CHAPTER IV

THE GANDHIAN ORGANISATIONS IN KERALA:
STYLE AND FRAMEWORK

The existence and effective functioning of any organisation in a political system will have its direct bearing on the functioning of that political system. Political scientists of today agree that the political system is not an independent variable, but that it is a dependent variable of the general social system. A political system is an open system amenable to the influence of environmental factors. The environment of a political system may be intra-societal as well as extra-societal.¹ The extra-societal environment includes the political, cultural, religious and the economic sub-systems of the international society. The intra-societal environment includes, the national social, religious and cultural sub-systems of a given society. Thus the organisations and groups which exist in a society have their direct bearing on the political system of that society. The degree and weight of the challenges from the environment will be reflected in the policies of the

¹ J. C. Johari, Comparative Politics (New Delhi, 1972), p. 42.
political system. If the challenges from the Gandhian organisations are strong and compelling, the political system will respond positively to the Gandhian call. But if the challenges from the Gandhian organisations are feeble the political system may not respond to the challenges from them. Unfortunately, it seems that the Gandhian organisations in the country failed miserably to act as a challenging force in the political system and also failed to educate the people about the relevance of Gandhism in solving the problems of humanity. The prominent Gandhians of Kerala agree that the Gandhian organisations have failed to educate and guide people in the Gandhian way. They have failed to preach and practice Gandhian ideology. Even the existence and mode of functioning of the Gandhian organisations in Kerala is itself charged with un-Gandhian. Gandhi was a man of action. The Gandhian organisations remain, for all practical purposes, instruments of inaction. The office bearers of these organisations sit in their offices, receive periodical grants and write periodic reports. Remaining inactive for the most part, they become not Gandhians but un-Gandhians. Gandhi realised that his

2. Personal Interview with G. Kumara Pillai, President, Kerala Prohibition Council.
3. Personal Interview with K.E. Mammen, freedom fighter.
followers who became rulers of India began to deviate from his path.  

In spite of obvious shortcomings, some of the Gandhian organisations in Kerala have tried to educate the people about the imperative need of the application of Gandhism. The Gandhian organisations in Kerala, occasionally try to preach and practice Gandhism in social life. The halo of Gandhi disappears only when his followers renounce his ideology. The Gandhian organisations in Kerala often try to make the Gandhian halo shine through their feeble efforts to live up to the Mahatma's ideals. In this chapter, an attempt is made to explain the genesis, organisational framework and style of functioning of the various Gandhian organisations in Kerala.

The Kerala Gandhi Smarak Nidhi

Immediately after the martyrdom of Mahatma Gandhi, the working committee of the Indian National Congress met and decided to create a national trust in his memory to be called the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi. In April 1948 the Trust


Deed was executed with Rajendra Prasad as chairman. A five-member committee consisting of Rajendra Prasad, Pandit Nehru, Sardar Patel, Maulana Azad and Acharya Kripalani was empowered to name the trustees. The main objectives of the trust were to propagate the ideas of Gandhi, to perpetuate his memory in various ways and to continue the work that he had started.

State Gandhi Smarak Nidhi units were also set up as provincial units of the central organisation to carry out its work throughout the country. The Nidhi constructed seven Gandhi Museums in various places closely connected with Gandhi's life and work. It set up the Gandhi films committee in 1950 for the procurement and preservation of historical film materials on Gandhi. In 1959, a central publications committee was set up to plan and publish books on Gandhi both in English and Hindi and also in regional languages.

The Gandhi Smarak Nidhi was functioning in a different organisational perspective from the very start. Its thrust was to create an infrastructure for the

6. "In Memory of Mahatma Gandhi: 27 Years of Gandhi Smarak Nidhi" (New Delhi, 1976), p. 3.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid., p. 10.
propagation and development of the Gandhian ideals by setting up new institutions and by financing the constructive work already started throughout the country.\(^9\)

During the late 1950s the Nidhi had undergone two drastic changes: one was decentralising the State Boards directly under its control into semi-autonomous or almost autonomous centres, the other was to create fully autonomous institutions to pursue different kinds of work.

The Gandhi Smarak Nidhi had given too much stress and focus for the propagation of the Gandhian philosophy right from the very beginning of its inception.\(^10\) As time passed, when the Nidhi was confronted with catering to the numerous Constructive Programmes of nation-building throughout the country there was the need to lay special emphasis on the total message and teaching of Gandhi. After deep thought on this aspect the trustees of the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi decided to launch a separate organisation fully equipped for this purpose. In 1955, the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi set apart a fund of ten million rupees for its establishment.\(^11\) It was, however, on 29

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10. Ibid.

11. In Memory of Mahatma Gandhi, n. 6, p. 86.
December 1958 that the Board of Trustees adopted the resolution to form the Gandhi Peace Foundation. Subsequently, in March 1959, a governing body was set up with R. R. Diwakar as chairman and G. Ramachandran as secretary.\textsuperscript{12}

The state unit of the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi was established in 1951-52 with an advisory committee under the chairmanship of K. Kelappan to pursue the Gandhian activities in the state.\textsuperscript{13} In 1962, following the decision of the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi to make the state units autonomous, the Kerala Gandhi Smarak Nidhi was registered as a charitable society.\textsuperscript{14} The initial focus of the Kerala Gandhi Smarak Nidhi was on rendering financial assistance to the existing Gandhian institutions engaged in Gandhian constructive work and also by directly initiating activities and the creation of several Gandhian organisations for undertaking specific tasks after the manner of the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi. The Kerala Gandhi Smarak Nidhi also acted as the parent organisation in creating necessary infrastructure for the spread and growth of the Gandhian movement in Kerala.

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{13} "At the Feet of Mahatma Gandhi" (Trivandrum, 1987), p. 63.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
From the very beginning, the Kerala Gandhi Smarak Nidhi had two important vibhags or branches viz., the Gramaseva vibhag and the Tattva Prachar Vibhag to pursue the work of popularising the life and message of Gandhi. The Gramaseva Vibhag was to carry on village reconstruction work by promoting and continuing the Constructive Programme and the Tattva Prachar Vibhag was to propagate the Gandhian ideals among the people. 15

The beginning of the Tattva Prachar work in the state was marked in July 1951 by organising a student cell. In March 1956 it was transformed into Gandhi Vichar Parishad Centre with the formation of the Gandhi Vichar Parishad by the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi to pursue study, research and propagation of Gandhian ideals at the national level. 16 Subsequently, three major Gandhi Vichar Parishad Centres were set up by dividing the state into three zones viz., Trivandrum, Cochin and Calicut. Sub centres were also established to carry on the Tattva Prachar work in all the important cities which were attached to the respective zonal centres. In 1958, the centres were again renamed as

15. P. A. Jacob, n. 9, p. 43.

Tattva Prachar Parishad Centres with the winding up of the Gandhi Vichar Parishad at the national level. On 1 April 1965, as a result of the recommendations of the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi Second Assessment Committee the three major Tattva Prachar Centres in Trivandrum, Cochin and Calicut were transferred to the Gandhi Peace Foundation.

Gandhi Peace Foundation

The Gandhi Peace Foundation was formed in March 1959 with R. R. Diwakar as Chairman and G. Ramachandran as Secretary. The objectives of the Gandhi Peace Foundation are to establish an International Centre of study and research for the study of non-violence, to propagate and disseminate Gandhian Thought among various sections of the people and assist in developing a consciousness of Gandhian ideals in the public mind, to investigate the methodology for applying non-violence in social, national, racial and international affairs, to provide information and assistance in this field to educational institutions and to assist in developing an informed public opinion on the principles of truth and non-violence and on the techniques of non-violence.\(^{17}\)

\(^{17}\) In Memory of Mahatma Gandhi, n. 6, pp. 86-87.
The Gandhi Peace Foundation seeks to perform its task in three convergent ways (1) study, research and training (2) communication and (3) action. It undertakes and sponsors serious research projects and holds periodical training programmes, conferences, symposia and seminars. The communication programme has been linked up with the publication of books and the quarterly magazine 'Gandhi Marg' as well as the use of other media of communication. The third aspect, action programme, is very selective and occasional. Whenever there is a need for it, the task is fulfilled by undertaking peace action programmes.

The Gandhi Peace Foundation was registered as a Trust under the Societies Registration Act 1963. At the apex of the organisational set-up, there is a governing body and an executive committee elected by the governing body. The executive committee shall have a minimum of seven members and not more than nine. The governing body shall elect its own chairman and treasurer and appoint its own secretary and a joint secretary, if necessary. The term of office is three years. There are three types of members: founder/life members, ordinary members and ex-officio members.

Centres of Gandhi Peace Foundation

On 1 April 1965, as a result of the recommendation of the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi Second Assessment Committee, the three major Tattva Prachar Centres of Gandhi Smarak Nidhi at Trivandrum, Cochin and Calicut transferred to the Gandhi Peace Foundation. Henceforth, the centres came to be known as the Gandhi Peace Foundation centres. 20

Trivandrum Centre

The Gandhi Peace Foundation Trivandrum Centre came into existence as one of the four centres of the Gandhi Peace Foundation in Kerala. Immediately after the transfer, it became the prominent centre coordinating the activities of other centres. The centre is located in Gandhi Bhavan, the headquarters of the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi in Trivandrum. The main area of operation is the city and the sub-urban areas and the whole district of Trivandrum. 21 However, the centre undertook some special projects covering Quilon, Alleppey and Pathanamthitta districts from time to time.

20. P. A. Jacob, n. 9, p. 44.
From the very beginning, the centre had an advisory committee with its chief worker officiating as secretary. M. P. Manmathan was the first chairman; A. P. Udayabhanu, Kainikkara M. Kumarapillai and G. Kumarapillai were successive chairmen of the centre. The centre was registered as an autonomous one in March 1982 with G. Ramachandran, the founder General Secretary of the Gandhi Peace Foundation as chairman. The general activities of the centre were organising short-term and long-term study courses on Gandhian philosophy for students and youths, study classes in schools and colleges, conferences, seminars and symposia, orientation and training camps for students, youths and Gandhian constructive workers, peace education and action programme.

The centre has been actively associating with other Gandhi Peace Foundation centres in the state and also collaborating with other Gandhian organisations in undertaking various programmes to promote the spread and growth of the Gandhian movement.


23. Minutes of the first meeting of the advisory committee of G. P. F. (Trivandrum Centre), 18 March 1952.

24. P. A. Jacob, n. 9, pp. 45-46.
Cochin Centre

The Gandhi Peace Foundation Cochin Centre was started in 1956 as one of the Gandhi Vichar Parishad centres in India under the Tattva Prachar Vibhag of the Kerala Gandhi Smarak Nidhi. Its focus was on the central zone. It consists of the districts of Kottayam, Ernakulam, Trichur and Palghat. In its early days the centre was actively involved in the Bhoomi-gramdhana Movement. This together with organizing training and orientation camps for students, youths and Gandhian workers, Santi Sena programmes and discussions and dissemination of Gandhian ideals formed the regular programmes of the centre.

When the 'Gandhi Vichar Parishad ceased to exist at the national level, the centre directly came under the control of the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi coordinated with the Tattva Prachar Vibhag of the Kerala Gandhi Smarak Nidhi as its Tattva Prachar Centre. Later, on 1 April 1965, it was taken over by the Gandhi Peace Foundation and became the Gandhi Peace Foundation Centre along with the other centres in Kerala. Subsequently, the centre was transformed into an urban centre and its activities were confined to the Cochin urban area. On 5 June 1985, the

centre was registered as an autonomous body affiliated to the Gandhi Peace Foundation with K. P. Madhavan Nair as its Chairman and the chief worker as the secretary. It also has a vice-chairman, treasurer and an executive committee elected from among its members. The centre is located at Gandhi Bhavan in Cochin.

Calicut Centre

The Gandhi Peace Foundation Calicut Centre was started like the Trivandrum and Cochin centres in 1956 as the Gandhi Vichar Parishad Centre of the Tattva Prachar Vibhag of the Kerala Gandhi Smarak Nidhi. The centre was registered as the Gandhi Tattva Prachar Kendram affiliated to the Kerala Gandhi Smarak Nidhi with Kelappan as its President. The area of operation consisted of the districts of Cannanore, Calicut and Palaghat.

On 1 April 1965, the Centre was transferred to the Gandhi Peace Foundation network along with other centres. As a result, it underwent thorough restructuring. It was registered as the Gandhi Peace Foundation Trust Calicut on 25 February 1972 affiliated to the Gandhi Peace Foundation. It was set up on the Trust model with

president, secretary and treasurer elected from among the trust members. It is located at Gandhi Griham in Calicut. The centre functions in active collaboration with other Gandhian organisations in organising various programmes to strengthen the Gandhian movements in the state. It provides numerous facilities to other Gandhian organisations. In short, the Calicut Gandhi Peace Foundation Centre is the seat of all Gandhian activities in the Malabar area.27

Quilon Centre

The Gandhi Peace Foundation Centre came into existence on 1 May 1980, following the decision of the central office to set up a centre in Quilon.28 When the centre started functioning as an independent unit under a duly organised committee, the central office gave affiliation to it as the fourth Gandhi Peace Foundation Centre in the state. Membership is open to all who have faith and interest in the Gandhian ideals. The president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer and the executive committee of the centre are jointly responsible for its administration. The area of operation includes the

27. P. A. Jacob, n. 9, p. 48.
districts of Quilon, Alleppey and Pathanamthitta with its headquarters in Quilon. Its activities include study, research and training, propagation and communication, and peace education and action. In 1991, the centre got itself registered under the Charitable Societies Act of Kerala with K. Raveendranathan Nair as president. 29

Among the various forums and cells working under the four centres the Gandhi Darsan, School of Non-violence, Gandhi Yuva Mandalam Environment Cell, Nature Cure, Voters Education Forum for Raising Citizens' Voice, Neethi Mela, etc. deserve special mention. By giving study classes, study camps examination and awarding prizes the Gandhi Darsan tries to popularise the life and message of Gandhi among school students. The School of Non-violence under the Trivandrum and Calicut centres conduct various programmes for students and youths. The prime objective of the school is to educate students and youths in Gandhian philosophy with special emphasis on non-violence. The Gandhi Yuva Mandalam organises specific programmes meant for the youth.

In spite of the programmes and action plans conducted by the Gandhi Peace Foundation, the activities have not

been conspicuously successful in spreading Gandhism among the people. This is the view of about 72 per cent of the permanent members, 95 per cent of the ordinary members and all the ex-officio members of the various centres. 30

Kerala Sarvodaya Sangam

The Kerala Sarvodaya Sangam was started as a branch of the All India Sarvaseva Sangh. Gandhi established several organisations, institutions and Ashrams to implement his programmes and principles and also for continuing uninterrupted the action plan he had chalked out. 31 The important ones established under Gandhi's guidance were Sabarmati Ashram in 1915, Dhakshina Bharat Hindi Prachar Sabha in 1918, Navajivan Press and Young India 1919, Gujrat Vidyapeeth in 1920, All India Spinners' Association in 1925, Goseva Sangh in 1928, Harijan Seva Sangh in 1932, Harijan in 1933, All India Village Industries Association in 1934, Sevagram Ashram in 1936, Hindustan Talimi Sangh in 1938 and All India Nature Cure Foundation in 1946. 32

30. P. A. Jacob, n. 9, p. 177.
Immediately after independence, in order to make these organisations more effective and purposeful, Gandhi proposed that they should be brought under one umbrella organisation, instead of functioning independently.\textsuperscript{33}

After Gandhi's assassination, the conference of the constructive workers held at Sevagram in March 1948 decided to form a brotherhood known as the Sarvodaya Samaj and prepare a scheme for the unification of the various constructive organisations. Subsequently, a new organisation, the Akhil Bharat Sarva Seva Sangh was formed in 1948 for the purpose of coordinating the activities of the various constructive organisations. As a result, the All India Spinners Association, The Village Industries Association, The Goseva Sangh and the Hindustan Talimi Sangh merged with ABSS. State units of all these organisations which were already established in the various states as provincial units had also merged with the respective Sarva Seva Sangh state units. The other organisations opted to remain independent and kept their identity separately.\textsuperscript{34}

A branch of the ABSS was started in Kerala and it functioned until 1958. On 30 August 1958, it was

\textsuperscript{33} P. A. Jacob, n. 9, p. 14.

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., p. 15.
transformed into the 'Kerala Sarvodaya Sangh'. It was registered under the Societies Registration Act 1860 on 30 August 1958.\textsuperscript{35}

Objectives of the Kerala Sarvodaya Sangh

The objectives of the KSS are to make the village self-sufficient in the primary needs of life such as food, clothing and shelter free from exploitation of any kind, to develop a spirit of community life and community ownership among the people and to establish a sarvodaya social order based on truth and non-violence, to give relief to the poor by giving them part-time or full-time employment through Khadi and village industries programmes, to secure for them, as far as possible, a living wage and to provide them with insurance and security against unemployment particularly in times of famine, failure of crops or other natural calamities.\textsuperscript{36}

As envisaged by its Constitution, it has a managing committee which shall consist of 16 members including the chairman, secretary, joint secretary and treasurer.


The managing committee shall also elect an executive committee of 7 members from the managing committee. The first managing committee came into existence in 1958 with Kelappan as chairman, K. P. Diwakar Kartha as secretary, A. Dhamodaran Nambiar as joint secretary and Shyamji Sundar Das as treasurer.

When the ABSS was transformed into Kerala Sarvodaya Sangh it had 75 Khadi Sanghs under its control. Subsequently, the Khadi Grama Vevasaya Association of Mavelikara, Kurumbanad Development Society, Tavanoor Gandhi Smarak Kendram and Valluvanad Development Society were merged into the KSS.

Decentralisation of the KSS

For effective functioning, there was the need for decentralisation of administration. Accordingly, on 1 July 1966 the Trivandrum and Cannanore centres were established. On 1 April 1976, the Calicut and Palaghat centres were established.

According to the directions of the Khadi Commission, Independent Centres of KSS were established on 1 April 1984. Along with the parent organisation KSS, five independent units viz., Cannanore Sarvodaya Sangam,

37. Ibid.
Calicut Sarvodaya Sangam, Palghat Sarvodaya Sangam, Alleppey Sarvodaya Sangam and Trivandrum Sarvodaya Sangam came into existence.

At the closure of 1984-85 the Sangh maintained 167 Khadi production centres, 4 laundry soap units, 2 soap base units, 6 toilet soap units, 3 honey grading laboratories, 5 bakery units, 7 footwear and leather goods manufacturing units, 20 cottage match units, 4 carpentry and blacksmith units, 1 lime unit, 2 fibre units, 14 powerghani units, 2 tiles units and 110 sales centres including one major Khadi Emporium set up at Gramodaya Trivandrum. 38

Kerala Prohibition Council

The Kerala Prohibition Council tries to realise the Gandhian dream of a new India free from all kinds of exploitations. Prohibition was a cause which Gandhi held so dear to his heart. For Gandhi, liquor was a symbol of sin and exploitation.

Liquor, as we say, is an invention of the devil. I have seen in so many cases that liquor has not only robbed men of their money but of their reason; they have, for the time being, forgotten the distinction between wife and mother, lawful and unlawful.[39]

38. Ibid.

The prevalence of the liquor culture in society, in fact, implies a degeneration of the character of the people and also the failure on the part of the government in keeping it morally sound and stable. I (Gandhi) hold drink to be more damnable than thieving and perhaps even prostitution. Is it not the parent of both. 40

The drink habit destroys the soul of man and tends to turn him into a beast, incapable of distinguishing between wife, mother and sister. I have seen men who forget this distinction under the influence of liquor.[41]

Gandhi advised people to voluntarily renounce the use of all alcoholic beverages and asked the government, to legally ban their sale and consumption. As Gandhi believed that alcohol was the root cause for crime and corruption, he demanded its ban in the country.

Nothing but ruin stares a nation in the face that is a prey to the drink habit. History records that empires have been destroyed through that habit. We have it in India that the great community to which Lord Krishna belonged was ruined by that habit. This monstrous evil was undoubtedly one of the contributory factors in the fall of Rome.[42]

Gandhi even had gone to the extent of calling the excise revenue derived from the sale of liquor as unholy

40. Ibid.
41. Ibid., p. 162.
42. Ibid., p. 163.
revenue and declared that if he ever become the dictator of India for one hour, the first thing that he would do was certainly closing down all liquor shops in the country without any compensation whatsoever.

If I was appointed dictator for one hour for all India, the first thing I would do would be to close without compensation all the liquor shops, and compel factory owners to produce humane conditions for their workmen and open refreshment and recreation rooms where these workmen would get innocent drinks and equally innocent amusements.[43]

Gandhi became an ardent prohibitionist, because he was a leader who came from the grass roots, knowing full well, the situation in the Indian villages. He always held that India lives in her villages and unless the plight of the villager is improved, India's progress will be stagnant and sterile. He remained, all through his life, a champion of the ordinary Indian villager.

Gandhi's commitment to the cause of prohibition was a part of his total vision of a new India free from all kinds of exploitation and poverty. He believed that the elimination of alcohol was a pre-condition for the realisation of his great dream viz., Rama Rajya. Gandhi's Rama Rajya was indeed a system where the humblest of the

43. Ibid.
humble was made the master and thus enjoyed his rightful place of prominence. Any hurdle whatsoever that remained a hindrance in realising the welfare of the Daridra Narayana of the Indian society has to be removed at any cost, Gandhi asserted. It was in this connection, he became so vocal and stern on the issue of prohibition. His commitment to the cause of prohibition was a reflection of the human touch that one has come to recognize as a distinctive trait of the Gandhian philosophy. He considered the use of liquor in all its forms and varities as a grievous social evil and sin and wanted its total eradication from all sections of society.

When Gandhi assumed leadership of the Indian National Congress at the national level, prohibition became one of the objectives of the Congress Party. In Kerala, in the Malabar region, the Congress and in the Travancore Cochin region the teachings of Sri Narayana Guru evoked the enthusiasm of the people in favour of prohibition. It was against this background that the government of Travancore appointed a committee to report on the need for prohibition in 1925.

45. Ibid., p. 13.
The Congress government in the Madras province introduced prohibition at Salem in 1937. On 1 October 1947, the Madras government introduced prohibition in the Malabar region. In Cochin, on 1 October 1947, prohibition was introduced in the taluk of Chittoor. In Travancore on 17 August 1948, prohibition was introduced in the taluk of Neyyattinkara. Though the movement for prohibition produced good results in the pre-Independent and in the early post-Independent period, it was set-back considerably in the post-Independent period. The state governments began to cancel prohibition laws that already existed and, in doing so, showed their unwillingness to follow the Gandhian ideal.

In the post-Gandhian era, every party that came to power diluted its commitment to the cause of prohibition. When the government in Delhi took a very relaxed and liberal posture, regarding the issue, naturally the various state governments toed the line. The governments have, over the years, distanced themselves from the policy of prohibition as they distanced themselves from several other areas of Gandhian thought and action.

It was against this background that a prohibition movement was started in Kerala to realise the Gandhian

46. Ibid.
dream of prohibition in the 1950s. Its aim was to educate
the people about the need for prohibition and to persuade
the government in the Gandhian way to implement
prohibition. The prohibition movement known as the Madya
Varjana Samithi started at Puthuppally near Kottayam began
to be popular and spread throughout Kerala. In 1977 it
was affiliated to the All India Prohibition Council.
Henceforth, the Samithi came to be known as the Kerala
unit of All India Prohibition Council with headquarters at
Kottayam. The first president of the Kerala Prohibition
Council was Lakshmi N. Menon and Cyriac Thomas was its
first general secretary. Subsequently, its headquarters
was shifted to Ernakulam.47

The Kerala Prohibition Council started functioning
in 1977 and it has 500 units throughout the state. As per
Constitution it has a president, two vice-presidents, a
general secretary, two secretaries, a treasurer, a state
executive committee and a state council.

The Prohibition Council seeks to perform its tasks
mainly in two ways—communication and action. The
communication programme has been confined to the
publication of a magazine 'prohibition' and other

47. Personal Interview with Cyriac Thomas, the founder
General Secretary of Kerala Prohibition Council.
pamphlets and to conducting public meetings and processions. The action programme includes adoption of the Gandhian technique of satyagraha in front of liquor shops. The council conducted satyagrahas in Mattancherry, Arrimavu, Palayam, Ooramana, etc. which lasted for more than 400 days with the cooperation and support of local people. Lakshmi N. Menon, M. P. Manmathan, Mar Sebastian Valloppilly and G. Kumara Pillai gave effective leadership to the council. The headquarters of the Prohibition Council is located at Gandhi Bhavan Cochin.

Christavashram, Manganam

The Christavashram was founded by K. I. Mathai, M. P. Job and K. K. Chandy at Alleppey in 1934. The founders drew inspiration from the teachings of Jesus Christ and Mahatma Gandhi. As Alleppey could not provide a proper site for an Ashram, the group acquired a plot of eight and a half acres at Manganam and set up the Ashram there, four years later. The Christavashram has about 200 inmates including members men and women, married and single, lay and ordained as well as children. There are besides 23 Associate members living outside the Ashram following different avocations of life. Full-time

members, called Sevaks, give up private property and pool their resources together for common sharing. There are 9 Sevaks and 2 Balasevaks. A Sevak has to pass through three stages of membership covering normally three and a half years of probation; associates have an year's probation and have to accept the rule of life for associates. There is a Friends of the Ashram group, who pray for the Ashram and are prayed for; they make a voluntary contribution yearly and attend a retreat annually arranged for them. 49

The Kerala Balagram or boys' village for Kerala run by the Christavashram offers housing for 100 children. It has four cottages with two wardens and 25 children in each cottage. The Central Social Welfare Board when it came into being appreciated the cottage system which was followed in the institution from the beginning and selected the Balagram as a Model Home. 50

An Industrial School was started for vocational training in three trades--cloth weaving, tailoring and soap making. With the starting of the Ashram press, composing, printing and binding were also introduced for occasional training, besides a commercial institute for typewriting. Children were also given training in

49. Ibid.
50. Ibid.
agriculture, cattle and poultry farming from a very early stage. General education normally up to school final is given. The Balagram Vidyalaya which now has classes from standards five to seven is being developed as a work oriented school.

Arunodayam, the magazine started in 1937 served as the chief literary organ of the Ashram till 1977 when, during the National Emergency period it had to be stopped. As a socio-religious magazine the Arunodayam sought to bring home to the people the social implications of the Gospel and to bring to bear the standards and values of the kingdom of God in social, political, national and international life. It promoted dialogues with men of other faiths and with movements such as communism and sarvodaya. It 'served also as an organ of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation.

Kerala Unit of Dhakshina Bharata Hindi Prachar Sabha

Gandhi started the Dhakshina Bharata Hindi Prachar Sabha in 1918. Its Kerala unit was started at Tripunithura in 1930. Its aim is to promote Hindi language and literature. It was registered under the Charitable Society Act.51

51. Personal Interview with M. Krishnan Nair, former Secretary, Dhakshina Bharat Hindi Prachar Sabha, Kerala Unit.
As per Constitution, it has an executive committee which consists of 14 members, including the president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer and a managing trustee. The present President is D. Damodaran Potti. The office of the vice-president is now vacant. The present secretary is K. Vimala Bai, Treasurer A. V. Chinnan and Managing Trustee K. K. K. Marar.

The Kerala unit of the Dakshina Bharata Hindi Prachar Sabha is currently running several educational institutions. It has Hindi Vidyalayas in every district which conducts courses such as Hindi Pradamic, Hindi Praveen. It has two B.Ed. colleges at Ernakulam and Neelkshram. The Mahatma Gandhi Public School at Chottanikara is run by the Sabha. It has a Central Hindi Library at Ernakulam. The Sabha also publishes a monthly called 'Kerala Bharathi'.

The Nava Bharatha Vedi

The Nava Bharatha Vedi did not, at first, seem like a typical Gandhian movement as it appeared different in style, content and approach. Nor was it the outcome of prolonged deliberations and planning over any considerable period; it had its birth in a suggestion thrown up at a meeting of like-minded people who met for an independence
day gathering in 1981 at the MT Seminary Hall, Kottayam for a day's sharing of the "pains and pleasures of freedom". Veteran freedom fighter and 'Book Baron' D. C. Kizhakkemuri presided over the 'one day conclave' convened by four Gandhi admirers—K. E. Mamman, George D. Vellappally, Cyriac Thomas and Jose Parakadavil. Just before dispersing, the meeting took up and wholeheartedly endorsed a spontaneous suggestion of the senior Gandhist and freedom fighter, K. E. Mamman, to form a Resistance Movement to check widespread corruption and violence in the society, particularly in politics. The movement was promptly christened 'Akrama Rahitha Samskarika Vedi' (Non-violent Forum for Social and Cultural Action) by D. C. Kizhakkemuri and the name was temporarily accepted till a proper name was found and approved.52

The meeting formed a steering committee with D. C. as Working President, Cyriac Thomas General Secretary, Jose Parakadavil Secretary and George D. Vellappally Treasurer. The convention, by a resolution, requested Sukumar Azhikode, the well-known public speaker and critic, litterateur and educationist to take up the leadership of the new movement.

52. Personal Interview with Cyriac Thomas, founder General Secretary, Nava Bharatha Vedi.
The movement was formally blessed and inaugurated by Morarji Desai, former Prime Minister of India, on Gandhi Jayanthy Day the same year (2 October 1981) at Kottayam. Eminent personalities like Mathews Mar Coorilose Metropolitan (present Catholica Bava of Kottayam), Justice T. Chandrasekhara Menon, P. C. Cherian, M. P. Manmathan and M. V. Pylee shared the platform with Morarji to bless the new Gandhian Resistance Movement.

Sukumar Azhikode formally took over the reins of the movement only about an year after when the workers met in an annual convention against at Kottayam. He renamed it "Nava Bharatha Vedi" (New India Forum) and D. C. Kizhakkemuri, Sugathakumari and R. M. Manakkalath were elected Vice-presidents of the restructured organisation; the other office-bearers kept their posts.

The stewardship of Azhikode naturally evoked keen public interest in the movement and as a crowd puller, Azhikode drew large audiences wherever he toured in connection with the Nava Bharatha Vedi. The barbed words of Azhikode often hurt those in offices of power.

53. Ibid.
54. Ibid.
55. Ibid.
Declaring himself a staunch champion of the old values of the Congress, Azhikode took the new generation of Congress leaders to task for their sins of omission and commission. Chief Minister Karunakaran happened to be Azhikode's favourite target though he did not spare other leaders too, irrespective of party affiliations. All these built up Nava Bharatha Vedi as a movement for social and political correction—helping the movement emerge as a corrective force in Kerala Society. The involvement of leaders and literary personalities of the stature of R. M. Manackalath, Sugathakumari, N. P. Mohammad, M. T. Vasudevan Nair, P. C. Cherian, etc. lent much weight to the movement. The response of the public also was surprisingly positive in the initial years of the Nava Bharatha Vedi.

From the start there were two schools within the Nava Bharatha Vedi: one represented by K. E. Mammen, P. C. Cherian, R. V. Jose, etc. pleading for Vedi's active entry into electoral politics and fielding candidates of its own with or without alliance with the already established Political Fronts in the state; and the other led by Azhikode, Cyriac Thomas, Jose Parakadavil, etc. arguing against any electoral politics for the movement. 56

56. Ibid.
The general consensus arrived at was not to identify with either LDF or UDF as such but to campaign for candidates of character and integrity irrespective of their ideological identity.

The Nava Bharatha Vedi was, indeed, capable of capturing the imagination of the general public by resorting to two sathyagrahas—one led by Azhikode himself in Trivandrum before the Secretariat against the "pollution in the legislature" owing to the disgraceful conduct of several representatives of the people. It did make an impact evident from the fact that both the ruling front and the opposition in the Assembly promptly sought to dissociate themselves from such conduct by pinning the blame on the rival group.

The other satyagraha was held in the cause of "Treatment for Hospitals" and aimed at highlighting the corruption and other irregularities in the running of hospitals, both private and government. The treatment meted out to the people by doctors and hospital authorities was brought to media attention by the Vedi.

One of the main drawbacks of the Vedi, as pointed out by its critics, was that its main activity was, in fact,

57. Ibid.
58. Ibid.
confined to the "public platform". This was largely because of the image of leaders like R. M. Manakkalath and Sukumar Azhikode. The organisational set-up of the Nava Bharatha Vedi failed in practice to organise it into a mass movement of consequence. Paucity of funds was also a handicap as, unlike other Gandhian organisations, it could not on principle, accept financial assistance from any quarter. The movement was kept going by funds put up by the office-bearers and active workers. The membership fee, also, was minimal. There was, as a result, a slackening of effort after a time. Moreover, there seems to have been some disagreement among top leaders over the movement's style of functioning. Azhikode offered to resign though he was persuaded by the others to continue. Then it was the turn of the General Secretary to make that offer. Finally, by 1987-88, there was criticism that the Vedi and its president apparently took a soft stand towards the LDF government unlike the stance it had taken while the UDF was in power. Some critics even charged that Azhikode was settling scores with Karunakaran by taking him to task on every issue while the UDF was in the saddle and turned a blind eye to the sins of the LDF. The Eighth Convention at Kottayam accepted Azhikode's resignation with reluctance and elected D. C. Kizhakkemuri instead, R. M. Manakkalath and Sugathakumari having declined the top post on health grounds. D. C. and
General Secretary Cyriac Thomas resigned after a year whereupon K. E. Mamman and Jose Parakadavil were elected President and General Secretary, respectively.

The Movement is now practically defunct, with the frame of leadership continuing in name. Some attempts to revive the Movement has been made by George Vellappally, one of the founders of the Movement and R. V. Jose, a former General Secretary of the Vedi. But the Movement remains inactive and demoralised in spite of occasional attempts to revive it.

The Nava Bharatha Vedi was a Gandhian Movement with a difference and enjoyed a place of prominence in the public eye for a couple of years. Its strong stance against any governmental "excess" acted as a check to the then UDF government under K. Karunakaran. The hard hitting rhetoric of Sukumar Azhikode remained Vedi's main strength as he was listened to with rapt attention wherever he spoke to expose government's lapses. Azhikode was portrayed by many as the "main opposition" outside the legislature. The impression that the Vedi softened in its attitude towards the Nayanar-led LDF government affected its credibility and, in the eyes of the critics, seriously compromised its identity as a neutral political force to check the wrongdoings of the party (or the Front) in power. Some soul-searching at the top level leadership
regarding their organisational and official relationship also proved detrimental to the effective functioning of the Movement after a time. In spite of all its ineffectiveness in later years, the Nava Bharatha Vedi in the first few years of its existence, proved a powerful Gandhian phalanx to be reckoned with thanks largely to the dynamic leadership of Azhikode.