Chapter VII

TAKE OVER OF THE KERALA GRANDHASALA SANGHOM

After the fall of the Ministry of E.M.S. Namboodiripad, the C.P.I. took the leadership for the formation of a non C.P.I.(M) coalition ministry. The Party's choice of Chief-ministership fell on C. Achuthamenon, who was a member of the Rajya Sabha when the coalition ministry of Namboodiripad fell. In November 1969 C. Achuthamenon was sworn in as the Chief Minister with the support of the Congress Party.¹ A few months later the Congress Party itself underwent a split and the Party under the leadership of Indira Gandhi became acceptable to the C.P.I.²

The smooth and popular working of the Achutha Menon's Cabinet was disturbed by the threat of defection in the ranks of the P.S.P. (Praja Socialist Party) which was one of the coalition partners. Soon the Cabinet met and decided to recommend the dissolution of the legislature and a mid-term poll. Before the midterm poll, the Congress Party under Indira Gandhi joined Achutha

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Menon's band wagon and together they won an absolute majority in the election to the Kerala Legislative Assembly in 1970. The C.P.I.(M) sat in the opposition and watched the performance with considerable animosity. 3

Achutha Menon embarked upon an ambitious legislative programme during this period. Private forests were nationalised, and land reform act was amended. For the first time, the working conditions and other benefits of the farm labourers were protected by legislation. 4

And then the national emergency was declared on 25 June 1975. 5 But, for Achutha Menon, who was completing his five years tenure it was an indirect order to continue in power without a fresh election. The C.P.I. did not oppose the emergency. 6

It was in amidst this political tempest that the Government decided to lay hand on the K.G.S. During that time the strength of the public libraries in the state was full-fledged.

By 1976-77 there were more than 4,000 libraries including one State Central Library (Trivandrum Public Library), District Libraries

3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
6. "Two faces of Achuthamenon". No. 2,
(including the libraries run by the Local Authorities in the Malabar area), 100 Branch and Rural Libraries of the Local Library Authority's in Malabar, 4183 affiliated libraries of K.G.S., scattered throughout the state, in its villages, Panchayats, Taluks and Districts and about 1000 libraries of smaller size which were in the process of development so as to be able to get government grant. Even though the number of libraries was quite impressive the number and the quality of books possessed by them were not satisfactory. It may be pointed out that only 116 libraries in Kerala had more than 8000 books. Libraries that had a stock in between 5000 and 8000 books were only 313.

In 1977 there were over one crore books, worth around Rs.175 lakhs in these public libraries (the average cost of each book is Rs.1.75, which reveals the low quality of the books) with a paid membership of more than seven lakhs but a large number utilised the library facilities free of charge. Of the 7 lakh members, a good number was quite ineffective. Many small libraries had inflated number in membership just to get higher grade.

8. Ibid.
Among these libraries about 2500 were run in their own buildings; 2800 had children's and women's sections, as well as cultural and sports wings; and 1715 had their own radio sets for the benefit of their clientele. ¹⁰

There were about 1000 libraries affiliated to the Kerala Grandhasala Sanghom from the Malabar area. Of this, 800 got government grant, 9 libraries had a stock of more than 8000 books; 25 had in between 8000 and 5000 books. These 1000 libraries altogether had a stock about of 10 lakhs books¹¹ (See Appendix G).

It was obvious that the K.G.S. was not in a position to look after the interests of the District Libraries, and other big libraries for it had to look after the larger interest of numerous village libraries managed by the voluntary workers. A Central Libraries Association of Kerala was formed in 1975 by the District Libraries. The Association made representations to the Government for improving the conditions of District Libraries. It demanded, among other things, the enhancement of annual library grant, building grant and their proper channelisation and the timely payment. It also requested the early enactment of a proper and effective library legislation and


the establishment of a scientific, and well-organised library for a more fruitful library service in the State.\textsuperscript{12}

The Kerala Government had established a few distributing libraries attached to the District Libraries even without having a library legislation. Nine mobile units were working for the distribution of books to taluk, panchayat and village level libraries in the year 1975-76, but their working came to a standstill soon. It was regrettable to note that the Government had not taken any step to recognise and revitalise the services of the Distributing Libraries.\textsuperscript{13} This was the picture of the libraries in the state during that time.

The K.G.S., by now, had grown into a very big cultural, social and educational organisation in the State. There were thousands of dedicated social workers as volunteers behind the Sanghom and its affiliated libraries. This coordination enhanced the success of the Sanghom. From the Government of Travancore the Sanghom received a grant of Rs.200/- in 1947 and by and by it had grown to the stature of receiving an amount of Rs.2,31,834 as grant during 1977-78. The Sanghom received an annual recurring grant from the Government towards its establishmental and organisational expenses which include expenses for the organisation of new libraries, the inspection of affiliated libraries, for conducting discussions, meetings and seminars, and for the publication of articles, pamphlets, list of


\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.
Even though the Sanghom was not a statutory body, the State Government was actually meeting the recurring expenditure of the Sanghom. This was quite a unique feature because in no other state in India a library association had enjoyed such government support and assistance as was being received by the Sanghom.

The Sanghom was purely a democratic body, and it consisted of affiliated unit libraries (at the base), taluk unions, district committees, government councils, and an executive committee (at the top), all formed by a chain of elections right from the general bodies of the unit libraries.

Thayat Sankaran, a C.P.I.(M) intellectual has been the President of the Sanghom since 1973. He was the editor of Grandhalokam also. The relationship between the President and the General Secretary P.N. Panicker was cordial and co-operative. The President issued a notice to the public on 15 July 1975 inorder to raise money, which was to be handed over to the Secretary as mark of his service to the library movement in the state. The notice praised the service rendered by P.N. Panicker in the field of library movement and cultural life of Kerala. The President went to the

15. Ibid.
extent of saying that he hadn't seen such a social worker as Panicker in the cultural life of Kerala.  

But before long the relationship between the two got strained due to the political differences. The President was a staunch Marxist, and some of the office bearers stood with him. He began to question the activities of the Secretary, which was rather uncommon. The Secretary who was endowed with long experience, was quite displeased with the situation. During that time Thayat Sankaran wrote an article in a leading Malayalam weekly, Kalakaumudi in which he severely criticised P.N. Panicker.

Meanwhile, in May 1976 the notifications for election to libraries, Taluk Unions, District Committees and office bearers of the Sanghom were issued. The election schedule was as given below:

1. Each library affiliated to the Sanghom may elect two representatives to each Taluk Union, between September 1 and 25, 1976.

17. Pirappancode Murali, "Keralathile Grandhasala Prasthanam". Grandhalokam, (Trivandrum), (Mal.), Special issue, September, 1990, p.64.
2. A District Committee member may be elected by the Taluk Union on or before 25 October 1976.

3. Three members may be elected as the representatives to Bharana Samiti of the Sanghom on or before November 13 1976 by Each District Committee.

4. Two persons shall be elected by the life members of the K.G.S. and one person may be elected by the employees of the K.G.S. to the Bharana Samithi on or before November 30.

5. The eleven executive members of the K.G.S. for the next three years may be elected by the governing body which consists of two Government nominees, a representative of the Kerala University and the other elected members, mentioned above.

By that time Emergency was declared and most of the opposition leaders of Kerala especially the C.P.I(M) leaders, were arrested and imprisoned. The emergency triggered political tension in the state. The election to the libraries was conducted at this juncture to form the new Bharana Samiti of the Sanghom. After the announcement of elections, differences among library workers gathered momentum in some parts of the State, especially in Cannanore district. In this election, representatives of major political parties of Kerala contested. The unnecessary interference of political parties in this election led to irrational conflicts, and finally the final destruction

of some libraries of the state by antisocial elements. The following libraries were destroyed in the clashes, and the Sanghom President requested the Government to provide financial help for restoring the earlier position of these libraries.

1. Aripuram Public Library (Cannoor)
2. Mudoor Library (Cannoor)
3. E.S.J.M. Library, Kanddakyakam (Cannoor)
4. Kunnathu Library (Cannoor)
5. Joji Library (Cannoor)
6. Peringalassery Library (Cannoor)
7. A.K.G. Library (Cannoor)
8. Kalippankulangara Sanmarga darshini Library, (Trivandrum)

On the 20 May 1976, the K.G.S. appointed a committee consisting of Thayat Sankaran, P.N. Panicker, Thengamam Balakrishnan (M.L.A) and P. Narayana Kurup (M.L.A) to enquire into the unhealthy developments in these libraries. The members of the enquiry committee were threatened, and tried to manhandle by some miscreants while they were discharging their duties. Political interference was responsible for this hurly-burly.

22. Ibid.
23. Ibid.
On 3 August 1976, a Memorandum signed by twelve office bearers of the K.G.S. was submitted to C. Achutha Menon, the then Chief Minister, in which many charges were levelled against the functioning of the K.G.S. They were:

1. For the last thirty years it was working without any political affiliation to any party in the State. But in the last election to the office bearers of the Sanghom, the C.P.I(M) members secured majority and they used these cultural institutions as their party office. They were giving membership only to those who pursued their line of political thinking. They were not ready to handover their office to the newly elected office bearers of the libraries. This led to clashes in different parts of the State, especially in Cannanore district. It was not fit to the functioning of the library movement in the State.

2. The present office bearers and working committee members were not interested to impart the different programmes of the Sanghom like literacy campaign.

3. They were trying to interfere with the functioning of the office of the K.G.S. especially of the General Secretary, who has been working as the Chief Executive of the Sanghom since

its formation. The President asked the employees of the office not to abide by the orders of the Secretary. He sought the help of the office bearers and working committee members for this purpose.

4. The present President of the Sanghom, Thayat Sanakaran had no time to work for the library movement of the State, because he was working in Brannen College, Cannanore.

5. The President and his associates were corrupt and they were alleged of nepotism. To a clerical post, he appointed his relative without conducting a test or interview. Also, he appointed a sub-editor to the Grandhalokam which was unnecessary.

6. The official publication of the K.G.S, the Grandhalokam criticises Government policies. It raised obstacles on the way of the implementation of the policies of the Government. If the twenty point programme had been given publicity through the libraries, it would have boosted the image of the Government.

7. Those who criticised the policies of the Government were arrested and put behind the bars. Those workers of the Sanghom who were talking in favour of the Government and its policies being criticised by these elements.

8. After the publication of the new election schedule, the President and the members of the C.P.I(M) were openly trying to capture the libraries. But when their attempts
failed in some places they resorted to clashes and confrontations.

In this background, the functioning of the K.G.S. was not smooth. The employees of the Sanghom were paid by the Government, and the books were purchased mostly with the grant of the Government. So the Government could not remain either helpless or lukewarm in the squabbles of the Sanghom.  

On the submission of the Memorandum, Thengamam Balakrishnan, the then Vice President of the Sanghom, recollects that they had foreseen a split in the K.G.S. and it was to avoid this possibility that they had submitted such a memorandum.

The General Secretary of the Sanghom writes: "For the first time in the history of the Sanghom, it failed to complete the elections as per schedule due to the clashes among the library members who signed the Memorandum were:

C.N. Balakrishnan, Working Committee Member & Trichur District President; P.C. Abdul Rahiman, Working Committee Member, Ernakulam District Secretary; M.C. Checko, Office bearer, Kottayam Taluk Union President; C.G. Vasudevan Nair, Kottayam District Committee President; N.M. George, Office bearer, Kunnathunnadu Taluk Library Union President; K.K. Ebrahim, Office bearer, Secretary, Muvattupuzha Taluk Union; K. Kuttilkrisnan, Office bearer, Secretary, Chavakkad Taluk Union; Karavaloor Sivasankara Pillai, Office bearer, Punalur; K.C. Checko, Indukki; K.R. Balakrishnan Nair, Office bearer, Adoor; K. Narayanakurup (M.L.A) and Thengamam Balakrishnan (M.L.A) the Vice President of the Sanghom.

Interview with Thengamam Balakrishnan at Saksharata Bhavan, Sasthamangalam, Trivandrum on 8 October 1990.
workers in different libraries and also due to the complaints received about the election process. Though, to some extent, the election at the Taluk level was completed, a number of complaints were received from different corners about the election malpractices, and in prima facie it was found that they were not totally baseless. This was mainly due to the narrow views of political parties with vested interests. Finally it was decided to put off all the elections in the libraries until a peaceful atmosphere was created.  

Veekshanam, a pro-Congress party daily, wrote that the clashes occurred in different libraries for the Taluk Union elections were due to the political interference in the libraries of the State by the C.P.I.(M). The Taluk Union elections were not even completed due to this conflict. If this crisis was not solved, the Government should interfere in the affairs of the Sanghom, and take control of it.

During the time of Emergency (June 25, 1975 to March 27, 1977), the functioning of the opposition parties, especially C.P.I.(M), became very difficult. They used the libraries as their media for their political activities and it was this trend that led to large scale politicization of the K.G.S. and the libraries which caused the present malady.

29. Interview with P.N. Panicker on 19 July 1990 at KANFED, Trivandrum.
A notice was issued to counter the arguments in the memorandum by a fraction of office bearers of the Sanghom, who alleged that the crisis was not due to the political interference, but because of the doubt raised by the President and some of the Members about the financial matters of the Sanghom. It was alleged in the notice that they requested the Secretary to summoning the office bearers of the Sanghom to discuss matters. They alleged that the General Secretary was not keen on summoning the meeting but was trying to prorogue the office bearers of the Sanghom, and to form a Government controlled Board, instead of elected members. The notice appealed to all library workers to press the General Secretary to summon a meeting of the office bearers of the Sanghom and re-instate the democratic nature of the libraries and the Sanghom.  

The General Secretary claimed that the financial allegations against him were baseless and he asked those who lavelled charges against him to check Account Book of the K.G.S. He also added that the then office bearers created additional posts and sanctioned new allowances, which really led to the financial crisis in the Sanghom. To overcome these financial difficulties, two financial programmes of

30. Kerala Grandhasala Sanghathile Prathisandhi Enthukondu? (Mal.), (A notice issued by the signaturies on 27 December 1976 from Trivandrum). (R. Achuthan Nair, Vice President, K.G.S.; I.V. Das, Joint Secretary; K.C. Chacko, Working Committee Member; P. Chellappan Pillai, Office bearer of Sanghom; Pookadi Moidu, Office bearer; C. Achuthan, Office bearer; M.C. Krishnan Unni, Office bearer; V. Muthu, Office bearer; K.R. Cherian, Office bearer and Palakishu Narayanan, Office bearer).

the Sanghom, viz., "Special Grandhasala Fund of 1973-74" and the
"Two lakhs Fund of Grandhasala Sanghom", were arranged by the
Sanghom. The collection of the Funds was started immediately but
the accounts of these were not cleared, even then.

Deshabhimani, a pro-C.P.I.(M), daily also accused financial
irregularities against the General Secretary and requested him to
summon the Bharana Samiti meeting for clarification of the Sanghom
accounts. In the meantime, Thayat Sankaran, who was the honorary
editor of the Grandhalokam, was disallowed to continue in the post by
the General Secretary. He, then, approached the Munick Court in
Trivandrum against the publication of Grandhalokam. But the Court
verdict was against him and it pointed out that the Journal had to
be published in on behalf of the name of the General Secretary.
Hence Thayat Sankaran had no right to challenge the publication.

At that time the accounts of the Sanghom were audited and
the auditors reported that the "Kerala Grandhasala Sanghom receipt
and payment accounts for the period from 4 April 1974 to 17 December
1975, the scheme of assistance for running Adult Literacy centres are
examined and found correct as disclosed by books of accounts and

records produced before us."  

In 1979, all the accounts of the Sanghom were also audited by Accountant General and no discrepancy had been reported in financial matters.  

P.N. Panicker recollects: "all the elections of the Sanghom were almost unanimous. A sense of unity was there in Taluk, District and at the State level. But the interference of unconstitutional external forces created bitterness in seventeen taluk Unions last year (1976). This was, perhaps, my first bitter experience in life in my long association with the organisation. The greatness of K.G.S. was that, it could accommodate all types of people. The attempt of a group of people who wanted to undo it, had created chaos in the last year. The Sanghom was on the brink of a break down. I approached C. Achutha Menon, the then Chief Minister, with a few other workers of the Sanghom and had long discussions with him about the situation."  

At this juncture, the Government interferred with the affairs of the Sanghom. An ordinance was issued to that effect by the Governor N.N. Wanchu on 16 May, 1977 which said "an ordinance to provide for taking over, in the public interest of the management of the undertaking of the Kerala Grandhasala Sanghom, with a view to

ensuring the proper work to Sanghom and for matters connected herewith or incidental thereto."\(^{37}\) The official record of the Government of Kerala stated that certain specific events compelled the Government to take over the administration of the K.G.S.\(^ {38}\) The opposition parties pooh-poohed the ordinance and demanded restoration of democracy in the Sanghom and its affiliated libraries.\(^ {39}\)

As per this ordinance, the entire administration of the K.G.S. was vested with a Board of Control, consisting of the State Education Minister (Chairman), P.N. Panicker (full time Member Secretary), Chithran Namboodiripad, P.T. Bhaskara Panicker, N.V. Krishna Warrier, A.N.P. Ummerkutty, A.D. Krishnan Assan, and Balagopal (Chairman of the Local Library Authority, Calicut). Thereafter, the post of other elected office-bearers of the Sanghom in various levels were considered to be null and void.\(^ {40}\) Chakkeeri Ahammedkutty, the then Education Minister, who was also in charge of the Library affairs remarked that, the K.G.S. and the libraries attached to it had become venues of strong political currents. The order to avoid further complications in that field and also to maintain the earlier


\(^{39}\) An interview with P. Govinda Pillai and I.V. Das at Trivandrum and Calicut on 27 Sept. 1990 and 28 August 1990, respectively. They are the veteran C.P.I(M) ideologist and strong leaders of the library movement of the State and "Grandhasala Sanghatinethire Pokunna Pookil Bharanakkarude Kathiyere". Deshabhimani, (Calicut), (Mal.), 19 March 1977.

\(^{40}\) Ordinance No.5 of 1977, 16 March 1977, (Trivandrum: Government Secretariat).
position of the Sanghom the Government interfered and took over the control of the Sanghom.41

It was obvious that the President and the Secretary were on the path of war. Since these two important office bearers were in confrontation, the government interference, naturally, became unavoidable. But the election process of the Sanghom should not have been stopped short. Once the election process has started it should not be interrupted before the final results come out. Had it happened, there would have been no need for establishing a Board of Control to look after the affairs of the Sanghom and its affiliated libraries. The Government failed to do so, and even after years they could not have democracy restored in the Sanghom. It was a great set back to the activities of the Sanghom.

41. Interview with Chakkeeri Ahammed kutty, the Education Minister (2 March 1973 to 25 March 1977) at his residence at Vengara (Malappuram) on 15.12.1990.