Rise of Communist Movement in Kerala

The history of the Left movement in Kerala is a subject that is of utmost importance and great interest to those who are committed to the cause of social progress. Kerala can never ignore the immense contribution of the Left movement in making Kerala one of the most progressive and Left-oriented States in India.\footnote{International Congress on Kerala Studies, Vol.I, AKG Centre, Trivandrum, 1994, p.59.} The Communist Movement in India emerged out of a situation that developed in close connection with the anti-imperialist and democratic struggles of the Indian people. Over the years the revolutionary urge of the Indian people has manifested itself in anti-imperialist resistance, working class struggle, peasant revolts, general democratic struggles and movements for social reform.\footnote{International Congress on Kerala Studies, Vol.I, AKG Centre, Trivandrum, 1994, p.59.} Thus the Communist Movement arose in India in the course of the struggle for the national liberation which in turn was part of the anti-imperialists upsurge across the globe especially after the end of the First World War.

From the mid-nineteenth century itself India had become a focal point of attention in the writings of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. Marx’s ‘Chronological notes on Indian History’ shows evidence of his keen interest in Indian affairs. In two celebrated articles—\textit{The British Rule in India} and \textit{The Future Results of British Rule in India} published in 1853 in the Newyork Daily he highlighted the exploitative character of British Rule in India. According to Marx and Engels “the immediate aim of the communists was same as that of the other proletarian parties: “formation of a proletariat into a class, overthrow of the bourgeois supremacy and conquest of
political power by the proletariat”. Marx and his theory came to India rather late. The first article in English introducing the names of Marx and Engels appeared in 1912 in the Modern Review. The first biography of Marx in an Indian language was authored by R.Ramakrishna Pillai and published in 1912. Apart from that no attempts were made to familiarize the Marxist theory to Indians till 1918.

The credit of introducing Marxism in India goes to Bolshevik Revolution which attracted the attention of Indians both at Home and abroad. Two Indians Abdul Sattar Khairi and Abdul Zabbar Khairi immediately went to Russia, met Lenin and conveyed their greetings. Papers like Tribune, Modern, Modern Review, Dainik Basumat, Kesari, Abhyadaya and Bombay Chronicle carried special news items regularly on the Bolshevik Government, Lenin and his schemes. Balagangadara Tilak and Bipin Chandra Pal hailed Russia and Lenin. A Fatwa was made to be issued by the Britishers that the Muslims were to keep away from Communism. A counter campaign was started through the columns’ of Pioneer and Civil Military Gazette with fabricated stories about the Communist atrocities on religion, women and children. A special branch was created in the Home Department to check Communist influence. Another incident that contributed to the beginning of communist movement in India was the Khilafat issue. A number of Indian Muslims crossed over to Afghanistan to fight for the cause of the Sultan of Turkey. These Muslims were called Muhajirs. Some of them managed to reach Russia and people like Abdul Reza, Shaukat Usmani,

2 Ibid.
4 M.V.S.Koteswara Rao, Communist Parties and United Front Experiment in Kerala and West Bengal, Hyderabad, 2003, p.82.
5 Ibid.
Rafiq Ahmad etc. became communists and remained in Russia and served the communist cause.

Both the Communist movement and the formation of the Communist party of India had an immediate relation with the Communist International whose inaugural session was held in Moscow on 2nd March 1919. It aimed at establishing a permanent and close bond between the struggle of the proletariat in the imperialist countries and the national liberation movements of the oppressed peoples in the colonies to facilitate the breakdown of imperialism. By the Second Congress of the ‘Third International’ in 1920 an Indian Communist Centre had been setup under M.N.Roy and other émigré Indian revolutionaries and later in the year a training school for Indian revolutionaries was established under Roy at Tashkent.6

In fact the history of Communism in Kerala, until the establishment of an independent Communist party in 1940, was the history of its struggle against foreign domination and for the introduction of political, economic and social reforms along with the Congress party.7 It is interesting to note that the advent of the Indian Communist movement more or less coincided with the emergence of Mahatma Gandhi as the dominant leader of the Indian National Congress. Gandhiji transformed it into a mass organization and launched the non-co-operation movement in 1920. Therefore the interaction between the Communists and the Congress started since Gandhiji’s time.8 When Gandhi assumed the leadership of the Indian National Congress, the national movement in India had only two forms—the speeches and

resolutions by thinkers and scholars and the terrorist activities of young men inspired by idealism and impatient of bondage.\(^9\)

The attitude of Nehru also favored the rise of socialistic movement in India. It was very clear through his statement that, “A study of Marx and Lenin provided a powerful effect on my mind and helped me to see history and current affairs in a new light. The long chain of history and of social development appeared to have some meaning, some significance and future lost most of its obscurity.”\(^10\) He again says that, “Political freedom, independence was no doubt essential, but they were steps only in the right direction; without social freedom and socialistic society and State, neither the country nor the individual can’t develop much.”\(^11\) After the Civil-Disobedience Movement, Nehru wanted to consolidate the anti-imperialist forces in the country and tried to create a united national front. The Communist members of the Congress wanted collective affiliation of mass organizations such as Trade unions and Kisan sabhas. Though Nehru was willing to take this step, the majority of the Congress members were rejected the proposal.\(^12\)

In the meantime the tidal waves of a new ideology which was rejected to the impatient extremists was rising and spreading all over the world. The success of the Great October Revolution and the assumption of power by the Communists in Russia had their influence on the Indian youth too. The special interest taken by the

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Communist International in the spread of Communism in colonial countries gave a powerful fillip to this trend. Communist groups were organized in all the important cities in the country. With a view to integrating these and other socialist groups already inexistence into an All India Workers and Peasants Party, a conference was held in Meerut in 1928. The leaders of the movement were however arrested in 1929 in connection with the famous Meerut Conspiracy Case. The party cleverly utilized this opportunity to popularize Meerut Conspiracy Case started by the British government against Communist leaders and workers in 1929 showed that Roy had been successful in raising a band of devoted Communists who had begun to establish some influence over the working class.

The communist groups had already begun to feel that apart from the workers and peasants party it was necessary to organize an independent Communist party. Thus the first central organization of the Communist party in India was formed in 1933 and its activities were intensified under the General Secretary-ship of P.C. Joshi. Though declared unlawful they managed to issue a monthly magazine ‘Communists’ and a number of pamphlets. ¹³ In Kerala, while working within the Congress, the Communist leaders like P.Krishna Pillai, E.M.S.Namboodiripad, K.P.Gopalan, Mayarath Sankaran, and others, built their own ideology among workers, peasants, students and intellectuals, thus laying the organizational foundation for the future Communist Party.

In March 1934, a comprehensive Communist thesis prepared by Dr.Adhikari, one of the ablest of Meerut convicts was accepted by the provisional Central Committee of the Communist party of India. This thesis outlined the course,

which the Communist revolution in India should take; it was based on the “Draft Platform of the Communist Party of India” a notorious document which was originally drawn up in Moscow. 

14 It laid down that the first step was to be the transformation of individual strike into a general strike and the second was to be the overthrow of British imperialism, the princes and landlords by means of an armed insurrection.

In 1935 the seventh congress of the Communist International reversed its ultra leftist policies and launched a programme of forming united front’s with democratic policies. The Indian unit also laid aside its hostility to the Congress and the Congress Socialist Party was came up with a new strategy. They joined the Congress and Congress Socialist Party in large numbers. The successful participation of Congress in the elections in 1935 and the formation of Congress Governments in many provinces opened an era of civil liberties. The Communist party utilized this opportunity to popularize its publications like the “National Front”. The Communists who had infiltrated into the all India leadership of the socialist group were able to establish contacts with E.M.S.Namboodiripad, P.Krishna pillai and other Kerala leaders and convert them to their line of thinking.

The lineage of the Communist party of India in Kerala can be traced to the left tendencies within the Congress as well as non-Congress movements and the crystallization of the former in the Congress Socialist Party. The Communists in

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15 Ibid.
Kerala came to Communism through Congress socialism. The Communists in Kerala were successful in linking their class and mass organizations with the national movement and emerged as the unquestionable leaders of the national movement during the post-war revolutionary upsurge.\textsuperscript{18} Many of the leaders who led a radical leftist movement in Kerala came under the influence of the Marxist-Leninist ideology in the thirties particularly after the termination of the Civil Disobedience Movement.\textsuperscript{19} The Communist leaders like P.Krishnapillai, E.M.S.Namboodiripad, A.K.Gopalan and many others participated in the mainstream of national movement as ardent followers of the Indian National Congress. However gradually they shifted their ideological commitment to Marxism-Leninism.

The writings of Indian National leaders like Gandhi and Nehru influenced the intellectuals of Kerala too. Gandhiji wrote in his popular journal, ‘\textit{Young India}’ in 1928, “there is no questioning the fact that the Bolshevik ideal has behind it the pure sacrifice of countless men and women who had given up everything for its sake; an ideal that is sanctified by sacrifice of such master spirits as Lenin cannot go in vain”.\textsuperscript{20} Nehru in his Presidential address of the Indian National Congress said, “Socialism is however, something even more than an economic doctrine; it is a philosophy of life and it’s no other way of ending the poverty, the vast unemployment, the degradation and the subjection of the Indian people except through socialism. That involves vast and revolutionary changes in our political and social structure, the ending of vested interests in land and industry, as well as the

\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Young India}, dated 15\textsuperscript{th} November 1928, TNSA, Chennai.
feudal and autocratic Indian States system.”

He agreed with the ‘socialist approach’ with the hope that socialism would not kill individuality but it would release innumerable individuals from economic and cultural bondage. Thus, Nehru’s socialism had three distinct features, Individualism, Marxism and Gandhism.

In 1931 a Communist League was formed in Trivandrum by nationalists like Ponnara G.Sreedhar, N.P.Kurukkal, Tiruvattar Tanupillai, Sivasankara Pillai, R.P.Iyer, Taikkat Bhaskaran and N.C.Sekhar. They were responsible for translating and publishing secretly some portions of the ‘Communist Manifesto’. But the impact of the League did not last long. The Gandhian methods of Satyagraha and the suspension of the Civil Dis-Obedience movement created considerable frustration among the nationalists who finally found themselves enrolled in the Congress Socialist Party. The leftist within the congress socialist party, found the Gandhian techniques of Satyagraha and protest unsuitable in a fight against British Imperialism. They decided to implement the revolutionary plan of action chalked out by the Central Committee of the Communist party of India in the well-known document, ‘The Proletarian Path’. Their intention was to mobilize the entire people by a buildup of militant movement through general strikes and peasant struggles. In 1937 the Indian Communist leaders like S.V.Ghate had organized the nucleus of a Communist group in Kerala consisting of P.Krishnapillai, E.M.S.Namboodiripad, N.C.Sekhar and

21 S.Gopal (Ed), Jawaharlal Nehru – An Anthology, New Delhi, 1980, p.300.
22 Subodh Bhushan Gupta, Nehru’s Socialism, in the edited work of Verinder Grover, Jawaharlal Nehru, New Delhi, 1992, p.370.
The secret Kerala branch of the communist party started functioning from 1937. Through study classes and pamphleteering, it apparently intended to teach the new-comers the official policies and programmes of the socialist party and thus they were slowly converted into communists. When the Second World War broke out on 1st September 1939 India was declared a co-belligerent without her consent. The situation created by war intensified the ideological struggle between the left and right wings inside the Indian National Congress. The communists at that time adopted deliberately a double faced programme. They were Congress men in public and Communists in secret. They accepted Congress policies publicly and opposed them privately, pretended to endorse the individual Satyagraha programmes of the Congress and secretly organized terrorist activities. However a number of factors entered the politics of the Congress Party which brought about a sharp polarization of its memberships. Thus the party split into a radical wing, which was imbued with Marxist and Socialist ideas and pressed for a far reaching programme of socialization even before the attainment of independence, and a moderate wing which opposed this programme of socialistic reforms for the future.

In December 1939, a crucial and secret meeting of some 90 prominent workers of Kerala Congress Socialist Party met at Pinarayi in Tellicheery to consider

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26 K.K.N.Kurup, *Modern Kerala, A Studies in Social and Agrarian Relations*, Delhi, 1988, p.120.
the formation of communist party. They decided on a transformation and to linkup with the popular agrarian and working class struggle against the economic crisis and sufferings brought out by the world war. The formation of the party was declared on 26th January 1940 through the writings on the walls by using tar. The supreme concern of Communism was the final perfection of humanity in a classless society. Communism always concentrated on the masses and not on individual people. The Communist hope was of a classless society which would be eventually achieved by eliminating the evils of private property and by eradicating the oppressive bourgeois. The prominent leaders like P.Krishnapillai went underground to organize the party as it was under ban. The first job of the party was to mobilize the people and bring peasant organizations and trade unions together for a united action against the government. A Central Agitation Committee with K.P.R.Gopalan as secretary was organized for that purpose. While the communist party in Kerala is part of a national organization, from the beginning it enjoyed a great deal of autonomy to accommodate local conditions.

In the beginning the Communists were in a peculiar position, they were the leaders of the provincial, district and lower units of Congress organization. In these circumstances the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee which mostly consisted of the leftists decided to observe an Anti-Repression Day on 15th September 1940. In reality the programme was planned by the Communists on 12th September. Thus the District

Magistrate of Malabar banned meetings and processions in the district of Malabar through the Defence of India rules on 15th September 1940.  

In spite of the above orders, the kisans and mazdoors participated in large numbers in the processions organized on that day. At the same time, the Communist party organized a series of agrarian rebellions in Malabar in which several party members were killed. There were violent agitations in places like Tellichery, Mattanur and Morazha. In Tellichery, during the course of the meetings at Jawahar Ghat there was police firing which claimed two victims Aboo aged 28, a primary school teacher of Mambaram and Chathukutty aged 22, a beedi mazdoor of Dharmapatam, were the first martyrs in Kerala for the cause of Communism. It was out of this militant action that the well-known Morazha and Mattanur cases arose leading to the sentence of death of K.P.R.Gopalan, an officer of the volunteer corps. That day was therefore the first occasion on which militant resistance to the police was consciously organized by a political party as against the hitherto spontaneous resistance of the people. Following these riots the government took all kinds of oppressive measures against workers and peasants, at the same time All Malabar Karshaka Sangham and its units were banned.

The ideological change following the inception of the Communist party made the Karshaka sangham a militant organization. They were against the oppressive measures of the government and its wartime activities, and thus the Communists in Kayyur started a revolt in March 1941. It was thus the transformation of an illiterate and oppressed peasantry in a remote village like Kayyur evolved into a group of

32 G.O.Home (MS) No.4654, dated 24th October 1941, TNSA, Chennai.
politically organized people and they were brought into the mainstream of freedom struggle.\textsuperscript{35} The communists continued their work mainly among the peasants and workers and followed the ideology of Marxism-Leninism.

In the pre-independence days the Communists merely represented the radical wing within the Congress, and disagreed with the national leadership over the political, economic and social reforms to be introduced in Kerala. When the ban on the Communists was lifted on 26\textsuperscript{th} July 1942, the Communist party began to function in Kerala as a lawful party. The August Resolution and subsequent agrarian and political struggles initiated by the Communists finally led them to extremism after independence. After independence famine situation continued, essential commodities were highly priced, weavers had no proper work and the ration system was controlled by the wholesale merchants. The immediate result of this situation was continuous starvation and rural poverty. The peasant activists and Communists alerted the people against such situation through meetings, protests, jathas etc.. It was against the background the Second Congress of the Communist party met at Calcutta from 28\textsuperscript{th} February to 6\textsuperscript{th} March 1948. The party chose B.T. Ranadive in place of P.C. Joshi as its secretary.\textsuperscript{36} The Calcutta thesis estimated the necessity of complete abolition of all forms of landlordism without any compensation and a redistribution of land to the tillers.

When the Communist party came to power in Kerala in 1957, it framed lot of measures for the development of different sectors especially to the agricultural field. In the Modern period Travancore was the first Indian State to have a Legislative

\textsuperscript{35} K.K.N.Kurup, Modern Kerala, A Studies in Social and Agrarian Relations, Delhi, 1988, p.128.

\textsuperscript{36} Bipan Chandra, India after Independence, New Delhi, 2002, p.204.
Council. It was formed in 1888 for the purpose of making laws and regulations during the period of Sree Moolam Thirunal Maharaja. The council consisted of six officials and two non-official members. This council was reformed, enlarged and invested with more powers and functions during the next 50 years. In Cochin State the Legislative Council came into being in 1925 and progressively reformed since then. In August 1947 following the transfer of power steps were taken in Travancore to constitute a popular Government. Travancore was the first state in India to hold a general election on the basis of universal adult franchise, two years before the Indian Constitution came into being. In the Malabar region people viz. property owners had the experience of electing their representatives to the Malabar Legislative Assembly and the Central Legislature.

The first decade after independence was a period of political instability, the emergence of multi party system, the decline of the Congress and ascendancy of the communist party. The period between 1947-1956 was notorious for ministerial instability in this region. By the provisions of the Linquistic State Reorganization Act, a new State of Kerala was formed on the first day of November 1956. The State Reorganization Act separated the Tamil speaking southern taluks to the Madras State and in the north a Muslim dominated but economically under developed huge land area called Malabar was constituted. Till the turn of the twentieth century the Muslims in the three constituent divisions of Kerala-Travancore, Cochin and Malabar did not take much interest in the political developments in these areas on account of their

backwardness in education and lack of organization. In 1956 Muslim League began to play an effective role and it pressed the need for the recognition of the rightful claims of the Muslim community.

The integration of Kerala in 1956 with inclusion of the Malabar region and exclusion of the 9 Tamil taluks proved fortuitous for the Communists. The process however resulted in a double disadvantage to the Congress. It disturbed the Communal balance in the State by reducing the proportion of the Christian Community, the backbone of the State Congress from 31 to 24 percent, while there was an increase in the ezhava population from 22 to 26 percent which boosted up the pro-Communist vote in the State.

In the elections to the State Assembly held in March 1957, each party decided to face the election single handed i.e., without making alliance with any other party. Therefore there was triangular contest and even a four-cornered contest in several constituencies. It may be noted that there was an electoral understanding between the PSP and the Muslim League and also between the Communist party and a few independent candidates. In 1957 the CPI in Kerala adopted the resolution “which promised to build not merely participatory democracy but also prosperity, political stability, social justice and economic reconstruction”. The CPI leaders and assembly candidates appealed to the people to vote for their candidates in order to form a stable government in the State.

41 Ibid.
At an election meeting CPI Kunnamangalam assembly candidate Chathunni master questioned the Congress party saying that, ‘in the last election Congress party won 100 seats in the assembly but failed to make a stable government in the State, then how can they make a stable government now’. 45 Another candidate P.T.Punnose said, ‘it’s impossible to form PSP government in the State because the party has not contested in all the constituencies’. 46 Ajay Ghosh, Communist Party Secretary said at a press meet that “the Communists could defeat the Congress party in the coming assembly election”. 47 During the campaign for the 1957 elections, “the All Kerala Catholic Christian Convention called on all Catholics to oppose the Communist candidates and to support the Congress.” 48

The New Age in its editorial published in 21st March 1957 “there is no doubt, a feeling of uneasy misgivings that the Communists once in power will upset the settled state of affairs by something drastic, something frightening. The Communist Party unhesitantly declares that there is absolutely no basis for such a scare. Our party has made it quite clear that the Communists in running the government shall work within the frame work of the Constitution. It was a welcome sign that the Press in the country have overwhelmingly come out in recommending that the Communists should be called upon to form a Ministry in Kerala.... And indications from the Congress circles also so far point out to a readiness to accept a

45 Deshabhimani dated 5th February, 1957, KSA, Trivandrum.
46 Deshabhimani dated 13th February, 1957, KSA, Trivandrum.
47 Ibid.
48 E.J.Thomas, Coalition Game Politics in Kerala, New Delhi, 1985, p.88
Communist led government in Kerala. These are to be recognized as the encouraging signs of sound health of the Indian democracy....“49

In the general election the Communists secured maximum number of seats to the legislature. The following table shows the results of the 1957 assembly elections in Kerala;

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Seats Contested</th>
<th>Seats Won</th>
<th>Seat Uncontested</th>
<th>Deposit Forfeited</th>
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<td><strong>380</strong></td>
<td><strong>126</strong></td>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
<td><strong>90</strong></td>
<td><strong>5818704</strong></td>
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</table>


After the election the political parties chalked out their strategy regarding the formation of a new government. The PSP chairman Pattom Thanupillai openly said, “The PSP will not support the Communist party government in Kerala”.50 The *Mathruboomi* daily reported that, “the meeting of the Communist and Communist supported MLAs which was proposed to be held on 25th March 1957 was going to

49 The editorial published in the *New Age* on March 21st, 1957, Ajoy Bhavan, New Delhi.

elect E.M.S. Namboodiribad as the leader of the new government because he was the most capable person to handle the present situation in Kerala.”

The Communist Party’s State Secretariat which met at Ernakulam on March 22\textsuperscript{nd} 1957 to discuss the government formation and analyze the situations after the general election in Kerala.\textsuperscript{52} The party selected E.M.S. Namboodiribad as the leader of the Communist Party in Kerala Assembly and Achutha Menon as deputy leader. After that E.M.S. Namboodiribad stated, “The Communist government will not interfere in the freedom of any religious groups even if they oppose Communism and the new government framed socio-economic policies mainly for the progress of the labourers and the farmers”.\textsuperscript{53} E.M.S. Namboodiribad with the support of 59 Communist MLAs and 5 independents approached the Governor to form a new government in Kerala. The Governor B. Ramakrishna Rao met the President regarding the government formation and submitted a detailed report of his role for the past four months in Kerala as a representative of President. The Communist party Politbeauro appealed to the PSP to support the new government but PSP was not ready to support the government. The 11 member Communist ministry was sworn in Kerala on April 5\textsuperscript{th} 1957.\textsuperscript{54}

The first and the most remarkable success of the ministry was the gathering together of eleven outstanding politicians and professionals who were uniformly imaginative and efficient. Every one of them had a reputation of being incorruptible and knowledgably. The Chief Minister though only 48 was among the

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{52} The Mathruboomi, dated 24\textsuperscript{th} March, 1957, Kozhikode.
\textsuperscript{53} The Mathruboomi, dated 27\textsuperscript{th} March, 1957, Kozhikode.
top leaders of the Indian Left. The next in the list was C.Achutha Menon who was of
great intellectual capacity and impeccable character. VR Krishna Iyer who later rose
to be a judge of the Supreme Court was already a legal luminary. Health Minister A.R
Menon was one of the senior most freedom fighters and a popular surgeon. The
education minister Prof. Joseph Mundassery was an eminent Sanskritised literary
critic an activist in the teachers and co-operative movement and an eminent
educationist with many remarkable books to his credit. The Speaker of the assembly
Sankara Narayanan Thampy was also a legendary figure in the freedom struggle and a
professional lawyer.

The communist ministry under E.M.S. Namboodiripad in Kerala of 1957-
1959 decided to act within the limitations of the Indian Constitution. The Article 41 of
the Constitution mentioned that, “The State should take steps within the limits of its
economic capacity and development, make effective provision for securing the right
to work, education and to public assistance in case of unemployment, old age,
sickness, and disablement and in other cases of undeserved want.” 55 Thus
Communist government lacked experience and was found to breed some undue
illusions about the possibilities of real structural reforms. Up to now all leftist State
governments had a different character and so each has to be assessed in its own
right. 56 The victory of the Communist party in the 1957 elections reflected the disgust
of the people of Kerala, especially the toiling masses with the fundamentalism and
corruption prevailed in the Congress party. In the period from 1947-1957 there were

56 Georges Kristofel Lieten, Progressive State governments, An assessment of First
ten ministries made and unmade in Kerala by the politics of discredited Congressmen and ex-Congressmen. It was in this background that the communist party was elected to office through the ballot box, for the first time in the history of India.\textsuperscript{57}

After the swearing ceremony on April 5\textsuperscript{th} 1957 EMS made a speech outlining the government’s policy before the people. He said, “As Chief Minister I and my colleagues have taken the office as ministers. We are conscious about the difficulty of the problems we had already taken; especially it is not good to rule a State known as ‘problem state’. Regarding the ruling of a State we have no former experience. More than this we have to work within the four corners where the existing rules and regulations are beyond our imagination and thinking. But based on two conditions we do hope to proceed and facing all the hazardous difficulties. The first is that we are taking this responsibility not in the name of individuals, but in the name of an institution, which had been serving for centuries the benefit of the people. Another factor which gives us confidence and courage is the blessings and greetings we are receiving from the different parts of the State. This shows that we are being elected not as the representatives of the party but as the representatives of the whole population to build a modern Kerala based on democratic ideals”.\textsuperscript{58} He added that the Communists in Kerala would only try to implement the promises which the Congress and the Central Government had made but which the Congress governments in the States had failed to carry out. He was also appealing to the Congressmen, PSP members, other party members and all others for co-operation, he

said, “we are try to bring changes in our national life in accordance with our national traditions.”

The Congress party was shocked by the victory of the Communist Party in Kerala. Even though Nehru was a supporter of Socialism and democracy, he was concerned more about the defeat of the Congress party in Kerala than in the States of Maharashtra and Gujarat only because of the victory of the Communists. In a speech at Ernakulam he added that it was very difficult to deal with them because of their irresponsibility; they were always on the brink of disturbances and violence and looking abroad for inspiration. But after Communist victory in the elections of the State, he was willing to give it a chance. The Governor of the State Sri. Ramakrishna Rao was a conservative Congressman did not like the Communist victory. In these circumstances the Chief Minister in a letter to Nehru on 15th April 1957, acknowledged that the experiment of a Communist government in Kerala could only succeed if he and his colleagues established with the Central authorities relations which were not only correct Constitutionally but of sincere co-operation. Anyhow Nehru made it clear that he was co-operating with the Communist Ministry if it was genuine about functioning within the terms of the Constitution.

In the election to the Lok Sabha held in 1957, the success of the Communist party was equally impressive when compared with the record of other parties. The following table shows the election result of the Lok Sabha held in 1957,

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59 The new Age dated 13th October, 1957, Ajoy Bhavan, New Delhi, p.60.
60 S.Gopal, Jawaharlal Nehru, a Biography, New Delhi, 1984, p.53.
61 Ibid.
62 Ibid, p.54.
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<td>580330</td>
<td>9.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>58</strong></td>
<td><strong>18</strong></td>
<td><strong>15</strong></td>
<td><strong>6050246</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Kerala Public Relation Department’s publication, 2007.

The communist party stood first among all the parties by securing the largest number of seats and votes. It was the only party which did not forfeit the deposit of any of its candidates. Thus in the 1957 elections to the Lok Sabha and to the State Assembly the communist party registered a phenomenal progress when compared with its own record in the previous elections and with the record of other parties. The the Communist government under E.M.S.Namboodiribad within a short span of 28 months convened 175 Assembly sittings and made number of legislations highly beneficiary to the masses.

Much literature has come out from communists and non-communists sources within and outside India explaining the reasons for the communist victory. The Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee’s publication “The Red Interlude in Kerala” assigned the following reasons for the communist victory. Conflicts inside the camp had led to the fall of successive Congress ministries. The people wanted to see a
strong and stable government installed in power. They had lost the hope in the Congress doing it. It was in this context that the Communist party approached them with the promise of an alternative government. They were the only party, other than the Congress, that contested in a sufficiently large number of seats to form a government. The support given by certain influential newspapers like the Kerala Kaumudi and Deshabandhu helped them immensely. They were able to win over some sections of capitalists even who had met with disappointments during the Congress regime.64 Another reason is that through the State Re-organization which included Malabar, where the Communists have decisive influence in Kerala and exclusion of South Travancore where Congress had practically less influence had strengthened the Communist’s position in the new State.

The leading daily news paper ‘The Mathruboomi’ stressed another crucial aspect of the reasons for Communist victory. It said that “the Communist party deep rooted in the soil of Kerala and tended by the constant care and attention of its activists”. In every remote village there are Communist activists who were closest to the most down-trodden of the people and have identified themselves with this section.65

Victor.M.Fic in his study emphasizes the caste factor. Subjecting the voting pattern of 1957 to detailed analysis, he says that Communists voted on Communal lines and that there was a shift in the voting pattern of the upper caste Nair’s in favor of the Communists which enabled them to emerge victorious.66

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65 The *Mathruboomi*, dated 21st March 1957, Kozhikode.
Jitendra Singh who “has made a study on the spot of the political situation in Kerala” believed like many others that the Communal and caste factors were also responsible for the success of the Communists in the 1957 election. He points out that the main support of the Communists comes from the Ezhavas and Scheduled Castes. The Muslims supported the Muslim League but those nationalist Muslims who did not vote for the Muslim League, favored the Congress more than the Communist party. The Nair’s were equally divided among the congress, the PSP and the Communist party. He came to the conclusion that each one of the three major Communities and the three major castes among the Hindus which had been at loggerheads with one another for a longtime had found a political ally by 1957. The Nair’s remained in a unique position as they were equally divided between the Congress, the Communist party and the PSP. The Nair’s therefore could wield pressure on all the three political parties. With the Christians supporting the Congress, the Ezhavas supporting the Communists and the Nair’s could tilt the balance whichever way they liked. Singh also says, the people lost faith in Congress’s ability to provide a stable government and the disunity that continued to exist among all the non-Communist parties helped the Communists in 1957 election.

A different view is expressed by a catholic journal ‘Prakasam’ that the Christians in general and Catholics in particular became indifferent to the Congress party in the 1957 elections. The *New York Times* observed that the factor which led to the Communist victory in 1957 was the weak, inefficient and corrupt administration of the Congress regime in the State for a decade since independence.  

The Communist leader A.K Gopalan believed that, “the results were a tribute to the self sacrificing and devoted work carried out by party members for many years despite repression, difficulties and hardships”. He said that the victory of the Communists in Kerala has to be viewed in the context of the big strides made by the democratic and socialist forces throughout the country and the total of 13 million votes polled by the Communist party.69

“It was a vote against the Congress rather than for the Communist party” was the assessment made by several Congress leaders including Prime Minister Nehru regarding the 1957 elections in Kerala.70 E.M.S.Namboodiripad held the view that it was “as much a vote against Congress as against the PSP and RSP who helped the Congress to resort to various intrigues during the five years between 1952 and 1957.”71

The opinion of M.N Govindan Nair secretary of the Kerala state committee of the Communist party, that the popular experience of the Communists both as leaders of struggle and as administrators in local bodies was one of the reasons for the great victory of the Communists in 1957.

According to Robin Jeffrey the social disintegration which followed the destruction of the matrilineal system played a crucial role in directing Malayalees towards communism.72 Dileep Menon offers a similar explanation for the growth of

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Communist power in Kerala. The major reason why the Communists came to power in Malabar according to him was the reshaping of Communism into a doctrine of caste equality. This was done through the forging of feelings of community. Abandoning class as a marker of identity even when discussing class related agitations, Dileep Menon puts forward the notion of conjectural community instead.

The claim of the 1957 election manifesto of the Communist party that the result of the 1957 elections was only a recognition by the people of the fact that the party had stood firmly with the people in all their struggles for democratic rights during the past three decades of ruthless oppression of the British and then of the Congress regime. The Communist in Kerala has earned the people’s vote and confidence through hard work and a constant demonstrated concern for the poor. But hard work alone is not enough, though it is the base of a party’s strength and influence. A highly competent leadership, organizing ability and a well organized party machine with its ramifications reaching out to the smallest village is the factors that have put the Communist party at a distinct advantage over all others in Kerala.

The party workers spread all over the State got people’s loyalty for the party and won the hearts by rendering human service to the lowly peasants and workers and their family, by getting them medical aid and tending to their sick and ailing. They helped them to get loans, fight their causes with the authorities and protect them against petty official suppression. The Communist party workers are always there in the village, in contrast to the Congress remembers who met the

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common people only at election time; otherwise the party did not very much exist beyond the major towns.

The vision of the Communist government was clearly known by the words of E.M.S.Namboodiripad on the eve of the one year celebration of the government that, “the more significant than them all was the fact that the First year of the Communist government in office has begun breaking the barriers between the Communists and the large mass of the people belonging to other parties who have the same national objective as the Communist party – the objective of building a Socialist India.”\(^75\) Through his writings and practice, Namboodiripad guided the Communist movement towards assimilating the most progressive features of diverse local socio-political movements and giving them new philosophical and political direction. These different movements in Kerala included the freedom movement, the radical and anti-caste sections of the social reform movement, the movement against landlordism, the movement against autocracy and monarchy, the movement for the linguistic re-organization of the region and for the establishment of a unified Kerala, and, of course, the modern movement of workers, peasants and radical intellectuals.\(^76\) Communists were among the early organizers of mass political organizations of women in the State. They played a leading part in the literary movement and in the cultural movement (including the theatre movement) in Kerala. School teachers were key activists and mass organizers of the national movement and the Communist Party; they were the first organizers of the \textit{granthashala} (library) movement and the movement for literacy in Malabar.

\(^75\) \textit{The New Age dated 6\textsuperscript{th} April 1958, Ajoy Bhavan, New Delhi, p.1}

\(^76\) \textit{The Frontline, Vol.15, dated April 1998, CDS, Trivandrum.}
The high percentage of literacy rate, acute political conscious which created by the leaders like P.Krishnapillai, A.K.Gopalan and E.M.S.Namboodiripad, the chronic unemployment among the educated, the intense population pressure on land and a lack of industrial enterprises to relieve that pressure, all constituted a fertile soil for Communism. Further there was ideological commitment for a social and economic egalitarianism which leads to the growth of Communism in Kerala.