be noted, the Court has itself misunderstood Marx and therefore the crux of Kautsky's misunderstanding.

For:

(1) Marx, Engels and Lenin did not consider the State as an external category. They have taken great pains to show that there was a period of human history when there was no state at all. Again, there will be a stage in the history of human society when there will be no state. In between these two phases, here exists a State which however is not the same for all time but changes its basic character from one to another. As has been lucidly explained by Lenin on the basis of the teachings of Marx and Engels, there is no State in general; the character of the State changes together with the character of the class society of which it is a product and guardian angel. The slave, the feudal and bourgeois societies have their respective class States. Every one of the States is an instrument of oppression forged by the slave-owing, feudal and bourgeois exploiting minorities to keep the exploited majorities in subjection. In class societies, like ours, dominated by the

alliance of the feudal and bourgeois, exploiting minorities, the State is the engine of oppression forged by this alliance of exploiting classes.

(2) It was this teaching of Marx and Engels which was misunderstood and misinterpreted by Kautsky who propounded the theory that the proletariat can use the bourgeois State in order to overthrow capitalist rule and establish socialist society. Engels himself in his last days had an inkling of Kautsky's mistakes on this point, but it was left to Lenin to demolish the anti-Marxian theory of Kautsky. Lenin pointed out that the fundamental error of Kautsky's teachings, was that he abandoned the class essence of the bourgeois State and confused democracy for the bourgeoisie with democracy for the people. This incidentally is the very idea against which Marx and Engels in their days had to fight a lifelong battle.

(3) The bourgeois State, according to Marx, Engels and Lenin, is the last form of the class State in the sense of its being an engine of oppression in the hands of the exploiting minority used against the exploited majority. For, capitalist rule is overthrown by the proletariat which, in alliance with the peasantry and the mass of petty proprietors, smashes the bourgeois State machinery and establishes its own State. Two points should however be mentioned with regard to this State.

Firstly, it is no more an engine of oppression wielded by the exploiting minority against the exploited majority, since it is the formerly exploited majority that have established their supremacy. This, in fact, is the first time after the emergence of class-society when the majority has ceased to be exploited.

Secondly, it has still the attributes of a State, i.e., an engine of suppression. For, the overthrown exploiting minority is still powerful enough to think of staging a comeback. It is therefore necessary to forge the necessary weapons of suppression against such attempts at restoration. This therefore is called dictatorship of the proletariat. For, the state is headed by a class which, in alliance with the peasant and petty proprietor masses, established the widest possible democracy for the people, combined with that amount of restrictions on the rights of the formerly exploiting minority which is necessary to prevent restoration of class rule.

(4) It is after this transitional phase in human history, during which collectivization of all the means and instruments of production is completed, discriminations based on physical and intellectual labour as well as urban and rural life, men and women and so on, abolished, thus putting an end to all the remnants of class distinctions, that the State 'withers away'.

The Hon'ble Judges who purport to 'expose' my 'error about the true teachings of Marx and Engels' do not seem to have understood that discussion of the State in general, and not the State in relation to the class which is wielding that engine of oppression, is alien to the true teachings of Marx and Engels. This is exactly the error committed by Karl Kautsky. The Hon'ble Judges have also in my humble opinion, fallen into this error. Hence the palpably erroneous statement made in the judgement that 'according to Marx and Engels, the State withers away *leading to the dictatorship of the proletariat*'.

If such a patently erroneous proposition were made by an ordinary scribe in a newspaper or an ignorant politician one would have taken it lightly. Even if a judge were to make such a statement outside Court, one would take the same view. Here, however, is a judgment delivered by the Supreme Court of India, a judgement which enjoins me to see my 'error' about the teachings of Marxism. I hope it would be permissible for me to exclaim: 'No, My Lords, I would rather keep my "error" than look at the teachings of Marx and Engels through your Lordships' eyes.'

NOTES

1 Letter written to the Editor, *Kerala Law Times*, Ernakulam, on 29.2.1970.

2 The words 'a rogue and a vagabond' are in English in the first German edition of 1845.

3 'Dogberries' is in English in the German edition of 1845.

Talking about Kerala

A Conversation with E.M.S. Namboodiripad

V.K. Ramachandran

This conversation with E.M.S. Namboodiripad took place on April 28, 1992. The context was this: I was at work on a research paper on Kerala's development achievements and, as any person who has worked on Kerala knows, EMS' writings on Kerala's history, society and politics constitute foundational material for any such effort. In 1992, I met the source himself for a conversation on certain specific aspects of my work; in the event, from EMS' responses to my somewhat disparate questions emerged a lucid, coherent and insightful picture of certain important features of modern Kerala's development. EMS' account here illustrates the extent and depth of his knowledge of Kerala and his willingness to push forward the boundaries of Marxism in order to understand the society in which he lived; it also illustrates his modesty about his own role in modern Kerala and his rejection of any kind of complacency with respect to its achievements.

The conversation falls into four parts. In the first section, EMS presents his views on aspects of Kerala's contemporary economy. Kerala has been recognized internationally as a region set distinctly apart from the rest of India in respect of achievements in education and health (including women's and girls' education and health), land reform, the struggle against untouchability, the movement for food security and bridging regional disparities.

Although he was one of the architects of Kerala's successes in the field of public action, EMS campaigned tirelessly against an uncritical attitude towards the current state of Kerala's economy. He believed—and this opinion is reflected sharply in this conversation—that the concentration on its achievements with respect to 'social indicators' had diverted attention from its failures in the spheres of production and employment. In this part of the conversation, he also expresses his belief that the major constraint on

the development of industry in the State was a failure of consciousness with regard to the problems of material production.

In the second section, EMS speaks about the distinct contributions of Travancore, Cochin and Malabar—the three regions brought together in the modern State of Kerala—to the State's development. In the literature on regional issues in Kerala's development, the dynamism of the Princely States, particularly Travancore, is often contrasted with stagnation in British-ruled Malabar; it is often assumed that, in regional terms, Kerala's development involved taking the lessons of Travancore and applying them to Malabar.

This perception of Malabar as an area of unrelieved backwardness and no change must be recognized for what it is, a partial and ill-informed view. It was the people of Malabar who faced the most archaic and reactionary system of agrarian relations; it was the people of Malabar who confronted British colonial power directly. An anti-imperialist, anti-feudal movement, based on mass organizations of workers, peasants, agricultural workers, teachers and youth and led by the left-wing (and later Communist) contingent of the freedom movement was Malabar's specific contribution to development, as was the new direction the Left gave to the movements against autocracy and caste oppression in the Princely States. EMS summarizes his view on this succinctly:

> As a matter of fact, the anti-imperialist freedom movement and the Left in that movement came from Malabar to the States part, while education and socio-cultural developments went from the States part to Malabar.

EMS was the first social historian of Kerala to bring analyses of social and marriage practices in traditional Kerala to bear on an integrated Marxist understanding of social development in the State. His writings in this field are a model of rigour and creativity; some of his observations on social organization and social development are in the third part of the text that follows.

Kerala has India's most successful public distribution system. The establishment of Kerala's PDS is widely recognized—as is the implementation of land reform—as being specifically a Left-led project. EMS was active in the movement for food from its beginning in the War

years, and in the concluding section of this text, he makes a brief comment —a typically modest one—on its origins.

CONTEMPORARY ECONOMY

The recent development history of Kerala has set it distinctly apart from the rest of India in respect of what are now called 'human development' indicators, although it has done relatively poorly in respect of industrial and agricultural growth. Would you comment on the recent interest in social and economic development in Kerala?

We must remember that while the development experience of Kerala has a positive side, it also has a negative side. In terms of the production of material values, we are very backward. That backwardness is increasing. Although some efforts have been made by Left Front governments to correct the balance, these have not gone far enough. It is here, perhaps, that West Bengal stands better. As a result of Left Front rule for the last 14 years, there has been a big change. There has been change in the rural areas. One factor that has acted in their favour is political stability. From 1977, the State has had, continuously, a Left Front Government. Political instability adds to the negative factor here; although some improvement was registered during the four-year Left Front Government here, the impact was not enough. One reason for this is that people here have been taught to think that development means only the development of social services; they don't think that industry and agriculture should be developed.

During the first Communist Ministry, we tried to make the first break in that sphere. Our effort was to bring industries via the private sector, because the possibility of industrialization through the public sector was not very bright in Kerala. So we brought the private sector from outside: the Birla factory in Mavoor, the Premier Tyres factory in Kalamassery. This was in industry. In agriculture also, a small beginning was made with the fostering of green manure. C. Achutha Menon, who was the Minister for Agriculture as well as for Finance, took this as his mission. Popularization of green manure, through which productivity in agriculture can be increased without the use or with very little use of chemical fertilizers. These were the two

directions in which we tried to increase production in industry and agriculture. It could not be kept up because that Government was brought down and, until the 1987 Left Democratic Government, there was continuous political instability. This is where West Bengal differs.

So when we assess the development experiences of these regions, we must take into consideration the composite picture, otherwise our picture will not be correct.

Land reform was perhaps the first concern of your first Government; the initiation of land reform must also be considered one of its greatest achievements. When you talk of the achievements of the first Communist Government, the major achievement was this: from the time that we issued the first Ordinance banning all evictions, the peasants (that is, the actual cultivators), in practice, got the land, at least in those areas where we had strong organizations among them. Although they were tenants, they could not be evicted; so they stuck to the land. With regard to paying rent, they did not pay rent scrupulously; the Ordinance had banned evictions even for failing to pay rents. So in practice, at least in those areas where the kisan organization was strong, ever since 1957, the peasants were gradually developing into owners. This was our biggest achievement. But unfortunately, following this, organizing and mobilizing them for the improvement of production could not be done. There, as I told you, a beginning was made.

How do you characterize agrarian relations in Kerala today? Landlordism in the old form has ceased to exist, that is, the big jenmi, but landlordism of that nature was in fact absent even in the Travancore and partly in the Cochin part of Kerala. In Cochin, the change in feudal forms of property was less than in Travancore, but even there, almost half the cultivable lands were big pandaravaka. So the type of jenmi who was very strong in the Malabar part was absent in Cochin and Travancore.

In 1957, as you know, first an Ordinance was issued banning all evictions, even for arrears of rent. After that, even in Malabar, the old type of jenmi ceased to exist.

But there is landlordism of the other type, that is, those who also get their lands cultivated through wage labour and those who live on usury and also the dominant section in rural trade. In place of the old jenmi a new class has come into existence—big landlords who get their lands cultivated through wage labour, those who live by usury and wholesale trade. This is the type of new landlord. This type of landlordism does exist. In this situation, the majority of the rural people are either small landholders or landless people. The kisan movement has to address itself to the problems of this section, that is, small landowners and agricultural labourers. This means that problems concerning seeds, other inputs of agriculture, and prices have become dominant in the propaganda and other organizational activities of the kisan sabha, while earlier, the dominant place was given to the problem of abolishing landlordism of the old type.

Do you consider the slogan against landlordism still relevant in Kerala?

Yes, it is relevant provided you understand this difference. The exploitation of this new class of landlords—that is, the big cultivators who get their land cultivated through wage labour, those who live on usury, those who live on wholesale trade—this type of landlord dominates the village today. So the bulk of the people, that is, small landowners and the absolutely landless labour, they have to fight this class.

Do you characterize this new landlord class as having a pre-capitalist aspect?
Pre-capitalist . . . yes. Pre-capitalism in Kerala terms should be seen as not merely economic, but as having a social and caste aspect as well. Even in the Christian community, there are Syrian Christians, and Latin and backward class Christians. Caste is a very important factor in the development of the kisan and agricultural labour movement, particularly the agricultural labour movement.

Landlordism is not only an economic category; it is also social, cultural, and political. For instance, in terms of caste, in the old system of landlordism, the dominant castes were the caste Hindus and Syrian Christians, the caste Hindus in particular, and, among caste Hindus, Namboodiris in particular. This was the caste form of landlordism. This has changed now.

What, in your opinion, are the major constraints on the growth of industrial capital in Kerala?

The major constraint is the consciousness of the people, particularly the intelligentsia, who think that development means progress only in education, public health, communications and transport. They do not attach any importance to the problem of improvement in the production of material values. The system of education developed under the British and under princely rule was also intended to train administrative cadre; general education and graduation being laid down as a condition for the recruitment of even clerks. There was no vocational bias at all. The most talented boys and girls go into general education, neglecting training in scientific and technological fields.

I am, therefore, of the opinion that a complete restructuring of the educational system is necessary for changing the consciousness of the people in favour of material production.

Does the present situation represent a failure of entrepreneurship, of capitalist enterprise? Why has capital not been invested?

As I told you, this is the consciousness; as a result, whatever capital one can gather is invested in transport, hospitals, schools and colleges. The consciousness that capital is intended to industrialize and modernize the economy is not there.

So why don't capitalists seek the avenues of profit that they do elsewhere? Because of this general consciousness and because of the educational system, their mind doesn't go that way at all. The psychology of the people has been turned away from material production.

Kerala has some history of entrepreneurship, particularly in plantations and trade.

Plantations were originally started by the Europeans and then taken over by the Syrian Christians and some others. It is true that elements of capitalism developed, not only in plantations, but also, for instance, in Kuttanad. While this is true, it was far less than was possible if the consciousness was there. For instance, even those who go to the Gulf and earn a lot, and who invest in

lakhs, do not think of investing in industry or the development of agriculture. This is part of the consciousness; it has come through generations.

Economic theory suggests that natural resources, an educated and skilled labour force plus a history of enterprise is something of a winning combination. (Laughs) In colonial conditions, sections of the English-educated middle class did, of course, go to industries, but they were a small section, and in a State like Kerala it was a still smaller proportion.

TRAVANCORE, COCHIN AND MALABAR

Comrade EMS, can we turn now to another subject, to the distinct ways in which the three component parts of Aikya Keralam*—Travancore, Cochin and Malabar—contributed to Kerala's development?*

Social services were far more developed in the States [here and elsewhere, 'States' is short for 'Princely States'; in this context, Cochin and Travancore] than in Malabar. One reason for this, according to me, is that in contrast to many other parts of India, the coming of British rule led to a certain amount of modernization, which affected the ruling families of Travancore and Cochin, so much so that these ruling families were close to the developing bourgeoisie. They encouraged, in different ways, development in education, health services, road communications, and all other social services. These had the patronage of the government. The Malabar part of Kerala was part of British India. Although the Malabar part of the Presidency itself was better in this respect than the rest of the Madras Presidency, it lagged behind the States part of Kerala. This is one aspect of the historical situation that has to be looked into. I have not been able to come to definite conclusions, but this is the way in which my mind is working.

In the period before the formation of the Kerala State, the social and cultural part of bourgeois development was greater in the States part, but the political part—that is, the national struggle—was developed more in the Malabar part, because of the direct presence of British rule. As a matter of fact, the anti-imperialist freedom movement and the Left in that movement

came from Malabar to the States part, while educational and socio-cultural developments went from the States part to Malabar.

It is my impression—I am not sure—that with all the progress that has been made in West Bengal, the socio-cultural life of rural West Bengal is still behind rural life in Kerala. That is my impression; I am not sure.

Bengal comrades certainly say that.

I remember when I first went to West Bengal's villages, the people there were surprised when they heard that there were tea shops in villages in Kerala (laughs). This was a matter of surprise to them. The urbanization of villages must now have spread in West Bengal as well. I remember Nehru having said that for development it is necessary to have three things in every village: a panchayat, a school and . . . I forget the other thing.

A post office?

No, he didn't say a hospital either. He used to raise this in his speeches to the National Development Council, but I heard this for the first time in his talks with me.

A feature of the West Bengal scene is, of course, the rural-urban contrast. Yes. There is no such contrast in Kerala. Kerala, in fact, is a continuous village.

What do you see as the origins of this?

(*Laughs*) I don't know.

It does appear that Kerala's rural-urban continuum is a phenomenon with a very long history.

Perhaps it cannot be explained exclusively through recent developments.

This must have been there even in pre-capitalist days.

On a related theme, long-distance roads (and north-south transport) seem to have developed relatively late in Kerala.

To a certain extent that is true. I remember that when I first took over as Chief Minister, when I had to travel from the southernmost part of Kerala to

the northernmost part, I had to cross almost a dozen and a half ferries, at each of which I had to wait. But today you can go from one end of Kerala to another without crossing a single ferry. I remember that in my first constituency—from where I was elected to become the Chief Minister—within that very constituency I had to cross five ferries.

In Malabar, the Left also appears to have played the vanguard role in literacy, through the granthashala *movement and so on. It took from the social and cultural movement of the south and led it in the north.*

As far as the freedom movement is concerned, it had reached the villages even in the days of the Non-Cooperation Movement. You remember the Malabar rebellion of 1921. Even before that, the district of Malabar had a series of Congress and Khilafat committees, almost every village would have one Congress Committee and one Khilafat Committee. Although that was suppressed after the rebellion, its roots continued. An organized liberation movement of this sort dates back to the 1920s—in fact, I am a child of that movement.

Was it not a significant feature of the Malabar movement that when you went to the villages, you also took literacy and libraries with you?

Yes. As soon as we started work in the Congress, that is, in the mid-1930s, we started to organize night schools and reading rooms. When I was first elected the organizing secretary of the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC)—that is, in 1937—our effort was to have, in every village, a village Congress Committee and, attached to it, a reading room and a night school.

This was unique in India.

Yes.

. . . that is, the Malabar experience of one village Congress Committee, one reading room, one night school.

That was the ideal; it may not have been achieved everywhere.

Even such a goal was unique in India.

Yes.

How do you explain this particular feature of the movement in Kerala?

(Laughs) I can't explain it. (Pauses) You see, even before the Congress developed in Malabar, some such tradition of organization existed even in Travancore. When organizations such as, first, the SNDP (Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana) Yogam, and then the NSS (Nair Service Society), developed, these organizations, though formed on the basis of caste, had roots in the rural areas. So perhaps we took over that tradition of organization for the freedom movement.

Since the formation of Kerala, the gap between Malabar and the rest of the State . . .

. . . is slowly closing. There is another fact here that should be noted. Even before Kerala State was formed, cultivators from the Travancore part of the State began to go and settle in the Malabar parts. It began as early as during the War, but after Independence it developed much more and after the formation of Kerala, it became widespread. This is one of the reasons why, in addition to political and administrative integration, there has been an emotional and cultural integration of the people in the three parts of Kerala.

Even as between North Malabar and South Malabar, let me give you an example from my own experience. I first went to North Malabar in 1927. When I reached there, I resided with a family, but the way the members, and particularly the women members, of the family spoke the language, I couldn't understand them. Now that gulf has, to a large extent, been bridged.

Two factors which have led to the cultural and emotional integration of the people of Kerala are the radio and cinema.

And the Communist Party?

(*Laughs out loud*)

Kathleen Gough suggested that in Malabar, in the initial stages after the advent of the British, there was a decline in literacy. Is that likely?

One fact that has to be noted is that until the 1930s, in Malabar district the British continued the old jenmi system, resisting every change, so much so that the first tenancy legislation in the Malabar part came almost two decades after Travancore.

On a decline, I do not know in what sense you mean this.

In the number of people who were literate, and also in the number of pathashalas.

But considering this word 'decline', I do not know whether things were better earlier.

The evidence that I have seen suggests that they were not; in Bengal, though, it has been suggested that the coming of the British coincided with the destruction of pathashalas.

Yes.

Was this the case in Malabar as well?

I do not know whether that type of destruction took place in Malabar. One form of destruction and decline may have been there, and that is the strengthening of the feudal hold on the tenantry. In the pre-British days, the jenmi's hold on the tenantry was more customary and traditional, so much so that the jenmi used to give a lot of concessions to the tenants. A consequence of British rule was that everything became statutory, so much so that the exploitation by the jenmi of the tenants became much more intense under the British. The decline of social and cultural life due to this may have been there. About the other type of actual destruction, I don't know.

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

You spoke of the impact of modernization on the royal administrations of Travancore and Cochin. A parallel has been suggested with the Meiji Restoration in Japan, where royalty disbanded the old . . .

I have a feeling that the royal families in the States of Travancore and Cochin were closer to the people than the princes even in the rest of India. After all, even the Maharajahs in Travancore and Cochin led a relatively simple life, closer to the people, in contrast to their counterparts in the north. That being so, they could imbibe the feelings and aspirations of the rising bourgeoisie.

Is there some further explanation for the fact that in Travancore and Cochin, the Maharajahs did not live in the kind of splendour that is associated with royalty? Does it have to do with marriage practices, and so on?

I have been studying the books written by some of our younger historians. They have made a big contribution in integrating the study of social development with the study of the development of the means of production. In that sense, they have contributed to historiography. But I have a feeling that they have not been able to study the development of social and family life. For instance, I was just reading two books written by young historians in Malayalam. They do not deem it important to explain—it is also difficult to explain—that phenomenon peculiar to Kerala, that is, the system of marriage, and, in particular, the types of marital relations among the upper castes. This is something peculiar to Kerala. Nowhere else does it exist. Our younger historians, whose contribution I value very much, have not bothered to consider this aspect.

In your earlier work, you have written of the continuity *between the matrilineal and the patrilineal in Kerala, an idea that, unfortunately, does not seem to have been pursued in the literature. And in your autobiography, you have a discussion of the interplay of social status and marital relations.*

Yes. As a matter of fact, although they based themselves on traditional accounts, the older historians were stronger than our younger historians in this respect. Although their studies did not lead to any firm conclusions, they were conscious of that problem, whereas I don't find these people paying attention to it.

Does this 'closeness' that you spoke of—the royal families being able to understand local aspirations—does this have to do with patterns of social and family life and marriage practices?

I think so. After all, both in Cochin and Travancore, the person who became the Maharajah lived, for the major part of his life, almost as a commoner. Only when he reached that age, when his predecessor died, did he become a Maharajah. Till then, he was almost a commoner.

THE PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM

A relatively under-researched feature of social development in Kerala, and, as I understand it, a contribution of the Left, is the system of public distribution. Yes. Actually, during the War, particularly during the latter part of the War, in the People's War period, we, through our kisan sabhas, trade unions and other mass organizations, insisted on procurement from the landlords and distribution through fair price shops. Because of our pressure, and because of the administrative need of the British Government itself, they set up ration shops and subsequently converted them into the producers' and consumers' cooperative societies. This was in Malabar. The same thing was repeated in Travancore and Cochin. As a matter of fact, during C. P. Ramaswamy Aiyar's rule in Travancore, this slogan of government procurement from the landlords and distribution through the ration shops was in practice. We can't claim that we invented that demand, but in its original implementation, our pressure was very much there.

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E.M.S. Namboodiripad

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E.M.S. Namboodiripad is perhaps modern India's most important Marxist theoretician.

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E.M.S. NAMBOODIRIPAD (1909–1998) was among India's pioneering Communist leaders and a Marxist theoretician of enormous stature. He became Chief Minister of Kerala on two occasions, in 1957 at the head of the historic first Communist government, and again in 1967 as head of a seven-party coalition. He was the author of several books and hundreds of articles and essays.

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