Chapter II

POLITICAL BACKGROUND
The government which came into existence under the leadership of Marxist Party in 1967 had a good majority. But within two years there began to emerge differences of opinion between the members of the United Front. The differences between CPI and CPI (M) reached such a stage in which it was not possible for them to continue in the government. Charges of corruption were raised against two prominent ministers of CPI, M.N Govindan Nair and T.V Thomas. Moreover the CPI (M) began to have complete control over the affairs of the government which the other parties could not tolerate. Taking advantage of the prevailing political situation there began to emerge another coalition consisting of CPI, RSP, Muslim League and PSP. If such a coalition government came into existence its leadership was expected to be given to the senior RSP leader M. Sree Kandan Nair\(^1\). Eventhough the other parties agreed to make Sree Kandan Nair the Chief Minister of the new government he refused to accept the offer. Later it was decided that a new coalition government should be established under the leadership of CPI. Achutha Menon’s name was suggested as the Chief Minister by the president of Muslim League, Abdul Rahman Bafaki Thangal\(^2\). At the first instance, Achutha Menon was not prepared to accept the offer but when his party insisted that he
should accept the responsibility he had to relent to the direction of the party. Before accepting the post Achutha Menon insisted on certain conditions before giving his consent. The conditions were (1) No member of the previous government who was accused of corruption will be included in the ministry (2) Nobody should interfere in the affairs of the ministry (3). The cabinet should be under the control of the Liaison Committee which should be convened at least once a week. When all these demands were accepted Achutha Menon gave his approval for considering his name.

Necessity of an alliance with Congress

Achutha Menon was in favour of an alliance with the Indian National Congress on his strong ideological basis. The Communist movement in India according to him had to get the support of the democratic parties in order to bring social and economic transformation. The materialist conditions of India were not favorable for a socio-economic revolution. The change could be brought in due course of time only with the cooperation of democratic and socialist forces. Achutha Menon applied the theoretical insight to the concrete conditions of the
existing situations of India. This meant breaking from the understanding of building of an alternative to the Congress as in 1957-59 by forming a United Front with it. This had to be accomplished even if it meant breaking from the dogmatic, sectarian and opportunist formations of the Communist Movement. The United Front with the Congress and other similar parties was not merely intended for maintaining the status quo. It was intended to provide an impetus and an instrument for socio economic transformation. It was also necessary to rearrange the political alignment particularly at the mass level.

**Conflict in PSP**

The major problem which had to be faced by Achutha Menon was the difference of opinions that took place between the coalition partners and the differences that appeared within each of the parties. He had to spend a lot of time and energy to solve the problems. When he was successful in solving the problem within a party it was immediately followed by another problem between the parties or within the party. When the first ministry under Achutha Menon was formed the indifferences of opinion between the two factions within the PSP
began to emerge regarding the choice of minister. Both Attingal Gopala Pillai, the state chairman of the party and N. K. Balakrishnan, another senior leader wanted to become the minister. Eventhough N.K. Balakrishnan was chosen as a minister the dispute between the two began to assume wider proportions. The State Committee of the party met and passed a resolution requesting the Chief Minister to appoint Attingal Gopala Pillai as the minister in the place of N. K. Balakrishnan. In the normal case there was no need of a problem if Balakrishnan obeyed the decision of the party. But Balakrishnan refused to accept the decision of the party and wanted to continue as the minister. This led to a split in the party into two factions. One faction was led by Attingal Gopala Pillai and the other was led by Mangalath Madom. The faction led by Attingal Gopala Pillai insisted that the decision of the party should be accepted by the Chief Minister and if he was not prepared to do so, they threatened to leave the ruling front.

It was the general policy of Achutha Menon not to interfere with the internal affairs of the coalition partners. But in the case of PSP the internal conflict within the party began to affect the very existence of the government. In such peculiar circumstances Achutha Menon decided to
take initiative to solve the problem. He brought the matter before the Liaison Committee which discussed the issue and brought out a compromise formula. According to the Committee there were two alternatives. The first alternative was to accept the decision of the party leadership leading to the resignation of Balakrishnan as the minister. The second alternative was reaching a compromise between Attingal Gopala Pillai and Balakrishnan to share the ministership for two and half years each. N.K.Balakrishnan was not prepared to accept the compromise formula introduced by the Liaison Committee. When the situation became complicated the Committee had to take a decision authorizing the Chief Minister to settle the issue taking into consideration all the aspects of the problem. Achutha Menon took up the challenge boldly and he decided to retain Balakrishnan in the ministry. He was also successful in persuading Attingal Gopala Pillai faction to continue in the ruling front.

It goes without saying that it was the diplomatic skill of Achutha Menon that solved the problem within the PSP which threatened the very existence of the ruling front. Though it was the policy of the Chief Minister not to interfere either in the internal affairs of any party, he had to interfere when the existence of the ministry was in danger. His interference
was completely justified. The Liaison Committee evolved a formula which all the coalition partners had to obey. In this case when N.K Balakrishnan was not prepared to accept the decision, the committee had to save its face by authorizing the Chief Minister to take a suitable decision. It was at this critical juncture that Achutha Menon used his discretionary power by retaining N.K Balakrishnan as the minister. Moreover he was tactful enough to persuade Attingal Gopala Pillai faction to remain in the coalition. It is quite clear that but for the stern and cunning approach of the Chief Minister the problem could not have been solved and if it was not solved would have complicated the issues.

**Era of Experiments**

When Achutha Menon assumed office as the Chief Minister of Kerala, an era of experiments and uncertainty was being opened before him. The powerful opposition under the leadership of the Marxist party with E.M.S Namboothiripad at the helm of affairs would leave no stone unturned against the new government under Achutha Menon who was also a Communist leader with a clean image. The approach of the Marxist Party towards the Communist Party of India was based on an attitude of revenge
because it was due to the resignation of its ministers that the Marxists lead coalition fell down. The loss of power followed by the new developments which led to the establishment of a new ministry under the leadership of CPI which was their arch enemy was intolerable to them. Moreover the newly formed coalition was working with the help of an insignificant majority, liable to fall at any time. The number game was not very much favourable to the government. The wrath of the main opposition party was mainly on Achutha Menon and their intention was to turn all their weapons against him and weaken him as far as possible, so that the new ministry would collapse before the heavy wind of their herculean attacks.

Achutha Menon had to face vehement attacks from the opposition benches during the first six months. He was even subjected to corruption charges. He had been taken aback by the heavy blows on him by his former comrades from the Communist Party of India. But he had the unusual courage of conviction to face such a situation with immense patience and did not show any signs of weakness. The Chief Minister was able to listen to their attacks with sportsman spirit.

T.K. Divakaran of RSP was the leader of the House. Other leaders were C.H. Muhammad Koya (Muslim League), Baby John (RSP)
and K.M George (Kerala Congress) who faced the attacks and counter arguments of the opposition effectively. The oratory skills of C.H Muhammad Koya was a great help to the Chief Minister. He kept away from most of the war of words that were fought on the floor of the Assembly and interfered only when his presence was inevitable.

Within a short period after becoming the Chief Minister Achutha Menon was able to create great impression upon the people and was able to win their confidence. When he stood for the by – election, he came out with flying colours proving that he had the confidence of the people. When the Assembly was dissolved and new elections were conducted the people selected the coalition under his leadership. The success of the election was achieved by projecting Achutha Menon as its leader.

The opposition parties under the leadership of CPI(M) adopted a strategic approach of finding fault with each and every step taken by the Chief Minister. Their agenda was to create an impression in the public mind that the new ministry was the product of opportunist politics. They also wanted to tarnish the image of the Chief Minister as an imported politician from Delhi who had no idea regarding current politics
prevailing in Kerala. Creative opposition on the floor of the Assembly and in public was not the method adopted by the opposition. They let loose a series of strikes against the new government. Baseless allegations were raised against the Chief Minister including allegations of corruption but all these allegations and arguments did not defeat him and he faced them with courage and conviction. He presented the facts before them without expressing any sort of anger or disappointment. He did not try to raise counter allegation against the opposition parties.

In the Assembly the RSP leader T.K. Divakaran was the leader of the House. The responsibility of giving answers to the questions was given to the leader of the House and other ministers. During 1970 when the budget was presented there was every possibility of the downfall of the ministry due to the differences of opinion between the coalition parties. But Achutha Menon was not at all affected by the new developments and presented the picture of an immovable mountain which never cared for stormy winds.
Problems in the formative days 1971

The election of 1970 was a turning point in the political developments of Kerala because it witnessed many political experiments conducted by different political parties. The CPI (M) was actually not prepared for fresh election. It was during this election that the Congress, Congress(O) and Congress(R), began to fight each other. (The Congress led by India Gandhi came to be known as Congress (R) because they were advised to vote for Sanjiv Reddy in the presidential election). Another feature of election in 1970 was the emergence of three fronts. The CPI(M) sought the support of parties like SSP, KSP and KTP and CPI(M) was the only major party in it and all others were insignificant. The ruling front led by CPI, RSP, Muslim League and PSP was by itself a powerful group. It came to an agreement with the Congress. The Congress was able to give its support to the Achutha Menon ministry and this decision was accepted by the people. It was due to the charismatic personality of Achutha Menon that the UDF government under his leadership was able to win the confidence of the people. The Congress was able to face the challenge imposed by the CPI (M) because of the new image of the UDF government created by the Chief Minister. The third front was led by the
Kerala Congress which failed to come to an agreement with the ruling front, though it came to an agreement with the Congress (O) which had no significant following in the state.

In the election that followed the United Front under the leadership of Congress was able to win a comfortable victory to form a new government. Throughout the election campaign C. Achutha Menon was projected as the next Chief Minister. When the United Front came out successful, Achutha Menon was again made the leader of the Parliamentary party with the consent of the Congress. But the Front had to face many problems at the time of forming the new Government. The Congress did not join the coalition cabinet due to the high idealism of the Youth Congress under the leadership of A. K. Antony. But the senior members of the party wanted to join the ministry. Another objection raised by a section of Congress was their reluctance to join hands with a communal party like Muslim League. But later when they joined with the Muslim League they justified it by saying that while in the rest of the country the Muslim League was communal and reactionary in Kerala it was not communal. Another problem which the United Front had to face was the rivalry between the Trade Unions of the
Congress and the CPI. These two trade Unions began to fight between each other when there was a strike in the FACT, a public sector undertaking at Aluva. These differences of opinion between two major parties of the coalition created problems for Achutha Menon at the formative stage of the ministry.

When the Congress reluctantly decided to join the ministry it demanded major share in the cabinet by asking for important portfolios. Moreover, it was the party with the biggest number of members in the Assembly. Their demands had to be accepted and the portfolios of the ministers had to be rearranged creating further confusions among the parties. K.Karunakaran, the leader of the Congress was satisfied when Home Department was assigned to him. Achutha Menon had no hesitation to give the Home Ministry which was usually held by the Chief Minister.
Notes and References

1) Thekkum Bhagom Mohan, Achutha Menon Mukhamoodiyillathe, Kottayam, 1992, p43.

2) M.C Ibrahim, C.H Muhammad Koya, Kozhikode, 1985, p212


5) Mathrubhumi, 8th October, 1971, Ernakulam.

6) The Mathrubhumi, 3rd December 1971, Ernakulam

7) Dr. R. Prasannan, ‘Prathichaya Prashnamakkatha Athiprashasthan’, For an Indian Model, p.87

8) E.J Thomas, Coalition Game Politics in Kerala, New Delhi, 1985, p.121