CHAPTER II

KERALA POLITICS: THE CONGRESS AND THE GANDHI CURRENT

The Indian National Congress played the keyrole in the freedom struggle and the people of Kerala played an important part in the activities of the Congress. Since the beginning of the Indian National Congress the people of Kerala showed great interest in it.¹ At the beginning the activities of the Congress mainly comprised of passing of resolutions and organising annual and special sessions. The first Keralite to become the member of the Indian National Congress was G. P. Pillai. The first Congress President from Kerala was Sir C. Sankaran Nair who presided over the 13th annual session of the Indian National Congress in 1897.

The activities of the Indian National Congress in Kerala was started in Malabar. A District Congress Committee was started for the first time in Malabar in 1910 and C. Kunjirama Menon was its secretary.² In 1916 the Malabar District Congress Committee was reorganised with K. P. Raman Menon as president and K. P. Kesava Menon

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2. Ibid., p. 20.
as secretary. When Mahatma Gandhi took the leadership of the Indian National Congress, there were sudden changes in the organisation and programmes of the party. Gandhi enunciated a definite policy regarding the new reforms, to be characterised by the promotion of Swadesi and Hindu-Muslim unity.

The philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi got reflected in the programmes of Indian National Congress from 1920 onwards when Gandhi undertook the leadership of the Indian freedom movement from 1919 and upto his assassination by a Hindu communal fanatic on 30 January 1948, he was the unquestionable leader of freedom movement. The Nagpur session of the Indian National Congress held in December 1920 declared that the goal of Congress was the attainment of Swaraj by peaceful and legitimate means. The Nagpur session effected great organisational changes in the Congress and adopted the principle of creation of provinces in India on a linguistic basis and accepted Hindi as the national language of the country. The princely states were brought within the orbit of the activities of the Congress.

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delegates from Malabar. On the basis of the changes in the Constitution and the goal of the Congress, analogous organisational changes were effected throughout the country. Kerala including Travancore, Cochin, and British Malabar, got a recognised position in Indian political affairs. The old Malabar District Congress Committee was expanded into the Kerala Provincial Congress Committee. Hitherto there had been no effective Congress work in Travancore and Cochin though several patriots in these two states had placed implicit faith in the creed of nationalism and joined the Malabar District Congress as members. The Kerala Provincial Congress Committee came into existence in 1921 with headquarters at Calicut. It had five district committees and the first secretary of the Kerala PCC, was K. Madhavan Nair. With the establishment of the Kerala PCC, Taluk Congress Committees started functioning in all Taluks.

Mahatma Gandhi's Visits to Kerala

Mahatma Gandhi visited Kerala on several occasions. Gandhi came to Kerala on many occasions, when he travelled all over India as part of his campaigning for

5. Ibid.
political or Constructive Programmes like Non-cooperation, Khadi Movement, Civil disobedience and removal of Untouchability. He visited Kerala on some special occasions also.\(^7\) Gandhi set foot on the soil of Kerala for the first time on 18 August 1920.\(^8\) The purpose of his first visit was to spread the messages of non-cooperation and Khilafat movements. Gandhi's visit reinforced unity among the people. In his speech at Calicut beach on 18 August 1920 Gandhi emphasised the imperative need for holding non-cooperation against the British. If we support and cooperate with the activities of the British Government, we become accomplices of their wrong doings.\(^9\) Gandhi made it clear that the Non-cooperation Movement was based on the principle of Ahimsa or non-violence.

> I request the people of India to follow the path of non-cooperation because it is harmless, systematic, comprehensive and effective. Effective implementation brings desired results because it is the way of age old principle of renunciation.\(^{10}\)

He asked the people to boycott foreign goods, resign government jobs, withdraw their children from government

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8. K. Ramachandran Nair, Gandhijium Keralavum (M) (Trivandrum, 1979), p. 3.

9. Ibid., p. 4.

10. Ibid., p. 7.
aided schools. He called upon the lawyers to suspend their practice at the Bar. The people of Kerala accepted Gandhi's call and rendered all possible support to the Non-cooperation and Khilafat Movements. After that visit, the events in Kerala acquired momentum. Yakub Hassan, K. Madavan Nair, U. Gopalamenon and P. Moideen Koya were arrested for participating in a public meeting violating prohibitory orders and were sentenced to imprisonment. Thus the Non-cooperation Movement under the leadership of Gandhi started to grow in Malabar. The atrocities of the police to suppress the growing National movement led to the Malabar rebellion, which started in August 1921 and continued for more than six months. Though Gandhi left for Kerala to pacify the rebels, he could not reach Malabar due to the prohibitory orders from the Government. 11

Though Gandhi could not visit Malabar at the time of Malabar rebellion he tried to pacify the emotions of the Muslims. He condemned violence from the part of rebels and government. Violence and non-violence are mutually antagonistic. They destroy each other. For the success of non-violence, a non-violent atmosphere is quiet essential. 12

12. K. Ramachandran Nair, n. 8, p. 17.
Gandhi again visited Kerala in 1925. It was in connection with the Vaikom satyagraha. The Coconada session of the Indian National Congress (1923) had adopted a resolution calling upon Congress workers to take constructive action for the removal of untouchability. T. K. Madhavan attended this session and secured official support of the Congress for the campaign against untouchability in Kerala. At that time there was a strange custom of denying to the Avarnas in the Hindu community the right of passage through the approach roads leading to the temples including Vaikom Temple. The Kerala Congress Committee viewed that satyagraha as the only means to remove this social evil. Vaikom satyagraha started in April 1924 under the auspices of Kerala Congress Committee.\textsuperscript{13} It was with the advice and blessings of Mahatma Gandhi that satyagraha was started.\textsuperscript{14} Gandhi carefully watched and nursed the satyagraha at every stage. To boost the morale of the satyagrahis he visited Vaikom in 1925. Gandhi was not a person to leave the satyagrahis alone. At the final phase of the Vaikom satyagraha—in March 1925—Gandhi visited Vaikom. On that occasion he had dialogues with the Hindu conservative notables and that showed Gandhi's patience, politeness and

\textsuperscript{13} K. P. Kesava Menon, n. 7, p. 7.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., p. 8.
rational thinking. It was the rare occasion for Gandhi to explain how to work and behave in the spirit of satyagraha. It proved fruitful in Kerala—the cradle of untouchability.\textsuperscript{15} Gandhi visited Kerala in 1927 for the promotion of Khadi movement.\textsuperscript{16} Gandhi visited Kerala for the last time in 1937. After the Travancore Temple Entry Proclamations Gandhi visited Travancore as a pilgrim in 1937.\textsuperscript{17}

Role of Mathrubhumi in the Gandhian Era

With the dawn of Gandhian era in Indian politics, a new set of newspapers appeared specially devoted to the cause of Indian freedom. In Malabar, Mathrubhumi undertook the noble task and gave an impetus to the growth of political consciousness. The immediate purpose behind the establishment of Mathrubhumi was to remove the wrong impressions in the minds of the people about the Malabar rebellion. There was a wrong impression among the people that the Malabar rebellion was a creation of the Congress and Khilafat Movement. To remove this wrong impression and to spread the noble aims and objectives of the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{15} Ibid., p. 10.
\item \textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Ibid., p. 11.
\end{itemize}
Congress the Mathrubhumi was started as a thrice-monthly from 18 March 1923 from Calicut. It became a Daily on 6 April 1930, the day on which salt satyagraha had started. The service of Mathrubhumi to evoke patriotism and sense of freedom among the people is unquestionable.  

P. Ramunni Menon, K. Madhavan Nair, P. Achuthan, K. Madhava Menon, T. V. Sundra Iyer and Kurur Neelakantan Namboodiripad were among the great stalwarts who sacrificing their comforts of life took up public and political work and founded the Mathrubhumi. The young and active leader K. P. Kesava Menon and the great nationalist P. Ramunni Menon quietly built up its traditions.

In Malabar the Mathrubhumi constantly endeavoured to make its readers fit for the assumption of political responsibilities. During the dark days of the struggle, the Mathrubhumi shone as the guiding star of inspiration carrying out its task as an instrument of social will and national dedication without fear or favour and without personal or communal considerations. Its mighty traditions steadily built up by K. P. Kesava Menon and P. Ramunni Menon were carried on by succeeding editors including K. Kelapan. The authorities tried to silence

the paper for some time but could not resist the social will for long.

**Faction Fight in Congress--The Rightists and the Leftists**

The period following the withdrawal of the civil disobedience movement was a crucial period in the history of Congress organisation in Malabar. The younger section of the Congress stood for militant leadership. The birth of the Congress Socialist Party in India provided an opportunity to those radical elements to assert themselves and precipitate a polarisation between the Right and Left wings in the Congress. The elections in August 1934 to the various Congress bodies were keenly contested as the rift between the two became more open. P. Krishna Pillai and EMS Namboodiripad who believed in the Communist ideology led the left wing. They organised the Kerala unit of the Congress socialist party and functioned as a distinct unit within the Kerala Provincial Congress Committee. The left wing dominated by the socialists, led the agitations of workers and peasants who faced untold miseries in the wake of the world economic depression of the thirties. An extremist group of national muslims also emerged within the Congress under the leadership of

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Muhammed Abdul Rahiman Sahib. The leadership of the Congress organisation eventually passed into the hands of the Congress socialists and the nationalist Muslims. In 1938 with the help of nationalist Muslims, the Communists became Kerala PCC office bearers. At a meeting of the Kerala Provincial Congress Committee held at Shornur in October 1934 a resolution was passed expressing lack of confidence in the efficacy of the Gandhian principles of truth and non-violence as weapons in the fight for swaraj. Under socialist persuasion it was resolved that the Provincial Congress Committee should organise the peasants and workers and work for their economic progress as an important part of its activity. For the first time in the history of Malabar trade unions emerged in almost all industrial cities. The emergence of the Kerala Congress Socialist party was formally welcomed through a resolution at that meeting (Shornur Session of 1934) which saw a definite deviation from Gandhian ideas on several matters.

On the eve of the Bombay session of the Indian National Congress, the Congress Socialists congress took

22. A. Sreedhara Menon, n. 20, p. 60.
23. EMS Namboodiripad, n. 21, p. 292.
place in Bombay to define party's goal and programmes. EMS Namboodiripad was elected as the Joint Secretary of the Socialist party. In 1935 he started and edited the 'Prabhatham' Weekly and published a book in Malayalam entitled '1917' giving a short account of the Russian Revolution. The Congress socialists in Kerala organised study classes to give political education to the masses in their own way.\textsuperscript{25} All these marked the beginning of the open rupture between the right and the left wings in the Congress. An attempt was made to patch up the differences between the Rightists and the Leftists. A compromise was eventually arrived at according to which both the groups were to have equal representation in the working committee of the Kerala Provincial Congress Committee. However, the General Secretary of the PCC was to be a non-leftist with absolute control over the working of the entire organisation and the leftists who were trade union workers were to act only in consultation with him.\textsuperscript{26} On behalf of the Rightists K. Kelappan, U. Gopala Menon, Kongattil Raman Menon, K. Madavan Nair and P. K. Kunjisankara Menon and on behalf of the leftists EMS Namboodiripad, K. P. Gopalan and Manjunatha Rao signed the compromise document. Consequently, the rivalry between the two wings

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., p. 410.

\textsuperscript{26} A. Sreedhara Menon, n. 20, p. 60.
instead of showing signs of abating became only more acute
day by day.\textsuperscript{27} The series of labour strikes in the
early months of 1935 under the dynamic leadership of
A. K. Gopalan helped to tighten their grip over the
workers.

Congress Ministry

According to the provisions of the Government of
India Act 1935 the elections from Malabar to the Madras
legislature were held in February 1936. In spite of the
dissenssions within the organisation, the Congressmen
presented a united front and annexed almost all the seats
from Malabar in the provincial legislature with
overwhelming majority.\textsuperscript{28} When the first Congress ministry
of Madras assumed office under C. Rajagopalachari,
Kongattil Ramen Menon the then president of the Kerala
Provincial Congress Committee who represented Ponnani
constituency was included in the ministry as the
representative of Malabar. In the election of the Malabar
District Board the Congress won a significant majority and
Kelappan was unanimously elected as the President of the
Malabar District Board. Though the Congress victory
aroused considerable enthusiasm among the people the

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., p. 61.
communists had also become a force to be reckoned with through the leadership of P. Krishna Pillai, A. K. Gopalan and EMS Namboodiripad. They were able to organise the peasants, students, and teachers under their banner. In the election of the Kerala Provincial Congress Committee in January 1939 the Rightists suffered a severe setback. Mohammed Abdul Rahiman became the president of the PCC and EMS Namboodiripad the General Secretary. When the Second World War broke out in September 1939 the Kerala Provincial Congress Committee which was still under Communist domination opted for a mass struggle against British imperialism. \(^\text{29}\) The Congress High Command decided not to cooperate with Britain in its war efforts and directed the Congress ministers in the provinces to resign office as protest against the action of the British Government in committing India to the war against the Axis powers without consulting the leaders of the country. Subash Chandra Bose, the most outspoken critic of this policy of the leadership, left the Congress organisation and organised All India Forward Bloc in 1939. Mohammed Abdul Rahiman the then President of the Kerala PCC joined the new party founded by Bose.

In September 1940 the All India Congress Committee decided to launch individual satyagraha under the

\(^{29}\) Ibid., p. 62.
leadership of Gandhi. But the socialist led Kerala PCC decided not to accept the decision of the AICC. So the Kerala Provincial Congress Committee was dissolved and an adhoc committee was constituted. With the dissolution of the socialist led Kerala PCC and with the intense war time repression against the leftists, the internal struggle between the rightists and the leftists in the Congress took a new turn. The Congress socialists decided to go almost enbloc into the Communist Party in 1940.

The Congress in Malabar played its own role in the Quit India Movement of 1942 under the leadership of K. B. Menon. During this period the ban on the Communist Party was lifted and was granted freedom to function freely as a political party. This followed a change in the policy of the Communist Party of India. The Communists who had earlier advocated the thesis that the war was an imperialist war had, since Russia's entry into it in June 1941 began to regard it as a people's war and extended their cooperation to the government in its war efforts. Consequently, they opposed the Quit India Movement and abstained from it.

32. A. Sreedhara Menon, n. 20, p. 65.
Communist Movement in Kerala

The echo of the communist ideology got reflected in Kerala in the early decades of the present century. Marx is regarded as the founder of Scientific Socialism or Communism. He is respected together with Engles and Lenin, as the prophet of a new philosophy based not on brotherly love but on the doctrine of class war. The message of Karl Marx is a revolutionary call to the working class. Marx advocated violent revolutions to the transformation of the society. He also preached the doctrine 'the end justifies the means'. The political ideology of Karl Marx began to exert influence over a micro minority of intellectuals in India even before the First World War. After the Russian Revolution, the communist ideology began to spread in India. It was after the Russian Revolution of 1917 the principles of marxism began to spread among the freedom fighters of India. Some communist leaders of India at that time got associated with the Communist International. The Communist International tried to educate the Indians in the ideals of Marxism and to organise them into a


34. EMS Namboodiripad, Indian Swathanthria Samara Charithram (M) (Trivandrum, 1976), p. 375.

35. Ibid.
revolutionary party. The Indian Communists began to participate in the meetings of Communist International. M. N. Roy who represented Indian communists rose to the leadership of Communist International. It followed the formation of Indian Communist Party at Thaskent. In 1925 a group of Communists met at Kanpur and formed the Communist Party of India. Thus a Communist Party was formed in the soil of India.

The Kerala Unit of Communist Party

In 1937 the Kerala unit of Communist Party came into existence. In the beginning, it was a secret organisation that worked within the Congress. The first unit of the Kerala Communist Party was an organisation of those active members who were working in the organisation of Kerala PCC and Congress Socialist Party. After three years they left Congress and Congress Socialist party and began to work in the name of Communist Party in Malabar. In the beginning of this activity, however, the Communists

36. Ibid., p. 377.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid., p. 397.
40. Ibid.
were in a peculiar position. They were on the one hand an independent political party functioning illegally and fighting the official policy of the Congress, while on the other hand, they were the leaders of the provincial, district and lower units of the Congress organisation. They had on the one hand to popularise the independent revolutionary political line of the Communist Party and on the other to keep as Congressmen, within the limits set by the rules of satyagraha laid down by Gandhi. This conflict between their position as Communists on the one hand and as congressmen on the other led to the call issued by them as congressmen to celebrate an anti-repression day (15 September 1940) and to the organisation of militant resistance to the police on that day organised by them as Communists.41

In Travancore, the Travancore Youth League which was founded in 1931 functioned in close cooperation with the state Congress. Eventually it came to be dominated by the Communists. They had a considerable hold over the industrial and agricultural workers of Alleppey and Shertallai areas. The Alleppey-Shertallai area with its heavy concentration of industrial and agricultural workers who suffered from untold economic hardships turned out to

41. EMS Namboodiripad, n. 31, p. 150.
be the cradle of the Communist movement in Travancore.\textsuperscript{42}
They were led by T. V. Thomas, R. Sugathan, P. T. Punnoose and M. N. Govindan Nair. In October 1946 the town of Alleppey and the villages of Punnapra and Vayalar situated in its suburbs witnessed a series of clashes between the Communist led working class and the police, stationed in the area.\textsuperscript{43} The industrial workers of Alleppey town, the fishermen of Punnapra and the agricultural workers of Vayalar held demonstrations and proclaimed their solidarity and made preparations for a general strike. The strike which took place on 22 October was a great success. On 24 October a huge demonstration of workers moved to Punnapra where the police force had been stationed. In a battle fought between the workers and the police at Punnapra 200 fell victims of police bullets. The Police Inspector and some military officials also lost their lives. In the clashes which followed several people lost their lives. According to one estimate at least a 1,000 persons lost their lives in the whole upheaval.\textsuperscript{44}

The post-independent period saw a realignment of political forces in Malabar. The Communists emerged as a strong and well-organised political party. A group of

\textsuperscript{42} A. Sreedhara Menon, n. 20, p. 26.

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., p. 27.

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., p. 28.
Congress workers under K. Kelappan formed the Kerala unit of the Kisan Mazdur Praja Party founded at national level by Acharya J. B. Kripalani. The Communist KMPP alliance inflicted a crushing defeat on the Congress in Malabar. The united front of the Communists and KMPP emerged as the dominant group from Malabar in the Madras Legislative Assembly.

Communism or Marxism and Gandhism

The origin and growth of the Communist ideology was a challenge to the Gandhian ideology. Theoretically and practically Marxism and Gandhism stand far and wide from each other. To Marx economic inequality was the only form of inequality but to Gandhi economic inequality was not the only form of inequality. Marx says about the polarisation of society into the have's and have not's, Gandhi stands for mutual cooperation. Marx advocates a violent revolution as the only means for the creation of an egalitarian society while Gandhi is the apostle of peace and non-violence. Marx advocates dictatorship of the proletariat but Gandhi is against dictatorship of any party. Again, Marx dreams about a classless and stateless society but Gandhi stands for a non-violent state with cottage industries.

45. Ibid., p. 65.
Though the birth and growth of the Communist movement in Kerala was a challenge to the Gandhian ideology, it is not correct to conclude that the growth of the Communist movement signified the irrelevance of Gandhism to solve the existing socio-economic problems. On the contrary, contemporary developments in the Communist and non-Communist states show that Gandhian answer to socio-economic questions is proving its relevance today.

To Marx, political structure is a mere shadow of the socio-economic force in a country and a class war is going on between the haves and have-nots. Gandhi knew that economic inequality was not the only disparity and to be precise was against all kinds of exploitations. Gandhi raised his voice against exploitation and cruelty in many a field ranging from liberation of women, removal of untouchability, tribal uplift and rehabilitation of lepers. He also formed movements for these. Even before setting up movements he practiced these ideals in his own personal life. In all respects Gandhi was the symbol of poor man.  

To Marx values are relative to class interests historically determined by the law of dialectical materialism. Marxian historical relativism tends to view values as a superstructure of economic

factors, of the relation of production in a given historical perspective. They are propelled by the same dialectical power that moves history. To Marx values would have a dual character and would reflect the class contradictions at every stage of history. 47

Gandhi and Marx both believed in change. To Marx change should come through revolution because force is the midwife of every old society pregnant with a new one. Gandhi was also a practical man who believed in change. But the means he adopted were through peaceful methods. He felt that equality and social justice could be established only through non-violent methods. A compromise with non-violence is not allowed by Gandhi under any circumstances. This non-violence, however, is the non-violence of the brave. 48 Gandhi gave a new dimension to the idea of revolution by transmitting moral principles in all walks of life including politics. 49

Gandhi advocated non-violence as a means to achieve desired ends but Marx advocated violence as the means to achieve ends. Gandhi advocated non-violence as means and accepted the maxim that means justifies the end. Marx

48. Ibid., p. 56.
49. G. Kumara Pillai, n. 46, p. 91.
believed in violent methods for gaining the desired results and admitted the maxim that the end justifies the means. Most practical politicians believe in the maxim that the end justifies the means. This means that if the end is desirable, even means like cunning, deceit, and violence are justified if they help to achieve the end. 50

We have a powerful non-violent method to meet corruption, that is the satyagraha adopted by Gandhi. In the history of man's cruelty to his fellow being, the weapons of satyagraha and non-violence would show a turning point. 51

Gandhi refused to glorify the cult of expediency. According to Gandhi what cannot be justified by inner conscience cannot be justified on political grounds. He held that the highest morality is the highest expediency. Gandhi would never permit any compromise with truth even if it be in the interest of the country. 52 Marx starts from the top and tries to seize political power by a coup and then uses it for setting up the desired economic structure, while Gandhi starts from the bottom and seeks to bring about a revolution in the mind of men to make them self-restrained and developed character. 53

50. T. S. Devadoss, n. 47, p. 56.
51. G. Kumara Pillai, n. 46, p. 93.
52. T. S. Devadoss, n. 47, p. 57.
53. Ibid., p. 60.
Gandhism also repudiates dictatorship of the proletariat. Gandhism denies totalitarianism. It is against centralisation of power either by a proletarian party or by any other parties. Like wealth, power also should be shared. Sharing of power means democracy. Decentralisation of power is not seen sufficiently in the present day representative democracy. So Gandhian way demands participatory democracy that is Panchayat Raj, a non-party set up, where panchayats are getting maximum possible power and citizens directly involve in the process of administration.  

54. G. Kumara Pillai, n. 46, p. 94.