Chapter VI

AS A PARLIAMENTARIAN
Achutha Menon had developed a unique style of his own in dealing with the members of the Assembly. His style of functioning in the Assembly was marked with some special features which were not generally found in the other Chief Ministers who adorned the chair. He appeared to be not listening to the hot exchange of words between the members of the Assembly and questions raised by the members demanding answers from the ministers. But it was quite surprise to many that when his turn came Achutha Menon had ready and well prepared answers proving that he was carefully listening to the questions raised by the members.

An important characteristic feature of Achutha Menon was the great respect and consideration he had given to the opposition parties. But even the most powerful orators of the opposition members could not defeat him in the argument. Perhaps Achutha Menon was the only Chief Minister who could stand on equal status with EMS Namboothiripad who was the opposition leader during this period. He had the courage to cow down the demand of K.M Mani the leader of the Kerala Congress who demanded an enquiry into the false allegation of corruption raised against the Chief Minister.
The parliamentary skill of Achutha Menon came to the limelight when he managed to get the confidence vote in 1969 and after winning the confidence he advised the governor to dissolve the Assembly and conduct the elections. It was a bolt from the blue both for the opposition parties and for ruling alliance. However the fact remains that it was the most appropriate time for such an action from the Chief Minister. This chapter deals with the eventful days when C. Achutha Menon was able to prove himself to be an eminent parliamentarian.

Achutha Menon was well prepared to give proper answers to the questions raised by the members of the Assembly. When U. A. Beeran was the Education Minister, Achutha Menon had to answer questions regarding educational bills as the former was absent in the house due to illness. He himself introduced the educational bills and all the attempts of the opposition members to create problems for the Chief Minister were defeated by him. When the Muslim League minister who handled the Wakaf Board was absent, Achutha Menon answered all the questions regarding the activities of the Wakaf Board without any difficulty.

Achutha Menon was able to prove himself to be one of the most efficient and outstanding performers in the Assembly. During the
entire period of Achutha Menon’s Chief Ministership the opposition leader was EMS Namboothiripad. EMS was known for his shrewdness, strategy, theoretical knowledge and debating skills. His speeches touched on national and international issues, economic and political problems, the inevitable collapse of world capitalism and the final victory of Communism. Nobody could foresee what arrows will emerge, how and when from the arsenal of this master of archery. It was not easy to counter EMS in the Assembly. EMS was not only a political leader but was an intellectual giant, a cunning diplomat and an efficient argumentator who could break down the enemy with ease. He used to bring the attention of the Assembly to the national and regional politics, the economic problems of the state, the retrograde steps taken by the CPI in the Communist Movement, the differences between the parties of the coalition government and the necessity of leftist unity. It was very difficult for any Chief Minister to satisfy him by giving probable answers. The only Chief Minister in the history of Kerala who could face EMS Namboothiripad successfully was C. Achutha Menon.

R. Prasannan the Legislative Secretary during the time of Achutha Menon observes that if anyone have effectively stopped the attack
from EMS Namboothiripad it was only Achutha Menon. According to Prasannan it was not only educative, but even more an intellectual experience to listen to the arguments of these two veterans who had worked together in the same movement for most of their lives. There was no personal animosity in their encounters on the floor of the House and each had the respect for the other so that their debate maintained a very high standard.

There were many occasions in the Assembly when Achutha Menon could prove himself to be an outstanding parliamentarian. The Kerala Congress developed a great animosity against Achutha Menon because they were not permitted to become the part of United Front. They utilized all the opportunities to attack Achutha Menon. A noconfidence motion was moved against the ministry raising allegations of corruption against Achutha Menon in the matter of appointment of an employee in a public sector under taking. The debate continued for two days. At the end of the debate after the reply of the Chief Minister, K.M Mani, the deputy leader of Kerala Congress asked in an arrogant manner.

“If the management says there was pressure on them, will a judicial enquiry be ordered on it?”
The intention of K.M Mani was to corner him at the time of voting for the no-confidence motion. With roused indignation, the Chief Minister jumped up and thundered “No Never”⁶.

The members of the Assembly thought that Achutha Menon lost his temper due to the purposeful attempt made by K.M Mani to corner him in the debate. Even though Achutha Menon was known for his short temper he conducted himself in the Assembly with admirable restrain. It showed that Achutha Menon did not care if his ministry survived or not but he was definitely not prepared for a humiliating bargain. He was not prepared to move an inch away from his principled stand to get the support of anybody for political game.

He was out rightly open to express his ideas and reactions at crucial times. To express his ideas openly he did not mind whether they belonged to ruling party or to opposition party. Once in the first session of the New Year, the governor who came to address the members in accordance with the provision of the constitution was gheraoed by the opposition members. Condemning this action, Achutha Menon in his speech the next day said:
“I cannot but say that the gheraoing of the Governor and showing discourtesy to him, whatever justification one may try to advance however strongly, was wrong”. Suddenly an opposition member stood up and raised a point of order, “whether the Chief Minister could utter a falsehood that there was discourteous behaviour shown to the Governor.” Achutha Menon’s restrain broke and he retorted. “The Governor’s way was blocked, slogans were shouted at him with clenched fists. If this is not showing discourtesy, is only stripping oneself naked be considered discourtesy?”

In fact the word ‘gherao’ was a term introduced by the trade union leaders and which had the meaning of encircling the manager or officer who was at the helm of affairs of the factory and who did not accept their demands. So it was a term generally used and utilized mainly by the trade unions of the Communist party. But when it was used by the members of the Assembly who encircled the Governor preventing him from discharging his duties it could not be justified by the Chief Minister even though he was a Communist leader.

During the Assembly session Achutha Menon was seen occupying the seat of the Leader of the House lost in reflection and resting
his cheek on the palm. It might appear that he was not listening to the proceedings. He rarely got up to ask the questions while others spoke. He would not speak except when so directed by the Chairman of the House. But when the time came for the Chief Minister’s reply he would refer to all important points raised in the debate by all members of the House. Then only the members could realize that he had been carefully listening to all that was said in the House. If he had any doubt regarding some clarification he did not hesitate to intervene. Normally he did not raise his voice.

When the first government under the leadership of C Achutha Menon was formed in 1969 there were only four parties in the coalition, Communist Party of India, RSP, PSP and Muslim League. Even within the PSP there were differences of opinion between its members and one group broke away from the party. As the Chief Minister who was responsible for forming the ministry Achutha Menon had to face great difficulty. Due to his clean image as a politician and gentle behaviour as a colleague he was respected by all the parties. But due to the inner problems within the parties, it gave him many sleepless nights during the time of the formation of the ministry. But it was due his political maturity and tactful handling of
the situation that he was able to solve the problems. Even the people who opposed Communism as an ideology accepted him as their leader. During the short period after becoming the Chief Minister in 1969 he was able to convince all the political parties and the people that Achutha Menon was able to prove himself as an efficient Chief Minister during his period. His ministry had functioned with remarkable courage compared with the ministries of the previous governments. Even though Achutha Menon was able to manage his ministry he was not satisfied in the prevailing uncertain political situations in the state. It was this attitude that compelled him to advise the governor to dissolve the Assembly. The events that followed proved that his decision was right and his advice to dissolve the Assembly was the only possible step that a Chief Minister could take during such a situation.

New elections were held on 17th September 1970. Due to the conflicts of interest within the political parties he took many days to form the Cabinet. In the beginning Congress and RSP were reluctant to join the cabinet. Congress party was not very happy to join hands with Indian Union Muslim League which was declared as a dead horse by none other than Jawaharlal Nehru. When the issue was discussed in the meeting of
Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee some MLA’s were against joining hands with Muslim League. Due to the differences of opinion among the MLAs and leaders of the Congress party they decided not join the ministry but support the government from outside. Finally the ministry was formed with three ministers of CPI, two of RSP, two of Muslim League and one of PSP. Due to the changing scenario after the Loka Sabha election circumstances were favourable for them to join the Cabinet. When the Congress was prepared to join the ministry Kerala Congress decided to follow suit. The Chief Minister had no role in selecting his colleagues from other parties. It was the prerogative of the political parties to give the names of their parties as the ministers. In this process the Chief Minister played the role of a persuader and coordinator.

There were many chances of discord in the government as the ministry was heterogeneous and was not left oriented. The main objective of the new ministry was to exclude the Marxist Party from power. Instead of implementing the common programmes decided by the coalition ministry the political parties were involved in the struggle for power. Many factors were responsible for the differences of opinion that prevailed among the political parties. Out of the sixty nine members only fifty seven
could be called progressive. Even among them the Congress cannot be
called a leftist party and it was at the most be called as a central party. The
Indian Union Muslim League openly stood for its community and it was
progressive in some problems but was extremely conservative on most of
the problems. The Muslim League was raised to the level of a secular and
democratic party even by Mohit Sen, the Communist ideologue\textsuperscript{13}. Formation of such an alliance constituting of Congress, CPI and Muslim
League was a novelty in India. Kerala Congress was an out and out rightist
party which openly stood for the interests of the churches in central
Kerala. Another partner was Revolutionary Socialist Party which was
formed when some leaders found the Communist parties were not
revolutionary up to their expectations. Taking into consideration the
differences prevailing among the parties it was a herculean task on the part
of the leader to lead them through the proper way. The question remained
that how could such a contradictory groups rule together, administrate
effectively and implement their programmes? The people’s expectations of
radical reforms from Communist party of India could not be carried out.
Moreover CPI was a minority in the coalition with ten members. The
Congress MLAs were thirty two in numbers and they were not prepared to
accept the demands raised by a party which had only ten members in the Assembly. Moreover the thin majority of the ruling front was a source of instability for the government because in the house of 133 members the Ruling Front had 69 members and the opposition had 64 members. If three members turned against the government from the ruling coalition they would fall down.

It was under these circumstances, differences of opinion within the parties of the United Front began to create problems for the government. Chances of discord were plenty but the only way of hope was the attitude of the Chief Minister who was able to control and co-ordinate them effectively. During the period of crisis the cabinet under the Chief Minister exhibited unity and collective responsibility. The government was able to complete its term of five years first time in the history of Kerala. There is not a Chief Minister since independence who could claim to have received so much praises from the people like Jayaprakash Narayan. He said “I have no complaint against the government in Kerala. The reports I have received about Achutha Menon are good”\(^\text{14}\).

It was during the time of emergency that Achutha Menon had to face a peculiar situation in which anybody having self respect could not
continue in his position. It was due to his complete allegiance to his party that he continued to carry on with his responsibility. During the period of emergency Achutha Menon played the role of a fair and impartial leader with clear and definite stand on issues. He always preferred the interest of the state. He was able to take his colleagues into confidence. He never adopted a big brother attitude towards small parties. Emergency was an unexpected development over which the political parties including Congress had no control. To run away from the responsibility during such an unexpected period was escaping from the responsibility. He had much imagination and political fineness in handling the complicated issues which emerged during the time of emergency.

**Call for new election**

The fact that the people were able to accept the new government under the leadership of C. Achutha Menon was proved by the success they could achieve in the two by- elections in Kottarakkara and Nilamboor. EMS used to challenge the Achutha Menon government that it was the combination of opportunist parties having no mass support. In Kottarakkara constituency it was C. Achutha Menon who contested the
by-election for UDF. He came out victorious by a margin of 26000 votes establishing his popularity in the state. Nilamboor in Malabar region which was a traditional strong hold of the CPI(M) was also lost, giving a stumbling block to its morale.

The CPI(M) continued its efforts to destabilise the Achutha Menon’s ministry. But all its efforts failed. It resorted to the final step through parliamentary manoeuvres. The party tried to distance the leftist party RSP and PSP from the coalition government promising them certain rewards. It also tried to buy some independents who gave the support to the Achutha Menon ministry. But the cunning politician in Achutha Menon was able to realize the intention of CPI(M) and was successful in playing a suitable card and defeating their efforts. Achutha Menon presented a motion for a vote of confidence and was able to win the confidence by a narrow majority. When he came out successful in the confidence vote, to the great surprise of the opposition party he submitted his resignation to the governor and advised him to call fresh election in the state. The governor accepted the resignation of Achutha Menon ministry and requested him to continue in the office till the new ministry was formed soon after the election. It was indeed a great success for the
diplomatic policy adopted by Achutha Menon by taking appropriate decisions intime.
Notes and References


2. *Ibid*, p.90


4. *Ibid*, p.38

5. *PKLA*, 1971


7. *PKLA*, 1971


