Chapter V

THE BILLS FOR SOCIO ECONOMIC CHANGES
It was during the time of Achutha Menon that a number of Bills affecting the socio-economic and educational life of the state were introduced in the Legislative Assembly. The most significant among them were relating to land reforms. The process of the land reforms started with the first Communist government of 1957 and reached a significant level of achievement by the introduction of land reforms during the time of Achutha Menon. A sizeable section of unauthorized land kept by the Kannan Devan Company was brought under the control of the government and distributed among the landless labourers during this period. With the help of another Bill the landless kudikidappukars were made the owners of the land. Other Bills were introduced for the social welfare of the people. Another significant development during his period was the bills introduced for the establishment of two universities of excellence affecting the scientific and technological development of the state namely the Cochin University of Science and Technology and Agricultural University. While the other Universities were following the traditional path of the higher education the new universities were concentrating on scientific research on the most essential branches of knowledge which were essential for the economic growth and development of the country. This chapter deals with
the important Bills introduced in the Assembly during the time of Achutha
Menon.

The fourth Kerala Assembly could create a record by enacting 226 measures of legislation. During this period 1701 amendments to the various clauses of bills were moved. They include Land Reform Bills, University Bills and Labour Welfare Bills. All these bills were formulated after discussions with various departments and consultations with experts in the areas with the initiative of the Chief Minister. In the case of University Bills, the Kerala University Bill was presented by the Chief Minister as the education minister was hospitalized at the time of the presentation. The CPI (M) and other opposition parties used all the weapons in their hands to create problems for the government. But it was due to the timely interference of the Chief Minister that the bills were passed in the Assembly.

The Kerala Land Reforms Act 1963 as amended by the Kerala Land Reforms Act 1969 paved the way for the effective implementation of Land Reforms in the state. The important features of the amendment were 1) The introduction of ceiling for the land which a person or family can hold. 2) The vesting of the excess land with the
government. 3) The transfer of the ownership of the land to the tenants. 4) The payment of compensation to the person who surrendered his lands. 5) The constitution of kudikidappukars Benefit Fund to assist them. The implementation of land reform amendment bill was a revolutionary step in the history of Kerala for the landless kudikedappukars who were highly benefited by it. Though the Land Reform Act was planned by the first Communist ministry in 1957 it never materialized. It was Achutha Menon who took personal interest in its implementation after introducing certain important amendments. The Bill was intended to remove some of the impediments which came up at the time of the implementation of the programme. The Assembly also passed other bills which enabled the government to take possession of excess of private land and distribute them among the poor and landless people of the state. The Bill provided for a drastic reduction in the compensation paid to land owners whose lands were taken over by the government. Even though the opposition parties raised many differences of opinion they had to withdraw them taking into consideration the benefit it provided for the landless kudikedappukars.
The next bill was the Kerala Land Reform (Amendments) Bill, 1972. The objective of the bill was to validate the bonafide transfers of land made between 1957 and 1963. The ceiling limit of the land according to the amendments was 15 acres. It provided for the taking away of excess land of the land lords by paying compensation. The amendments were drafted in such a way that the general principles were acceptable to the CPI(M) led opposition. Still they raised certain objections and suggested some amendments but they were rejected and the bill was unanimously adopted by the House.

The Kannan Devan Hills (Resumption of lands) Bill, 1971 was introduced in the Assembly with the intention of taking back the agricultural land from the Kannan Devan Company and distribute it among the poor and landless people of the state. It was to be introduced without giving any compensation for the company. The opposition party had to accept the general principles of the bill. Still they raised some objections to some of the provisions of the bill but finally they could not go against passing of a progressive measure which helped the landless and poor people.
The Kerala private Forest (Vesting and Assignments) Bill, 1971 was introduced with the main objective of taking over Private Forest Lands without paying compensation. It was also aimed to distribute the land for the purpose of promoting the welfare of Agricultural Organizations. This bill became essential because extensive lands in the Malabar area in the private forest were owned and controlled by private persons. By introducing the bill the government was able to take over the private forest as part of the agrarian reforms\(^4\).

The Chief Minister took personal interest in formulating the bills and introducing amendments that were helpful for the poor and landless people. Even though the opposition raised many amendments the Chief Minister was willing to accept some of the constructive amendments. Throughout the presentation of the land reform bill the Chief Minister took special attention to see that the spirit of the bills were not overcome by the objections raised by the opposition parties.

The first Communist ministry in 1957 under the leadership of EMS introduced the Land Reform Bill abolishing land lords. But it could not make it a law, because the government was dismissed by the central government before it could complete its term. The task of land reforms
was taken up by the Achutha Menon government. The government also claimed that it would carry forward the good works done by the previous government. The most important step in these regard was the Agrarian reforms. Though the bill was introduced in 1959, the President’s assent to the bill was not given because the government itself was toppled after a week. It was the same land reforms bill which was passed in the third week of October, 1968, received the assent of the President by the middle of December and came into force from the first of January, 1970.

The passing of the Land Reforms was an important and historic event in Kerala. The efforts made by the previous governments to get the bill passed failed because of various political developments. The credit goes to Achutha Menon as it was during his period that all the circumstances were favourable for the bill and the Chief Minister made use of the opportunities to see that the bill was passed. CPI(M) under the leadership of EMS Namboothiripad did not get opportunities to pass the bill even though it came into power in 1967. The central government had to give its consent to the bill because Congress party was the major partner in the coalition government. The CPI (M) and its Allies declared that there would be great opposition within the administration against the bill. The
vested interests within the Congress would try their level best to see that the bill was sabotaged. In spite of all such fears the Central Government issued the notification regarding the presidential assent, on January 1st 1970.

The passing of the land reforms bill was a morale booster. The results of the bill was of far reaching consequences. The tenants could stick to their land with no fear of eviction paying no rent to the land lords. The bill was in fact a continuation of the earlier bill introduced in 1959. As a result of the passing of the bill the gains of the early legislation were consolidated. Many of the landless hutment dwellers became entitled to their home steds within the area of ten cents each. This was of course a revolutionary step. The agricultural labourers in Kerala for the first time became the real owners of their land. Another important achievement of the bill was that it was able to cut short police interference in the cases of ownership of lands by the agricultural labourers. This was acknowledged to be a significant departure from the early methods. In spite of all the deficiencies in implementing the provision of the bill, its significance was great in the history of Kerala. The passing of land reforms bill was the fulfilment of the long cherished desire of the masses. The popular song
sung by the agricultural labourers was like this ‘the paddy fields where we used to cultivate will become our own property in course of time’\textsuperscript{6}. It was this dream that was fulfilled by the passing of the Land Reforms Acts. The government could weather the storm of many sided offensives from the part of vested interests.

The Kerala Assembly during the time of Achutha Menon passed 24 enactments relating to University Education. The bills included the Cochin University Bill, 1971, the Kerala University Bill, 1971, the Kerala Agricultural University Bill, 1972 and the Calicut university Bill, 1975. The Calicut University Bill was adopted in the same form as the Kerala University Bill, 1972, and therefore there was no discussion on it.

The Kerala Agricultural University Bill, 1971 was introduced for the establishment for an Agricultural University for the development of agriculture and other related subjects like animal husbandry and diary science. The opposition welcomed the general principles of the bill even though they disagreed with the creation of some posts in the university like that of the Pro Vice Chancellor. After clause by clause discussion, the bill was passed in the Assembly\textsuperscript{7}. 

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The Cochin University Bill 1971 was introduced for the establishment of a federal university at Cochin for the development of higher education with particular emphasis on post graduate studies and research in applied science, technology, industry and commerce. The bill was referred to a select committee for the detailed scrutiny and amendments. All the important proposals of the opposition parties were accepted. They included bringing only those colleges with post graduate courses under the university, giving a representation to leading industrial concerns in the syndicate and giving more emphasis for training in specialized courses. The Chief Minister had no hesitation to accept the constructive objections raised by the opposition but rejected other objections which did not have any content. After a long procedure of debates and discussions on the clauses the Bill was passed by the Assembly.

The Kerala University Bill 1972 was introduced in the Assembly when it became necessary to amend the Kerala University Act 1969 in the light of the discussion of the High Court and Supreme Court in a petition relating to the minority institutions. The bill provided for the recomposition of the Senate, the Academic Council and the Faculties of
the University\textsuperscript{8}. The bill was introduced by the Chief Minister himself. The opposition parties moved 126 amendments to the bill. One of the important amendments of the bill was the inclusion of one student member in the University Syndicate. The bill also took steps to control the managements of affiliated private colleges. Sufficient clauses were included to have control over the managements in the appointments of teachers in the colleges. Many progressive steps were taken for bringing the private managements under the control of the university.

While introducing University Bills Achutha Menon took keen interest due to the special circumstances prevailing in Kerala. The government was planning to start direct payment of salary to the teachers of private colleges. Till that time the government had no control over the appointments of teachers or admission of the students in the private colleges. Without getting some control over the managements of private colleges in these matters it was meaningless for the government to take up the responsibility of direct payment for the teachers. Therefore he insisted that the private college managements should strictly follow the directions given by the government in the matter of the appointment of teachers, qualifications of the teachers and admissions of the students. He was not
prepared to accept any compromise on these aspects. Relevant clauses were included in the University Bill to introduce these principles in the administration of the Universities.

The Kerala Agricultural Workers Bill, 1972 was considered to be the *Magna Carta* of the agricultural workers in the state. There was uncertainty of wages and insecurity of jobs prevailing among the workers. The bill offered employment guarantee and higher rate of fixed wages. The bill also provided for 8 hours of work a day for a worker with half an hour rest after four hours of work. It also constituted provident funds for the workers. There were a lot of differences of opinion between the CPI(M) and Kerala Congress on various aspects of the bill. The government under the leadership of Achutha Menon effectively exploited the differences between the opposition groups which enabled the government to adopt the provisions of bills without much objection.

The other important bills introduced during the time of Achutha Menon were the bills relating to the preservation of the forests. The Kerala Preservation of Private Forests (Amendment) Bills, 1973, was intended to check the unauthorized felling of tree in the private forests, especially in the Malabar area⁹.
The Kerala Assembly passed a number of social welfare bills for the well-being of the state. The important among them were the Kerala State Housing Board, Bill 1971, Kerala State Rural Development Board Bill,1971, and the Kerala Land Development Corporation Limited(special powers ) Bill,1974\textsuperscript{10}. The Kerala State Housing Board Bill 1971 was intended for the establishment of Kerala State Housing Board to coordinate the various housing schemes in the state. The Kerala State Rural Development Board Bill, 1971, provided for the setting up of a rural board to undertake water supply schemes in rural areas with the financial assistance of the Life Insurance Corporation of India.

The Kerala Land Development Corporation Limited (special power) Bill, 1974 was introduced for the establishment of the Kerala Land Development Corporation as a state owned Company with the objective of providing land development schemes related to agriculture. Since Agriculture was the main occupation of the people of Kerala many people were involved in the agricultural activities. The bill was able to help them by providing more opportunities of employment.

During the time of Achutha Menon three bills were introduced for the welfare of the members of the Assembly. The bills
were: The payment of Salaries and Allowances (Amendment) Bill, 1972, The Payment of Salaries and Allowances (Amendment)1974, and The Kerala Payment of Pension to members of the Legislative Assembly Bill,1976\textsuperscript{11}. All these Bills were introduced for the improvement of salaries and other facilities for the members of the Assembly.

All the above mentioned bills were introduced in the Kerala Legislative Assembly for the improvement of land relations, education and social welfare of the people. Even though some of the provisions were objected even by the parties belonging to the ruling alliance the bills were passed with the timely interference of the Chief Minister. Some of the provisions of the bills were against the interests of the Congress and the Muslim League because they had some vested interests in maintaining educational institutions under the control of the religious organisations to which they belonged. Moreover, they had to depend upon the traditional land owners for their financial support. The Chief Minister was ready to accept some of the amendments proposed by the opposition parties. However, the bills introduced during his period were able to bring far reaching changes in the fields of land reforms, education and social welfare. The members of the Legislative Assembly had to depend upon the
income and facilities provided by the government since they had to devote their complete time for the service of the people. Therefore the Chief Minister took special interest in increasing their social status by improving their salaries and other facilities.

Notes and Reference

1. Dr. R. Prasannan,(ed), *Fourth Kerala Legislative Assembly Souvenir*, Trivandrum, 1979, p.6


3. *PKLA*, vol. XXXII, 1972, P.1205


6. ONV Kurup’s famous lines written for the drama, ‘*Ningal enne Communistakki*’


10. R. Jayaprakash, *Op. cit.*, p.113