STATE INTERVENTION, POPULAR MOBILIZATION AND REDISTRIBUTIVE REFORM: POLITICS OF LAND REFORMS IN KERALA, 1967-75

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Declaration

This is to certify that this dissertation entitled "State Intervention, Popular Mobilization and Redistributive Reform: Politics of Land Reforms in Kerala, 1967-75" submitted by Mr Jaideep Nair, is in partial fulfilment for the Degree of Master of Philosophy of this University. This dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree in this or any other university and is his original work.

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INTRODUCTION

Historically, land and politics have maintained a close, interdependent relationship. The type of land tenure constituted a significant determinant of the pattern of political power, and a specific power pattern perpetuated a particular type of tenure. In modern times, it is primarily in developing countries that this close relationship between land and politics persists. In these countries, land remains the principal source of national income, and land holders still exercise a commanding political influence. But many of these countries have faced, and continue to face a situation in which there is a constant demand in the realm of politics for reform of the tenure structure. Realizing the importance of the agricultural sector, the developing countries became genuinely conscious of the need for land reforms. Having long been exposed merely to the economics of land reform, in terms of distribution of land and increase in productivity, the developing countries have begin to appreciate the importance of the political aspect of land reforms. Merely giving importance to land reform measures is no guarantee that these measures are either meaningfully formulated or effectively implemented. It is here that politics has an effective role to play. formulation and implementation of land reform measures and

the degree of success achieved is determined by political factors like the nature of the regime and mass political mobilization. That is why the Indian experience in land reforms has been very uneven.

The term, land reform, has been subject to various interpretations. Doreen Warriner prefers the narrow definition of land reform. For her, "land reform means the redistribution of property or rights in land for the benefit of small farmers and agricultural labourers....

This is what land reform has meant in practice, past and present."

The United Nations, on the other hand, often employs the broad definition. It conceives land reform as "an integrated programme of measures designed to eliminate obstacles to economic and social development arising out of defects in the agrarian structure".

According to Ladjensky, the term "agrarian reform" is a loose one. Though it is a combination of a great many things, not all of them are of equal importance.

Important though the other ingredients are, unless those who work the land own it or hold it securely, it could be asserted that all the rest will not have the anticipated results. Hence, proprietorship and security of tenure are at the top of the list. Yet, the importance of land redistribution in developing countries needs no highlighting, as inequality of land ownership is the most common,

conspicuous and serious land-tenure problem.

According to Samuel Huntington, land reform does not mean just an increase in the economic well-being of the peasant. It involves also a fundamental redistribution of power and status, a reordering of the basic social relationships which had previously existed between landlord and peasant. These two co-exist in traditional society. and the destruction or transformation of their existing social, economic and political relationship is the essence of change in the agrarian order. 5 What generally occurs is a weakening of the traditional elite in rural areas due to various objective economic or political factors. Chalmers Johnson views the subsequent loss of will and ability to govern as a "power deflation". Barrington Moore calls it the loss of the "natural basis of respect for the landlord". 7 and Henry Landsberger sees the traditional elite losing ground to new elites through objective economic changes in the importance and structure of agriculture or political changes such as war, and therefore the resulting growth of peasant movements.

while emphasizing that the process of agrarian reform is inherently a political process, one must emphasize that it involves more than just modification at the margins; it consists of profound changes in power patterns via

changes in the distribution of resources and income-earning opportunities. Land is expropriated or confiscated and redistributed in order to achieve this. So, land reform commences primarily as a political question, running head-on into a fundamental conflict of interests between the "haves" and "have-nots".

In spite of the necessity for land reforms being recognized and attempts being made for the same, the variations in the extent of success achieved stand out. So, under what conditions does land reform become feasible? The conventional arguments include that of Hung-Chao Tai 10 who says "the competitive system is less efficacious than the non-competitive in bringing about reform", and Huntington 11 who says that "concentrated power" is necessary for reform. More recent arguments include that of Atul Kohli 12 who emphasized 'regime type' as a crucial category in explaining land reforms from above, and P. Radhakrishman, has highlighted the decisive role played by long peasant struggles.

In spite of emphasis varying on the factors determining successful land reform, there is consensus that, in post-colonial societies like India, state intervention is an important input in radical land reform legislation from above. But to say that it is a sufficient condition would be extending the argument too far. Various other factors

like leadership, ecology, history and intensity of peasant struggles, literacy, nature and ideology of political parties and groups involved, political consciousness and mobilization of the masses also play a significant part in the process of land reform.

Growing inequality between the rural and urban sectors and within the rural sector in developing countries is an indicator of the fact that there are various politico-historical factors obstructing successful reform in the rural sector. Inequality in land ownership in spite of land reform is one of the most common problems in the agrarian sector. The relevance of radical land reform measures and identifying the factors influencing its successful implementation must be seen in this context as the primary task.

The case of India is representative of the necessity and constraints on land reforms in most third-world nations with a colonial history. The national leaders, after a successful anti-colonial struggle and winning state power, were in search of new paths to prosperity for the people. Since the peasantry were a major force in the anti-colonial struggle in most of these countries, their emancipation from feudal structures became an important part of the reconstruction process. Land reforms became an integral part of nation building and economic development.

India adopted a mixed economy and the experience so far is highly instructive in understanding the various types of constraints in the effective implementation of good—intentioned redistributive policies. 14 The third world countries especially in South Asia, have faced certain common problems in the implementation of land reform measures, and the reason for this to some extent is their colonial past. It would not be over-generalizing if one were to say that the nature of land reform measures and their implementation in India would be useful in explaining the problems faced by other developing nations, especially in South Asia.

Although none of the states in India have succeeded in implementing entirely the land reform initially envisaged, even the limited implementation has had an effect on the traditional land system and the social order. The limited implementation has both reduced in importance and transformed in quality the top of the traditional agrarian hierarchy. 15

Just as land reform has had varied success in the developing nations, within India too there have been a few states with relatively a good record in land reform. Kerala stands out in this respect as a state where radical land reform legislations first introduced by the Communist

ministry in 1957, and later consolidated under the CPI(M) and CPI-led governments from 1967 onwards.

This study seeks to examine land reform legislation and implementation in Kerala with special reference to the 1969 Kerala Land Reforms (Amendment) Act. The choice of this Act, whose features will be discussed in detail in subsequent chapters, is due to its radical nature and the relative success achieved in its implementation by the Communist government in Kerala. The implementation had farreaching effect on the agrarian structure of Kerala and brought forth various related issues which this study dissertation proposes to study. Some of these issues are the limitations of land to the killer model in developing countries: land reform in transitional societies: state intervention and land reform from above; Communist parties and their mobilization strategies for radical reform in a parliamentary, federal system: and the possibility of implementing land reform in a largely non-revolutionary situation.

The Kerala experience in land reform will be of significance only if seen in the overall Indian experience of land reforms. This study will attempt to highlight certain factors specific to the Kerala experience. No doubt a lot of work has been done on land reforms in Kerala, but one does notice a certain shortcoming. A partial analysis is attempted by these works, resulting in either a

historical analysis of land reforms in Kerala, or the emphasis being laid upon a dominant factor like regime-type, mobilization or long peasant struggles being responsible for land reform. As a result, a holistic analysis of land reforms in Kerala is missing. The attempt in this study to bring out clearly the various objective and subjective factors, which only when seen together can explain successful land reform implementation in Kerala. And it is here that the significance of this study lies. The concluding chapter will try to bring out the general factors and those factors distinctly rooted in Kerala's society, history and politics, which determined the success of land reforms in Kerala.

An added significance of this study lies in the fact that the analysis of the Kerala experience in land reforms is also an attempt to challenge conventional propositions that land reforms and parliaments are "incompatible", and that power must be "concentrated" to effect change. An analysis of land reforms in Kerala in all its aspects is important as it took place in a non-revolutionary situation, which has added significance in the all-India context. The federal power structure existing in India has imposed certain constraints or "constitutional niceties" in the path of radical reform. Nevertheless, the Kerala Assembly showed a capacity for land reform unmatched

by the concentrated power of other regimes in the subcontinent. As Nossiter rightly pointed out, "in a national context Kerala's land reform, begun by the 1957-59 ministry, and implemented by the Mini and Maxi fronts has attracted attention as the most radical, comprehensive and far-reaching in South Asia".

Certain features unique to Kerala make its choice for this study quite relevant. It is 'one of the few areas of India, where, for a long time the relationship between landlords and those who functioned under them resembled (except for differences introduced by the caste system) that prevalent under feudalism in Europe'. 17 Prior to its reorganisation as a linguistic state in 1956, it had the highest percentage of area under tenancy in India, and was perhaps the only state characterized by such a bewildering variety of land tenures which were 'almost unique in respect of their complexity and multiplicity of incidence'. 18 It has a long history of land reforms dating to 1863 in Cochin and 1887 in Malabar, and a longer history of peasant struggles.

The methodology adopted is historical and analytical. The historical perspective helps us to understand the land tenure structure and previously attempted land reform measures since 1956, until the 1969 Act. Quantitative analysis as such is not assigned too much importance, but data used when deemed relevant and to show the extent of implementation. The study is based on both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources used include official census, government reports, committee reports and party documents. The secondary sources used are books, articles and pamphlets.

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Notes

- 1 Hung-Chao Tai, Land Reforms and Politics (Berkeley, 1974), p. 1.
- 2 Doreen Warriner, Land Reform in Principle and Practice (Oxford, 1969), p. xiv.
- Junited Nations, <u>Progress in Land Reforms</u> (New York, 1962), p. vi.
- Wolf Ladjensky, Agrarian Reforms as Unfinished Business, ed. by L.J. Walinsky (London, 1977), pp. 869-71.
- 5 Samuel P. Huntington, Political Order in Changing Societies (New Haven, 1968), p. 299.
- 6 Chalmers Johnson, <u>Peasant Nationalism and Communist</u>
 <u>Power</u> (Stanford, 1962).
- 7 Barrington Moore, <u>The Social Origins of Dictatorship</u> and <u>Democracy</u> (Boston, 1967).
- 8 Henry Landsberger, The Role of Peasant Movements and Revolts in Development (Ithaca, 1969), p. 23.
- 9 See Peter Dorner, Land Reform and Economic Development (Middlesex, 1972), p. 77.
- 10 Tai, Op. Cit., p. 469.
- 11 Huntington, Op. Cit., pp. 381-96.
- 12 Atul Kohli, State and Poverty in India (Cambridge, 1987).

- 13 P. Radhakrishnan, <u>Peasant Struggles</u>. Land Reforms and <u>Social Change</u>: <u>Malabar</u>. 1836-1982 (New Delhi, 1989).
- 14 See P.C. Joshi, Land Reforms in India: Trends and Perspectives (New Delhi, 1976), p. 36.
- 15 Andre Beteille, Studies in Agrarian Social Structure (New Delhi, 1974), p. 78.
- 16 T.J. Nossiter, <u>Communism in Kerala: A Study in</u>
 Political Adaptation (Delhi, 1982), p. 292.
- 17 Cited in T.C. Varghese, Agrarian Change and Economic Consequences: Land Tenure in Kerala, 1850-1960 (Bombay, 1970), p. vii.
- 18 M.A. Oommen, A Study of Land Reforms in Kerala (New Delhi, 1975).

CHAPTER I

KERALA: SOCIETY AND ECONOMY

In ancient times. Kerala was a large state which stretched from coast to coast. The area which the Indian Union inherited from the British in 1947, and which later formed united Kerala, was reduced to 14,937 square miles. Today Kerala is the second smallest state in India, 360 miles long and nowhere more than 70 miles in width. Formed in 1956. it is a small state by Indian standards and might have remained as neglected as its constituent elements (Travancore, Cochin and Malabar) but for the fact that in March 1957 Kerala became the first - and until 1977 the only - Indian state to elect a Communist government. Apart from the tiny Italian principality of San Marino it was the first case of a democratically elected Communist government in the world. But what Kerala lacked in area was amply compenstated for by the size of its population. It is the most densely populated and in money income terms one of the poorest states. It is also the most literate and has consistently had a voter participation rate of 70% to 80%. The uniqueness of Kerala's position is further established by the fact that it has the highest per capita expenditure on education, the

highest rate of unemployed, and the lowest rate of gainfully employed.

In its present setting, Kerala has the most unfavourable man-land ratio. Added to this is the greatest extremes of farm sizes, highest proportion of tenant farmers, largest share of dwarf holdings, and the greatest concentration of farm labour. Though Kerala has to its credit the highest foreign exchange earnings in the Indian Union, it has the highest deficit in foodgrains. So, not just diversity, but adversity of conditions makes life in Kerala not so easy. 2

At times Kerala has been called a microcosm of India or even of the Asian world. It can even be considered as a pace-setter for the Indian Union. The uniqueness of Kerala's experience in the Indian context is highlighted by the fact that, what Kerala was in the period from 1957 to 1970, would set the trend for India after that, 3

Society in Kerale

There are 4 major communities in Kerala. The Christians constitute 24% of the population; the lower-caste Ezhavas and Harijans 34%; the upper-caste Brahmins and Nairs, 19%; and the Muslims, 20%. The 3 religious communities are roughly divided in the ratio 60:20:20. So, Kerala is the only other major state part from Punjab and J & K where 2/5ths of the population are non-Hindu.

As a partial result of the separate histories of the 3 regions of Kerala, there are substantial Christian and Muslim minorities with considerable political influence.

The Muslims are concentrated in Malabar, particularly in Cannanore and Calicut, and are basically shopkeepers or businessmen. The Christians have settled down mainly in three to four districts of Cochin and Travancore, and are strongly represented in most forms of business, banking, government service and plantation agriculture.

Among the Hindus in Kerala, the caste system had achieved its highest elaboration, ⁵ while departing from the typical structure of Hindu ritual ranking. At the top of the system were the Namboodiri Brahmins numbering no more than a few thousands and often conceded ritual superiority by Brahmins elsewhere in India. Perhaps no caste in India has proved so resistant to change, preserving its ritual status in total disregard of its material privileges.

Below the Brahmins in ritual status are a small number of Kshatriyas and Ambalavasis; but the major high-caste group, and until the inter-war years Kerala's 'dominant caste', are the Nairs, constituting 15% of the population.

Together with the Namboodiris, they have formed the land-owning class. Historically, a military caste, the Nairs increasingly turned to administrative service. The most

distinctive feature of the Nair social organization was their family structure, which was hypergamous, matrilineal and matrilocal.

The major low caste in Kerala are the Ezhavas.

Though performing the task of Sudras, they were defined as untouchables by the Namboodiris and denied temple entry.

Their traditional occupation is the tending and tapping of the coconut palm. Most Ezhavas in fact were, and still are, agricultural labourers.

In spite of the rigidity of the caste system in Kerala, caste reform was an early phenomenon among both low and high castes. Probably, British missionary work, general education and the teaching of a language which linked Kerala with Britain's trading community had a definite impact on the social structure. It facilitated the growth of caste associations which aimed at enhancing the status of their members. But these caste associations later gave way to organizations, such as political parties and peasants' and workers' movements, which cut across caste barriers. In fact, caste associations have played an important political role in Kerala. As E.M.S. Namboodiripad rightly says, "Caste associations were the first form in which the peasant masses rose in struggle against feudalism". 7

The presence of the major religious communities and castes in Kerala's social structure was bound to have an impact in the political sphere. The Communist Party in Kerala was able - greater than other parties in the state to cut across caste and community to a large extent, and make its electoral appeal on the basis of class and ideology. There is no denying the fact that caste and communal divisions played a significant role in Kerala politics. In fact, the overwhelming support of the Ezhava community for the Communist Party led some analysts to identify this caste as the "social base" of Communism in Kerala. But what is important is that these caste and communal factors in Kerala politics began eroding in the 1940s and 1950s. Even if one were to look at the actual formation of Kerala state. it was the idea of Aikya Kerala (united Kerala) as conceived by the Communists, rather than the idea of Akhanda Kerala (undivided Kerala) as conceived by the Congress Party, which won the day.8

To drive home the influence of community on Communist politics in Kerala, some writers point out that the well-educated prosperous members of the Ezhava caste supported the Congress Party, as did the hierarchy of the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (SNDP), but the labouring and tenant-farmer majority of the Ezhava community formed themselves into the largest reservoir of Communist

support. According to them, political parties in the 1950s tended to be dependent on the major ascriptive communities. Religious or caste communities and coalitions were crucial in shaping party strategy and political behaviour in Kerala. The Ezhavas are seen as a politically conscious group, aware of the issues, and not easily swayed by slogans of political parties. For this reason they have been willing to support the Kerala Communist Party in spite of the Congress orientation of their caste association leaders. Between the Ezhavas and the Communists there have been no fundamental meeting of minds, but rather a fortunate confluence of programme and The Communists, for their part, do not really think action. of the Ezhavas as the 'proper' class for their support. At the same time, the Kerala Communist Party is the only autonomous political party, as the others are basically seen as brokers for communal interests, and are little more than the sum of their parts. The Communists do appeal to different castes, but their appeal is germane to their programme, and their programme is within the framework of an overriding plan. The members have a commitment to the theory and the party which is deeply ingrained. 9

But Communism in Kerala is not just a communal affair with the Ezhavas and Harijans. The Communist Party is stronger among the Nairs than any other Kerala party

except the Praja Socialist Party. So, it seems reasonable to assume, therefore, that the Kerala Communists have succeeded in obtaining the support of large number of the poor in Kerala, irrespective of community. Thus, it would be difficult to agree with Zagoria when he says that Communism in Kerala is as much a class as a communal phenomenon. O Such a statement would distort the degree to which traditional factors influence Communist politics in Kerala.

As the Ezhava caste was disproportionately depressed economically, the process of change, particularly in the last fifty years or so, resulted in increasing social and economic differentiation within the Ezhava community, and as the caste divided into heterogenous class segments, the political behaviour of the community was affected accordingly. The landless labourers, tenants, and poor peasants from among the Ezhavas who support the Communist Party do not so much because of their caste identity, but because of their economic interests. Ezhava support thus essentially represents a class orientation.

So, when speaking of the role of caste, community and class in Kerala politics, it would be important not to ignore either, but at the same time recognize the degree of influence each of them exercises. The Communist Party has been responsible to a large extent for the erosion taking place in caste and communal politics, and has successfully

mobilized the masses, especially the downtrodden, on class basis. True, even the Communist Party could not afford to ignore communal interests, but this is due to Kerala's political and social structure. But to say that "an adaptive interaction between the ideologies of Communism and Communalism necessitated the Communist Party to sacrifice its own secular virginity for political survival and resulted in the Party being traditionalized in the antecedent communal culture of the transitional society". 12 would be stretching the argument towards factual fallacy.

Economy of Kerala

Kerala is predominantly an agricultural economy which is still industrially backward. The percentage of population engaged in economic activity, that is activity producing marketable goods, was less than 30% by 1981. Unemployment has grown steadily in Kerala. The Kerala Government's Economic Review of 1959 noted that if 'unemployment is a serious and growing problem everywhere in India...it has reached menacing proportions' in Kerala. The most recent survey (1981) shows that as many as 18% of the labour force had no employment whatsoever in the preceding year; and national estimates suggest that Kerala's unemployment and underemployment may be as high as 10% of the Indian total. In round figures 2 million Keralites were seeking work in



1982. Of these, 50% are educated - 80,000 graduates and 7,000 post-graduates included. 13

In an agrarian society, the principal resource to support the population is land. By 1974 the per capita availability of land in Kerala was down to a quarter of an, acre (average for India is 3/4 acre) when 2 acres of standard fertility was taken as the minimum requirement for family subsistence. The situation was made graver due to the presence in 1971 of about 63% agricultural labourers (with no land or minimal land), as compared to an all-India average of 38%. There has also been a tendency for the number of work days to fall, in part because there are more potential workers chasing the available employment, but also because the Various unions representing the labourers have been successful in raising wage rates. 14 The general problem of land scarcity is compounded by the extreme fragmentation of holdings, their uneven distribution between classes in rural Kerala and tenurial arrangements.

Kerala is overwhelmingly rural with only 16% of its 24 million population (1981 census) living in 'urban' settlements. The urban growth rate is actually below the rural average for Kerala. Socio-economic and cultural factors have been influential in minimizing the drawing power of the towns, but the main factor in favour of increased

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settlements in the countryside is that the development process has not been as lop-sided in Kerala as it is normally the case in South and South-East Asia.

Industry absorbs only a fifth of the labour force available. The private sector as a whole, in 1982, provided only 520,000 jobs and the proportion of jobs fell in the private sector between 1970 and 1982. Conversely, the public sector's share has risen from 42% to 50% of the total. Also, the ending of the Gulf boom is bound to add to the unemployment problem.

When compared to the other major cities of India, Kerala has on an average a higher quality of life, though not standard of living. A variety of kinship, sub-caste and village networks of welfare are supplemented by large-scale state intervention to provide basic needs of everyday life. Kerala's per capita income may be as much as 30% below the all-India figure, but on a recent physical quality of life index it was 69% above the norm. But we should not overlook the disparities that still exist. A 1980 survey of housing shows that nearly one quarter of all 'houses' in Kerala were huts and another 5% 'old and dilapidated units'. Of the pukka houses half have a floor area of less than 500 square feet and 80% less than 1000 square feet. 15 On the whole, the not so uneven development in Kerala is due

largely to the efforts of the Communists there.

The social and economic structure of Kerala has constantly influenced and been influenced by the political structure there. The role of caste and class, as social and economic categories, have played a decisive role in determining the style of politics in Kerala. To study the political structure of Kerala at this juncture would help us to understand the context in which the important 1969 land reforms Act was legislated and the dynamics of its implementation which was determined by the interaction of the social, economic and political structures in Kerala.

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Notes

1 The Census of India, 1981, gives the following data:

Population of Kerala - 25.5 million

Density of Population - 655 persons per sq. km.

Literacy - 69.17%

Birth Rate - 24 per 1000 (For India 33 per 1000)

Life expectancy - 67 years for women and 64 years for men.

- 2 See W. Klatt, "Caste, Class and Communism in Kerala", Asian Affairs, vol. 59, October 1972, p. 274, for a description of the diversities in Kerala.
- Victor Fic too agrees on this point. See his, <u>Kerala.</u>

 <u>Yenan of India: Rise of Communist Power. 1957-69</u>

 (Bombay, 1970), p. 1.
- 4 In 1911, 'Kerala' was 67% Hindu; by 1971 it was 59% Hindu. In the 1960s the Muslim population grew by 37%, the Christians by 25%, but the Hindus by only 23%.
 - Data from T.J. Nossiter, Marxist State Governments in India (London, 1988), p. 60.
- 5 See Klatt, Op. Cit., p. 275. Klatt feels that the reason for the absence of a merchant (vaishya) caste in Kerala could be the landing of the Syrian Christians and Arabs on that Coast resulting in the strangling of the caste in its infancy.
- 6 Refer to T.J. Nossiter, <u>Communism in Kerala</u> (Delhi, 1982), p. 27.
- 7 E.M.S. Namboodiripad, The National Question in Kerala (Bombay, 1952), p. 102. Also see by same author, "Castes,

Classes and Political Parties", Social Scientist, vol. 6, no. 2, November 1977, p. 19. He says, "A still more significant difference between Kerala and the rest of India is the fact that the first form of political agitation, and the corresponding organisation for carrying on such agitations were based on particular castes, sub-castes and religious communities. None of them can be considered an integral part of a modern democratic political movement. This, however, was the initial form in which the simmering discontent of the common people found expression."

- See T.V. Sathyamurthy, <u>India since Independence</u>

 <u>Studies in the Development of the Power of the State</u>,

 vol. 1, <u>Centre State Relations</u>; <u>The Case of Kerala</u>

 (Delhi, 1985), p. 103.
- Refer to G. Woodcock, Kerala A Portrait of Malabar (London, 1967); Rudolph and Rudolph, The Modernity of Tradition Political Development in India (Chicago, 1967), pp. 71-76; and Michael St. John, quoted in Rudolphs, Op. Cit., p. 72. Ramakrishnan Nair, "The Communist Party in Kerala", in I. Narain, ed., State Politics in India, notes that "politics in Kerala is a projection of shifting strength and balance of communal organisations into the political arena. At the root of political dynamism in that state like the community and caste compositions of the local population which imbues state politics within communal and caste politics." (p. 445).
- 10 See Zagoria in Lowenthal, ed., Op. Cit., p. 109.

- 11 M. Weiner and J.O. Field, eds, <u>Electoral Politics in Indian States</u>: The <u>Impact of Modernization</u>, vol. 4 (New Delhi, 1977), p. 202.
- 12 See P.M. Mammen, <u>Communalism versus Communism</u> (Calcutta, 1981), p. 100.
- 13 Refer Nossiter, <u>Marxist State Governments</u>, <u>Op. Cit.</u>, p. 56.
- 14 Annual average of Daily Wage rate (in %. per day):

 1968-69 %. 4.47; 1969-70 %.4.64; 1972-73 %.5.15;

 1975-76 %. 7.25; 1978-79 %.7.49; 1979-80 %.9.14.

 Data from Haq and Sirohi, Agrarian Reforms and

 Institutional Changes in India (New Delhi, 1986).
- 15 See Nossiter, <u>Marxist State Governments</u>, <u>Op. Cit.</u>, pp. 34, 41.

CHAPTER II

COMMUNIST PARTIES AND THE POLITICS OF UNITED FRONT IN KERALA

the strength of the Communist movement there, despite

Communism coming late to Kerala. It was not until 1939 that
a secret party was established, and the earliest party faction
was formed in 1937. Much more important than the existing

Trivandrum-based Communist League of 1931, was the emergence
during the 1930s of Congress 'Socialism' as a body of ideas
and of the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) as an affiliate
unit of the Indian National Congress (INC). Those who were
to become the core of the Kerala CPI from the 1940s had
grown with and through the major political movements of the
1930s: from Gandhian Congress into Congress Socialism and
finally into Communism.

There were many factors which influenced the rise of Communism in Kerala. Some of the objective factors which played an important role were the abnormally high concentration of agricultural labourers, sharecroppers, dwarf holdings and plantation workers, in comparison to the other parts of India. The subjective factor which led to success of Communism in Kerala was the indigenous high-caste

Hindu leadership (Brahmins and Nairs), most of which came from the countryside, along with the Ezhava leadership. This leadership was able to effectively mobilize the peasantry behind the Communists, and organize some 50% of the total working class into trade unions influenced by the Communists. 2

In addition to an oppressed peasantry and high population density of agricultural labourers, sharecroppers, etc., what was an important factor in Kerala going Communist was the social disintegration on a scale unequalled elsewhere in India. By 1930, the matrilineal social system that governed the lives of most caste-Hindus in Kerala was collapsing. At the same time, orthodox notions of caste, which enforced extreme disabilities against low castes, were increasingly undermined by Western-style education and new economic opportunities. With the collapse of the matrilineal system in Kerala, the structural basis of society were destroyed, and men and women were unsettled and displaced against their will. So, Marxism in Kerala came to fill an ideological void keenly felt by thousands of literate, alienated people. ³

Indigenous Basis of Communism in Kerala

There are certain factors specific to Kerala's brand of Communism which gives it a distinct identity and a resilience as compared to the Communist movement at the

national level. The Communist movement in Kerala was less ambiguous than its national party, in its identification with the nationalist movement. It had avoided sectarian isolation from the wider struggle for Indian freedom in the late 1920s and early 1930s. In fact, as Fic points out, the story of Communism in Kerala, until the establishment of an independent Communist Party in 1940, was the history of the Congress Party and its struggle against foreign domination. The Communist leaders in Kerala worked loyally within the fold of the Congress Party on national tasks, and simultaneously established themselves amongst the workers, peasants and intellectuals. This was possible due to the physical and ideological aloofness of Kerala Communism from the problems which plagued the Central leadership of the CPI.

A unique feature of Communism in Kerala was its ability to associate Marxism with specific regional social reforms - including reform of the caste system in the area - and the Malayalam cultural renaissance - thereby minimising opposition to Marxist ideology as such. The Congress Communists successfully introduced Marxism into the ranks of communal organizations. E.M.S. Namboodiripad and his Brahmin colleagues, organized the Namboodiri Movement among young Brahmins; they published newspapers and staged plays. Thus, Communism was introduced into this elite caste not through

the study of Marxist literature, but through a reformist movement. Also, workers and peasants movements were organized on the basis of an enterprising educational programme which translated Marxism in terms relevant to their backgrounds. 4

An important indigenous feature of Communism in Kerala was the consistent use of electoral alliances and united front tactics. This went a long way in establishing Communist government in Kerala, and was also the cause of internal tensions within the party and thus instability became a distinct feature of Kerala politics.

Politics in Kerala has been highly unstable, intensely competitive, and evidently ridden by class conflict. The E.M.S. Namboodiripad-led Government of 1957-59 came to power after winning 60 out of the 100 seats it contested and getting 35% of the votes. The sorry state of the corrupt, communal and demoralized provincial Congress. in stark contrast to the well-organized, secular and enthusiastic CPI, was a major factor in Communist electoral success. The transfer to Madras of the Tamil Congress southern taluks of Travancore and the gain from Madras of Communist Malabar. resulted in the rise in Communist popular vote from 16% to 41% in 1957. The adoption by the Congress itself of a Socialist goal in December 1954, convinced the non-Communists in Kerala that Nehru's vision of Socialism in India could best be achieved by the Communist Party and not the fragmented

local Congress Party. ⁵ The popular feeling amongst the people at that juncture was that the Communist government was the only alternative.

With the first Communist government taking office under the chief ministership of E.M.S. Namboodiripad in 1957. many fundamental questions were bound to be asked. Can a Communist led and/or controlled government exist, prosper and survive over an extended period of time within the framework of a larger more extensive democratic or democraticsocialist government? will the 'revolutionary' approach of Communism lose some of its characteristics, which make the people subservient and submissive to the Party? The American authors of 'Communism in India', published in 1958, thought that Kerala posed a clear challenge to Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy. 6 Quite obviously, the Communist Party in Kerala would be deviating from the orthodox line. because the nature of Kerala's political system and India's Constitution created certain structural obstacles. Firstly, the federal structure of the Union of India, of which Kerala was only a part, resulted in the Communist Ministry not having entire control over the state apparatus. Secondly, though the Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP) and the preamble of the Constitution of India called for establishment of socialism, and thus placed an ample mandage on the Communist Ministry to try the same, the immense federal power in the

hands of the Congress Party at the Centre was a limiting factor.

The manner in which the Communist government in Kerala began functioning immediately after its installation represented the attempts at implementing the third proposition of the Theory of Peaceful Transition to Communism. The Communist Party of Kerala accepted the theory as valid for the state. However, in application it faced the dilemmas mentioned above, thus proving to be not so suitable a theory for Kerala.

The way the Communist government did eventually function in Kerala. had certain distinct features and was appropriately called the 'Kerala Pattern'. The main feature of this pattern were that it was based on the exploitation of the conflict inherent in the Constitution of India - conflict between the preamble and DPSP on the one hand, and provisions guaranteeing the inviolability of private property. actual process of transition took place through direct actions of the Communist controlled mass organization. attempted to apply directly the Preamble and DP in order to overcome the parliamentary limitations of the Communist government regarding private property and civil rights. The launching of the direct actions of the mass organizations entailed two elements - mobilization drive and organizational efforts. 9 An innovative feature was the neutralization of

the police. During the direct actions, mounted by mass organizations, the police would not only refrain from giving assistance to the assailants but also deny protection to those attacked. It would remain neutral. There was direct use of only the judicial organs, the magistrates and various arbitral tribunals, for the transformation. The executive branch placed a great deal of pressure on the judicial organs, handling the cases arising out of the direct mass actions, in order to have them legalize the gains won by the Communist-sponsored groups. A linking of the state apparatus, and the bodies of the municipal administration, to the Communist Party was done to make sure that the party -commands were transmitted and executed. The direct actions of the mass organizations driving to assert class rights on the one hand and the neutralization of the police and subversion of the judiciary on the other, reflected dynamism of the pattern.

Generalizing and evaluating the Kerala pattern,
which worked fairly well for the first 16 months, in an
article called the "Lessons of Kerala", Ranadive said:
"...the Kerala Ministry was a voyage on unchartered seas.
This was perhaps, the first time in the history of the
World Communist movement that the Communist Party had
agreed to form a ministry under Capitalism - with a
bourgeois-landlord government controlling the Centre and with
effective economic power in the hands of a handful few..."
10

A look at some of the important policies of the Namboodiriped ministry would give us an insight into the functioning of a Communist government in a parliamentary democratic context. the Kerala pattern in practice, and the limitations resulting from endemic structural contradictions in Kerala's socio-political and economic set-up. The most important reform attempted was the Agrarian Relations Bill. 11 It was the first comprehensive measure of its kind undertaken in India, and tackled tenurial relations of greater complexity than anywhere else in the country. The bill simed to create a free peasantry but provided for compensation to the landlords, which was inevitable within the constitutional frame-The agricultural labourer was given security of tenure to his hutment and daily wage rates rose. Another important feature of this Bill was the involvement of the Land Boards and Land Tribunals, backed by Advisory People's Committees. in the implementation procedure, so as to circumvent the problems of adjudication and execution.

Another area of reform was the educational sphere, which was dominated by the Church, and other communally based institutions. All but the entrenched interests conceded that reform was necessary to eradicate corruption, communal bias, malpractice and maladministration and to give the state a measure of control commensurate with its subsidies. The Bill introduced by the Communist Ministry in

July 1957 was modest. The government sought to regulate the appointment and conditions of teachers, ensure proper records. establish local educational authorities with a mixture of official, elected and nominated members and provided for temporary or permanent supercession of managements which failed to comply with the act. Opposition to the bill in principle was essentially Christian and extra-parliamentary. By February 1959 the Supreme Court had returned the bill and Presidential assent was granted to a revised version of the bill. Having lost the democratic contest, the Catholic Church turned to unconstitutional techniques, in alliance with the Nairs. The churches prepared to defy the rule of The so-called Liberation Struggle was launched. A similar response was seen to the Agrarian Relations Bill. which would effect largely the Nair landlords. So, the Nairs linked hands with the Christians to launch the liberation struggle. As it gained momentum, the opposition increasingly justified their actions on the grounds that the government had surrendered its democratic legitimacy, acting in a flagrantly partisan and lawless way. The cry that law and order was flouted by the Communists was the ultimate case for the ministry's dismissal on 31 July 1959, under Article _ 356 of the Constitution. The general census then was that the Communists were more sinned against than sinning.

Where did the first Communist ministry go wrong? Why did it have to face an anti-Communist "liberation struggle"? What one should understand is that it is difficult to make sense of the actions of the Communist government without reference to the interaction of party ideology. state-level political problems, and the logic, if not imperative. of electoral competition. "The limits on action imposed by federal hegemony, and the pressure of the rank and file for the fruits of office have tended to transform the party in outlook, from one of principles to one seeking power, and so to be judged by the electorate on the same criteria as all others." 12 But, what is evident is that any political party, however revolutionary, if it understands real politics functioning within the bourgeois system. must play the game of the system, but though sometimes compromise may be necessary. a revolutionary party cannot build its programme on bourgeois methods. The Party, new to power of the electoral kind, developed an appreciation of both the possibilities and the limitations of work on the parliamentary front. What the government in Kerala intended was a reconciliation of revolutionary and constitutional politics. In fact, the way in which the new government started functioning created a favourable impression, especially the moderate objective of sincerely implementing the progressive

policies which the Congress Party and the Congress Government had laid down. But certain factors at that juncture were intentionally raised against the Communists. There already existed at that time a very bad food situation in Kerala. The new police policy was received by vested interests, the landlords and capitalists, with the slogan, "our persons and properties are in danger". The novel idea of setting up local bodies and non-official committees, consisting of members of all political parties, was seen as a policy favouring the Communists only and subordination of the government to the party. 14

It was in the background of this vicious antiCommunist political campaign that the opposition struggle
was launched. The Agrarian Relations Bill and Education
Bill was the turning point, and the struggle turned
unconstitutional. Though a victory for the Congress resulted,
the long-term ramifications were in favour of the
Communists.

what the first Communist ministry did realize was that, working within the constraints of the Constitutional framework was no guarantee against Central intervention—
either directly, or indirectly by whipping up tensions on caste or communal basis, resulting in a so-called 'liberation struggle'. One cannot outright deny certain excesses committed by the Communist government, but this is common to

all ministries in power. What actually turned the tables against the 1957 government of E.M.S. Namboodiripad was the fact that it was a Communist Government, doing reasonably well in spite of various constitutional constraints.

One factor which prevailed both during the tenure of the E.M.S. government and after was political instability. The frustrations of a large, young, chronically unemployed or underemployed population, emergence of a number of minor parties holding and employing the balance of power between the Congress and pre-split Communist Party, pressures exercized by well-organized and numerically balanced caste, community and religious groups and endemic factionalism are some of the factors which contributed to political instability in Kerala. Struggle among castes and communities of the state and shifting coalitions of caste, both within and among the various parties have caused the downfall of governments. 15

Pointing to education as a cause for political instability, George Woodcock says: "Poverty and literacy form an explosive mixture, and one of the main ingredients in Kerala's present political instability is the fact that Western education has created expectations which the present economic system in this tightly overcrowded region cannot possibly fulfil." What is significant is that the very group which experiences the consequent sense of

frustration will provide that body of uncommitted voters whose support is essential to the party - Congress or Communist - that will rule Kerala in the future.

It is in this background that the formulation and implementation of the Kerala Land Reforms (Amendment) Act, 1969, must be situated. This Act was legislated by the second Communist Ministry which assumed power in March 1967, as a United Front Government led by the CPI(M). The Ministry lasted 30 months and managed to pass this Act.

CPI and CPI(M) Differences

It is important to understand the functioning of the united front from 1967-69, and thereafter, the CPI-Congress coalition ministry in the context of the split in the Communist Party in 1964. It derived from endemic interparty struggles on questions of ideology, tactics and programme resulting from the conflicting demands of its dual environment - international Communism and Indian domestic politics. It finally erupted under pressure from the split in the former and was precipitated in 1962 by the Sino-Indian Border War. The split within the Communist Party of India resulted in an unequal polarization between the Left Communist Party, which emerged strong in the countryside, and the Right Communist Party, which was the

weaker of the two in overall terms, though not without pockets of considerable strength in the industrial centres as well as certain rural areas. After the split in 1964. most of the top leaders, except E.M.S. Namboodiripad and A.K. Copalan, remained within the parent group. in Kerala appeared to be a party with a large number of leaders but a few followers, unlike the CPI(M). The CPI's cadre had predominantly been involved with working class, not peasant activity, but the proletariat were few in The source of the CPI(M) strength is its rural base. The degree to which EMS and AKG rejected the hopes and fears of the poor explained the contrast in organizational efficiency of the rival parties. The CPI had the officers but the CPI(M) had the field marshalls. the NCOs and troops in the people's army. 17 This was to prove crucial during the post-1970 implementation of the 1969 LR(A)A.

Long-term strategic differences induced shortterm tactical conflicts between the two Communist Parties.
Ideological conflicts were rooted less in Marxism-Leninism
itself than in the alternative strategies available under
it. 18 The Right argued for building up the Party at a
national level, for united fronts with progressive forces
of Congress and other parties - the 'United Front from
above' tactic. The Left, stronger at the regional level.

has argued for the concentration of party resources on a united front of classes through regional peasant and worker organizations — the 'United Front from below' tactic. A more fundamental difference on tactics has related to the extent to which parliamentary institutions can be utilized for the ultimate revolutionary thrust.

Coalitions were necessitated by the break-up of the party system and revival of Communalism in Kerala politics in the 1960s. Growing economic differentiation combined with the declining ability of the Indian and Kerala economics to satisfy rising and competing aspirations by caste, class and region shattered the party system. Both the Congress and the Communists knew they could not win a majority alone. Government had to be by coalition. difference between Communist-led united fronts of the past and the post-1965 united fronts, was in composition. the past, left and progressive forces did align, but such a configuration became increasingly difficult after 1965. winning coalition would perforce include either the Congress or the enemies of Congress' enemies, whether or not they were socialist in inclination. The fronts now embraced communal, reactionary, and non-progressive elements: and they won power. In a highly fragmented political system the former was virtually a condition of the latter. 19

United Front Tactics

Both the CPI and CPI(N) saw the tactic of united front in different light. The CPI's conception of the united front is that it should prove in actual practice to be a real alternative to the discredited Congress rule. in the sense that the administration should be clean, more alive to the grievances and needs of the people, more efficient and quick in the redressal of such grievances. and responsive to the demands and representations made by various sections of the population. Keeping in mind the constraints on a state working within the Indian Constitution. it is possible to give relief to the much-suffering people and an alternative administration. Only in this way can the UF government be made to act as a potent instrument of struggle against the rule of the Congress. In line with this policy, the CPI programme in 1964 said that 'no National Democratic Front would be real unless the vast mass following of the Congress and the progressive sections of the Congress at various levels take their place in it and it was the party's task to forge such a unity. 20

an instrument of twin struggles: first and foremost against
the central government, amounting to assault on the political
system from within and, second, against the anti-working
class and anti-poor peasant politics of the non-Marxist

partners of the coalition. "In clear class terms," the Central Committee stated in 1967, "our party's participation in such Governments is one specific form of struggle to win more and more people, and more and more allies for the proletariat and its allies in the struggle for the cause of People's Democracy and at a later stage for socialism". 21

Electoral Participation and the Communist Parties

Both the CPI and CPI(M) accepted electoral competition as one of the major arenas of mass action.

The CPI(M) was bound to remain committed to electoral competition as a major strategy in the medium term, for at least three reasons. 22 First, as the majority wing of the Kerala movement it inherited a tradition of exploiting representative institutions to wage the class struggle and strengthen the party. Second, CPI(M) supporters, who included a disproportionate number of the underprivileged, saw little prospect of any improvement in their condition without a powerful presence in the Assembly, if not in government. Third, given Kerala's high levels of literacy and political sophistication, a platform on the hustings and in the Assembly was a crucial means of communication for a mass Communist Party.

The CPI argued that the Indian Parliament had provided a forum whereby the people could, to a degree.

influence the affairs of the state, voice their aspirations for peace, national freedom and democracy", and demand social transformations such as land reforms and curbs on monopolies. The party acknowledged, however, that the class tendencies of the bourgeoisie as a whole imposed limitation on the utility of parliament. The CPI maintained that "the democratic and socialist forces" should back parliamentary democracy and the strengthening, under democratic control, of the state sector of the economy. The CPI further recognized that extra-parliamentary mass struggles could be an "effective vehicle for influencing and changing the course of parliamentary policies in favour of the masses—and against the monopolists". 23 In essence, the CPI saw the parliamentary way as a full-fledged strategy for advancing the revolution in India.

The CPI(M) on the other hand, saw little if any hope of bringing about fundamental structural changes in Indian society via the parliamentary process. This skepticism, it claimed, was based on the Indian experience itself.

Nevertheless, the party considered it useful, at the tactical level, to contest parliamentary as well as state assembly elections, and with this in view it envisaged efforts to forge electoral alliances with socialist and leftist democratic parties, groups, and progressive individuals on the basis of a common programme. Without compromising its

political principles, the CPI(M) stated, the party must adopt flexible tactics designed to enhance its representation in both the state legislature and national parliament. 24

Neither of the Communist Parties articulates a preference for any form of proletarian dictatorship - both continue to speak in terms of representative institutions. Though there is a growing emphasis on extra-parliamentary tactics of mass mobilization, these tactics are primarily intended to radicalize the parliamentary process. As E.M.S. Namboodiripad puts it: "Our party is of the view that, so long as this system continues, it is in the interest of the working class...to so utilize the institutions as built up on the basis of this Constitution as to further consolidate and strengthen the struggles of the working people for basic social transformations." 25

Despite these tactical differences between the two Communist Parties, in Kerala they both exhibited the most advanced type of mutual relationship which resulted in the formation of one united front to contest the elections. Two main factors responsible for this were: firstly, in Kerala the struggle for the hegemony of the Communist movement had been fought in the 1965 by elections and decisively won by the CPI(M). Secondly, the Muslim League fundamentally changed its attitude toward the Communist

Parties and adopted a policy permitting a direct entry into any electoral alliances with them. ²⁶

The 1967 United Front Government

In 1967, the United Front headed by CPI(M)'s E.M.S. Namboodiripad came to power, with a minimum common programme worked out between its partners. This minimum programme reflected a mix of radicalism and realism. main radical features of the manifesto related to agrarian reforms on which the Front expressed unequivocal commitment to restore the 1959 Act by amending the exhisting land reform legislation, and to bringing wholesale foodgrain trading entirely under the control of the state. On the home policy front, UF promised far-reaching devolution of power to elected bodies at the panchayat and municipal levels as well as to Zila Parishads which would control all district officials. The realism characterising the joint manifesto of the UF was reflected in the understanding that it conveyed of the severe limitations on the economic development of a single state in the existing Constitutional framework. Thus, one of the most important, but potentially difficult, areas covered by the programme related to the urgent need to achieve greater autonomy at the level of the state government vis-a-vis the central government. On the whole. the manifes to was politically a result of genuine

consultation between parties which had major differences of approach to social, economic and other fundamental issues. 27

Doubts cast from the very beginning were not on whether the UF would come to power, but on its survivability. The very composition of the UF was bound to create internal tensions. To begin with, the dominant position of CPI(M) in the UF and its modus operandi was a potential The very success in putting together source of friction. a tight coalition on the basis of a common programme resulted in a legislature the party composition of which imparted a certain air of artificiality to the real strengths of the different groups. Thus, CPI emerged as a party with far greater electoral strength than its objective strength would have warranted. Though each of the coalition members knew that its success was largely due to the self-restraint of the CPI(M), they were not prepared to consider the possibility that, for success in office, the coalition as a whole should refrain from obstructing the work of its most powerful component, a result, differences between the coalition partners. surfaced more rapidly than had been anticipated. As a

result of such differences accumulating over a very short period of time, they were seen as deeply held suspicions of coalition partners against each other and acquired

exaggerated political significance. This led eventually to a creeping immobilism which paralysed the government. 28 This occurred in spite of the minimum programme leaving out those issues on which the parties were divided on a national basis.

The main areas of conflict within the UF were the allocation and arrangement of portfolios, food production and land policy, industrial and labour policy and corruption, the last issue hastening the gradual realignment of forces and isolation of the CPI(M) within the front. CPI(M)'s line that the state government should administer - Kerala but agitate against the Centre at every opportunity exacerbated divisions within the UF. The slogan 'agitation and administration'. though implicit in CPI(M)'s general line, actually originated in the centre-state context. The minimum programme made no mention of this dualism. In fact. enomous internal and external pressures arising in the UF was a result of the deepening of the contradictions between the Left and Right within the Communist movement as a whole. Thus, while the CPI(M) had been the architect of a coalition between equals prior to the elections, its national leadership pushed it more and more in the direction of a hegemonic party in the state. 29 The dilemma of combining parliamentarism with an acceleration of the pace of reformism became

The CPI(M) slogan of 'Agitation and Administration'

sharpened internal contradictions within the party as to the correct attitude it ought to have towards the parliamentary process. Tensions and conflicts within the UF exploded in the spring of 1969 and the CPI(M)-led UF government resigned from office. Just before the fall of the UF, the CPI had presented to the CPI(M) a 13-point ultimatum on behalf of the "mini-front" (CPI, ML, SSP), of which the essence was the charge that only the CPI(M) rules...all others have either to fall in line or get out. 30

In analysing the break up of the UF, it is essential to see the UF as a sharp form of class struggle, with its edge turned against the main class enemy. Yet at various stages of its development it includes elements which are close to the main enemy, which have the same ideology. Therefore, inside the UF, a continuous struggle must go on, to find the appropriate line. This was seen by the CPI and other parties in the UF, as 'big party chauvinism' on the part of the CPI(M).

After the collapse of the UF ministry, the

Governor invited Achutha Menon of the CPI to form a

minority ministry made up of the Muslim League (ML), Indian

Socialist Party (ISP) and Kerala Congress (KC), supported

by the Rashtriya Socialist Party (RSP) and implicitly by

the Congress. This was to result in the exclusion of the

CPI(M) from power for a decade, ministerial stability, and the institutionalization of programmatic 'socialist government'. 32

A closer look would indicate that, in Kerala, it was conflict over land policy that finally broke up the UF. The two Communist parties were locked in a relationship of conflict on issues relating to peasant struggles and land. This rivalry was strong at the grass-root level and the state level. In spite of the CPI(M) spending a lot of its energy on settling internal squabbles, it had one major achievement to its credit: The Kerala Land Reforms (Amendment) Act, 1969. As Nossiter points out, "Despite its troubled course, consisting of a mutinous quarterdeck and its bilges full of corruption, the EMS ministry carried the Agrarian Relations bill through all its stages in the Assembly." 35

be understood in the light of previous land reform
legislations passed by the Kerala government. The 1957
undivided Communist ministry was true to its election
promises in regard to the implementation of far-reaching
land reforms, favouring the peasantry, as well as true to
its role of protector of the peasantry. The Ministry
proclaimed an ordinance enacted later as the Kerala Stay
of Eviction Proceedings Act of 1957. This Act was a

prelude to the comprehensive Kerala Agrarian Relations
Bill (KARB), which was introduced late in 1957 and passed
in 1959. However, the ministry could not enact and
implement the KARB, as it was toppled in July 1959.

The Congress-Praja Socialist Party (PSP) coalition, which formed the second Ministry in February 1960, tried to undo what the Communist government had done in the field of land reforms. It greatly watered down the KARB and then enacted it in February 1961. However, no progress was made in its implementation. After many of the provisions were struck down by Kerala's High Court and the Supreme Court, a still more watered down version of the Act was enacted. This act, known as the Kerala Land Reforms Act (KLRA) of 1964, has been the principal land reforms Act in the state. Before its implementation, the Ministry collapsed. Some of the main features of the KLRA were: the 'small holder' was defined as a landlord who had interest in eight or less 'standard acres', the ceiling limit was revised upwards, making it twelve standard acres; new exemptions were conceded to certain categories of land. All these provisions substantially reduced the possibility of acquiring excess land for distribution to marginal cultivators and landless agricultural workers. It also facilitated the perpetuation of the prevalent tenurial practices as most holdings were of very small size. 34

With the split in the Communist movement, and the emergence of the CPI and CPI(M) as independent parties, a favourable climate for land reforms was building up from April 1964. With the coming to power in 1967 of a CPI(M)led 7-party coalition in Kerala, land reforms again came to assume great importance as at the time of the first Communist Ministry in 1957. The government brought into force an ordinance, enacted later as the Kerala Stay of Eviction Proceedings Act of 1967 and the Kerala Cultivators and Tenants (Temporary Protection) Bill, 1978 which was meant to guarantee rights the "cultivators had earned after long agitations", agitations which otherwise might "lead to bloody revolution. 35 This was followed by a drastic amendment to the KLRA of 1964, passed in the Assembly in October 1969, and brought into force from January 1, 1970, as the KLR(A)A. Yet again, the Communist Ministry led by the CPI(M) collapsed, and was replaced by a CPI-led coalition, which later included the Congress.

The events which followed the fall of the CPI(M)led UF government afforded an opportunity to the CPI to
experiment with the practical implications of a united
front from above, as mentioned in its 1964 C-C-resolution,
without the final commitment of formally sharing power with
the Congress. What actually was the strategy, in the form
of unity with 'all progressive forces, including Congress

men' and struggle against 'right reaction' on the one hand and the CPI(M) on the other, was a deviation of the presplit Communist strategy, of 'unity of left parties' and 'struggle against' right parties.

CPI-Congress Coalition

The CPI's attitude towards the Congress Party fluctuated between contemptuous hostility, regarding the Congress Party as a "class organization of the capitalists". and eagerness for cooperation, perceiving in the Congress Party a progressive element opposed to imperialism and appreciative of socialism. The CPI saw the split in the Congress Party as the consequence of serious policy differences between the progressive and the conservative sections of its leadership. The new partnership between the CPI and Congress proved very profitable to the CPI in Kerala. This coalition of all progressive elements. including a section of Congress, was a significant experiment in Kerala. 36 One can see the new Congress understanding with the CPI as a reflection of new political maturity which appealed to Kerala, which was fed up of party feuds resulting in lack of economic development. The new Congress' support to the Menon government in 1969 and 1970 was seen as pragmatic common sense and the strides forward made by this administration as sufficient vindication. 37

There is no denying that the period 1970-77, was indeed one of stability for the CPI-led coalition government in Kerala and of Centre-State harmony, during which a number of progressive reforms were placed in the Statute book without, in any significant manner, posing a threat to the interests of the entrenched social and economic forces in the state. But there was increased repression of CPI(M) cadres who were genuinely agitating for sincere implementation of the 1969 KLRAA which they had successfully legislated.

In hindsight, at least, viewed from the perspective of CPI's serious pursuit of limited reform, CPI(M)'s tactics in the period 1967-69 was open to two criticisms: viz. that a UF type coalition at the State level, in the prevailing atmosphere of centre-state relations, could achieve little and, therefore, the task of the CPI(M) was not primarily legislative in character, but rather, one of using office to strengthen the party base; and that a UF type of government at the Centre could, by contrast achieve results, and ought to attempt to do so through legislation, knowing fully well that there was not even a remote possibility of such a coalition, let alone one led by the CPI(M), coming to power in Delhi.

The main question the UF government faced was:
"To what extent could structural reforms be brought about
in Kerala within the limits imposed by the Indian Constitution

which would, at the same time, be sufficiently radical to retain mass support and the momentum needed from the rank and file of the major partner of the coalition whilst not being so radical as to threaten the very existence of the coalition?" 'Agitation and Administration' was the tactic the CPI(M) chose, but the others in the coalition were not convinced, in spite of the CP(M) successfully legislating the 'radical' 1969 KLRAA. Now the CPI-led coalition was not devoid of similar problems. But its aim was not structural reform but incremental reform, through administrative means. Govindan Nair had made the CPI line clear when he said: "Administration and struggle cannot go together: either give up the administration and continue the struggle, or give up the struggle and carry on the administration."40 The CPI under Achutha Menon, by aligning with the breakaway 'progressive' Congress in Kerala. was now in a better position, with a broader support base, to launch a legislative attack on existing problems, especially land reform.

for a decade. A lesson the CPI(M) had learnt from the

1967-69 UF experience was that whilst disparate political
forces could be brought together with the common aim of
defeating a powerful and entrenched party, i.e., the Congress,
they were not necessarily ideally suited to share power

among themselves and pursue policies to the common advantage of their different constituents. Now, being the largest party in opposition, the CPI(M) faced some major dilemma. The most important one concerned the 1969 land reform.

The Act came into effect on January 1, 1970, under a government which had not been primarily responsible for drafting it, and which depended on parties which had opposed it. The CPI(M) was thus put in an awkward political position. If it cooperated in implementing a land reform that had been formulated by its leadership, it would be supporting a government to which the party had serious objections. Opposition to the government, on the other hand, could jeopardise the land reform, assuming that the government was seriously committed to the act. The CPI(M) also felt that it deserved credit for formulating an effective and radical land reform. Moreover, the party feared that the reforms would be used to dilute its support base and build up that of its political opponents. 41

The Marxists charged the CPI-led government of slowing down the implementation of the 1969 Act to avoid alienating the landed interests in the Kerala Congress, Congress, and Muslim League on whom it depended. The government charged the Marxists with adopting obstructionist

and agitational tactics and not giving it a chance to implement the reform. Implementation of the land reform thus began in an atmosphere of confrontation and severe partisan politics.

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Notes

- 1 T.J. Nossiter, <u>Marxist State Governments in India</u> (London, 1988), p. 46.
- Refer Zagoria, "The Social Bases of Indian Communism", in R. Lowenthal, ed., <u>Issues in the Future of Asia</u> (New York, 1969), pp. 107, 109, 112 and 113.

 He points out: (a) The median ratio for agricultural labourers to total peasantry in India as a whole is 19.7%. Not one district in Kerala has a labourer ratio of less than 30%; (b) Tenancy is 51% of all land holdings; (c) Dwarf-holding ratio of more than 20% as contrasted to Indian average of 51%; (d) All 9 districts of Kerala have more than 100,000 workers on tea, coffee, and rubber plantations.
- 3 See argument of Robin Jeffrey, "Matriliny, Marxism and the Birth of the Communist Party in Kerala. 1930-40". in Journal of Asian Studies, November 1978, p. 79. Also, K.P. Karunakaran, "Social Background of Political Radialism in Kerala", in I. Narain, ed., State Politics in India (Meerut, 1967), p. 165, quotes M.S.A. Rao. "Malabar Society with its Matrilineal form of Family Organization has shown little tendency to change in spite of rich historical contacts, foreign as well as Indian. But during the last half century or more this society had been subject to all-round changes. In fact. so radical and fast have been the pace of some of the changes that, if the facts and process of transition were not recorded at the present stage, there would appear to be danger of the knowledge of these beings lost for ever."

- See Victor Fic, Op. Cit., p. 8; K.P. Karunakaran,
 Op. Cit., pp. 161, 163; Thelma Hunter, "Indian
 Communism and the Kerala Experience of Coalition
 Government, 1967-69", Journal of Commonwealth Political
 Studies, vol. 10 (1972), p. 46.
 - 5 Cited in Nossiter, Op. Cit., p. 65.
- 6 G.D. Overstreet and M. Windmiller, <u>Communism in India</u>, (Berkeley, 1960), pp. 481-82.
- 7 Victor Fic, <u>Peaceful Transition to Communism in India:</u>
 <u>Strategy of the Communist Farty</u> (Bombay, 1969).

The third proposition of the Theory of Peaceful Transition to Communism maintained that if the Communist Party after securing a firm parliamentary majority, organized a mass movement and led this into open class struggles, it would be possible to break the power of the opposition parties and then transform the entire governmental machinery into an instrument of people's rule. The transformation would enable the Party to introduce profound political, economic and social changes which, ultimately, would result in the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat and secure the Party's perpetual monopoly of power.

The mobilization drive was an ambitious programme of legislative and other reforms, advanced in the state assembly and elsewhere, which dealt with agriculture, industry, education, labour relations etc.

The organizational effort consisted of building a vast network of mass organizations in agriculture, industry, education, culture and elsewhere. It entailed unification of trade unions and other mass organizations, setting up new kisan organizations. (See Fic, Yeman of India, op. cit., p. 91).

- 9 Ibid., pp. 90-95
- 10 Ibid., p. 114.
- 11 Same of the important provisions of this Bill were:
 - (a) Fixity of tenure was to be conferred on a wide variety of holders of tenancy like rights in land. All cultivating tenants, "irrespective of the deed or document held by the landlord", could claim fixity of tenure:
 - (b) Landlords were allowed to resume land for personal cultivation under extremely limited conditions; tenants from whom land was resumed were entitled to compensation, and tenants could be left with less than a subsistence holding, unless the owner held less than 5 acres:
 - (c) Arrears of rent were drastically reduced, particularly for small tenants:
 - (d) Landlords' and intermediaries' rights would be vested in the government. Compensation for landlords was set at 16 times the fair rent for small owners, less for large:
 - (e) Ceiling on land was set at 15 acres of double crop paddy or 30 acres of dry land. Exemptions were allowed for public, religious or charitable institutions and for plantations;
- (f) Land Boards and Land Tribunals to be set up for implementation, with popular representation.
 - 12 See Nossiter, <u>Communism in Kerala</u> (New Delhi, 1982), p. 242.

- 13 Quoted in ibid., p. 242.
- 14 See E.M.S. Namboodiripad, <u>Kerala: Yesterday. Today</u> <u>and Tomorrow</u> (Calcutta, 1968), pp. 211-13.
- 15 Refer to Thelma Hunter, Op. Cit., p. 46; and John P. John, Coalition Politics in Kerala (Trivandrum, 1983), pp. 37, 42, 43.
- John P. John, Op. Cit., pp. 45-46. Also see Hart and Herring, "Political Conditions of Land Reform: Kerala and Maharashtra", in R. Frykenberg, ed., Land Tenure and Peasant in South Asia (New Delhi, 1977), p. 251, and M. Weiner, "Political Development in Indian States", in Weiner, ed., State Politics in India (Princeton, 1968), pp. 34, 41.

17 See Thelma Hunter, Op. Cit., p. 49.

Occupational Representation among Communist Assembly
Members. Kerala. 1968

Profession	CPI		CPI(M)	
	Number	%	Number	%
Full time political or social work	4	21.1	13	25
Trade Union	3	15.8	13	25
Advo cate	4	21.1	4	7.7
Agriculturists	3	15.8	2	3.8
Others	5	26.3	20	3 8.5

Source: Kerala Legislative Assembly, Who's Who. 1968 (Trivandrum, Government of Kerala, 1968).

Communist Voter turnout in Kerala in Relation to Labour-Cultivator ratio (%)

Election	Heavy Labour Pressure areas	Moderate Labour Pressure areas	Low Labour pressure areas	Cultivator dominant areas
1957 1960 1965 1967	42.84 50 38.67 CPI CPM	37.61 42.34 36.16 CPI CPM	32.99 37.26 30.45 CPI CPM	34.91 38.57 38.42 CPI CPM
190/			7.89 23.26	

Source: Krishnamurthy and Lakshmana Rao, Political Veferences in Kerala, p. 65.

- 18 T.J. Nossiter, <u>Marxist State Governments</u>, <u>Op. Cit.</u>, p. 84.
- 19 T.J. Nossiter, Communism in Kerala, p. 242.
- 20 Constitution of the Communist Party of India, adopted at the Seventh Congress, October 31 to November 7. 1964 (CPM. 1965). p. 43.
- 21 Election Review and Party's Task, adopted by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of India,
 Marxist, Calcutta, April 10-16, 1967 (Calcutta, 1967).
- Nossiter, <u>Communism in Kerala</u> (Delhi, 1982), p. 243. Also see Namboodiripad's comments on the bourgeois parliamentary mentality within the CPI(M) in the <u>Indian Express</u>, 12 November 1970.
- 23 Bhabani Sen Gupta, "India's rival Communist Models",

 Problems of Communism, vol. XIII, January-February 1973,
 p. 7.
- 24 Ibid., p. 8.
- 25 E.M.S. Namboodiripad, The Republican Constitution in the Struggle for Socialism (Poona, 1968), p. 1.
- 26 Victor Fic, <u>Kerala: Yeman of India</u> (Bombay, 1970), p. 377.
- 27 T.V. Sathyamurthy, Op. Cit., pp. 111-113.
- 28 Ibid., p. 119.
- 29 Ibid., p. 120.
- 30 Achutha Menon, What Happened in Kerala: Review of of the 30 Months of Namboodiripad Government (New Delhi. 1969).

- 31 B.T. Ranadive in <u>Right Communist Betrayal of Kerala U.F. and Government: A Collection of Documents</u> (Calcutta, 1969), p. 105.
- 32 Nossiter, Marxist State Governments, Op. Cit., p. 93.
- 33 Nossiter, Communism in Kerala, p. 218.
- Not even 1% of tenants in the state benefited from the Act. In actual implementation less than 2,000 tenants could purchase the landlords' rights and only some 20,000 got any benefit by way of reduction of rent. On the whole, the implementation of the 1964 Act was a failure.
 - Data from V.C. Koshy, <u>Politics of Land Reforms in Kerala</u>, Ph.D. thesis, JNU, New Delhi, 1976.
- 35 Cited in R.J. Herring, Land to the Tiller (Delhi, 1983), p. 200.
- 36 Cited in Ouseph Varkey, "The CPI-Congress Alliance in India". Asian Survey. Vol. XIX, no. 29 (1979).
- 37 T.J. Nossiter and R. Nair, "The Rules of the Electoral Game: Kerala, 1970", South Asian Review, vol. 4, April 1971.
- T.V. Sathyamurthy, <u>India Since Independence Studies in</u> the <u>Development of the Power of the State</u>, vol. 1, (Delhi, 1985), p. 127.
- 39 Ibid., p. 122.
- 40 Cited in N. Chander Jose, ed., <u>Dynamics of State</u>

 <u>Politics: Kerala</u> (New Delhi, 1986), p. 43.
- 41 R.J. Herring, Op. Cit., p. 193.

CHAPTER III

THE 1969 KERALA LAND REFORMS (AMENDMENT) ACT AND ITS PASSAGE

Victor Hugo had said: "There is one thing stronger than all the armies in the world: and that is an idea whose time has come." The CPI(M) in Kerala had realized the absolute necessity of radical land reform at that juncture in Kerala, and formulated the Kerala Land Reforms (Amendment) Act of 1969. But it was amidst a complex political configuration, intense political bargaining and a conflict-cooperation relationship between parties that the Act was passed. Joan Mencher viewed this Act as "perhaps the most drastic of any land reform legislation passed by any state legislature in India". But it would be more appropriate to call it a radical act and see it as a model for other states.

Land Structure in Kerala before 1969

The significance and the extent of impact of the 1969 KLR(A)A can be understood best when seen in the background of the land structure as it existed in Kerala prior to the Act. The best source for that would be the Kerala Land Reforms Survey, 3 a stratified random sample of 3,475

households throughout the state, conducted in 1966-67. The survey sampled only households which held some recognized rights in land, however marginal.

Table I

Kerala's Agrarian Structure at the time of the U.F. Government4

Class	% of land-holding families	% possessing less than 1 acre	Average annual income	in area as % of	class belong- ing to wealth-	belonging to poorest stratum
Landlords	2.3	1.2	4,039	17.8	18.9	7.4
Owner cultivators	40.6	65, 1	1,601	-	3.0	38.1
Kudiyirippu tenants	21.8	71.2	1, 137	99.1	1.2	5 5 .7
Other Tenants	23.1	43.1	1,893	68.3	33.2	43.1
(Total Tenants)	(49.9)	(56,7)	(1, 526)	(83.3)	(34,4)	(49.2)
Kud iki dapp u - k ers	12.2	100	869	***		71.4
All classes	100	59.7	1, 526	2.7	2.7	43.9

Source: Land Reforms Survey, 1966-67 (Trivandrum, 1968).

Table 2

Distribution of Operational Holdings according to Size (1966-67)⁵

*************************************					(in acres)
Size of Operational Holding (acres)		of Holdings % to total	Total in '000		Average area per holding
Less than 1.0	1480	59.7	560.7	12,4	0.38
1 - 2.5	547.6	22.1	843.2	18.7	1.54
2.5 - 5.0	250.2	10.1	886,7	19.6	3 . 54
5.0-10.0	138.7	5.6	957.7	21.2	6.90
10 -15.0	37.1	1.5	446.9	9.9	12.04
15 -20.0	9.1	0.4	151.0	3.3	16,68
20 - 25.0	5.0	0.2	110.3	2, 5	22, 28
Above 25	11.4	0.4	559.5	12.4	48.94

Source: Statistics for Planning: Agriculture, serial no. 1 (Trivandrum, 1972).

The above two tables bring out quite clearly the complexity of Kerala's agrarian class configuration. The survey divided the tenantry into 2 strata - Kudiyirrippu and "other tenants". The former are those who leased a house site and some land from landowners. Such tenants constituted almost half of all tenants, and owned virtually no land, leasing in more than 99% of the land they possessed.

Given the size of holding and average income, we may infer that most of these tenants derived most of their income from performing agricultural wage labour. The "other tenants" showed more mixed-class characteristics. These tenants owned 31.7% of the land they operated. Their average income was 63% higher (R. 1,893) than that of Kudiyirrippu tenants (R. 1,137). The "other tenant" stratum thus contained a number of relatively privileged cultivators in the Kerala context. Significantly, though little more than half of all tenants, they controlled more than 95% of the land held by tenants.

Landlords in the survey were defined simply as households which have rental income. As a class, they leased in 17.8% of the land they controlled. Although this class constituted only 2.3% of the households with interest in land, these households owned 37% of the total agricultural land. Only 1.2% of these households have less than 1 acre of land, while 13% have more than 25 acres in holding size. 7

Although a section of the landlord class was quite wealthy, the majority had incomes of less than %. 3,000.
Only 18.9% of the landlords fell into the highest income category, compared to 3% of the owner-cultivators, 1.2% of the Kudiyirrippu tenants, and significant, y 33.2% of the "other tenants". The vast disparities existing in Kerala's

agrarian sector is evident from the above mentioned data.

Passage of the Act

The radical 1969 KLR(A) A faced practical difficulties in its passage prior to getting presidential assent. It is quite clear that there was serious ambivalence of the Centre at that juncture as to the desirability of radical land reform, as well as considerable hostility to Communist state governments. The positions taken by Congress legislators further demonstrated an opposition to radical agrarian reform. Rather than perceiving an essentially zero—sum agrarian situation, in which some classes would be benefited only at the expense of other classes, they argued that the government should provide house sites and land for the rural poor without disturbing the holdings of landed groups.

The Communist government proposed the abolition of the rentier class and rent as an institution, whereas more conservative forces including the Congress leadership, opposed radical redistribution, preferring instead a distributive reform. Distributive reform as opposed to redistributive reform would involve government waste and forest lands, and mere regulation of tenancies. An abolition of tenancy was not envisaged by these conservative forces.

The Marxists' stated objective was the same as in 1957 - to legislate benefits for as many of the rural poor as possible, within the limits of the federal structure and constitution. But within the CPI(M), both national and local leftist forces urged that a truly radical land reform be legislated; if struck down by Delhi or the courts, the situation would dramatically illustrate to the people the impossibility of fundamental change within the existing power structure. What reinforced this argument was the analysis within the party that there was more potential for politicizing and mobilizing the rural masses in an abortive radical reform than in meticulous compliance with existing constitutional constraints.

within the United Front ministry, there raged a controversy over land policy. This was due largely to the connections the various constituent parties of the UF had with the complex agrarian pattern of Kerala. The non-Marxists in the UF came together to try and dislodge the CPI(M) from its commanding position among the rural poor. The CPI(M) while wanting to extend land reforms to the plantations, also wanted to build up its support among the middle-level and rich peasants, and thus penetrate the social base of its coalition partners and of the Congress in Kerala. On fact, after the 1964 split in the Communist Party, the CPI(M) retained predominant support in the areas

of high labour concentration, while the CPI base remained strong in the peasant-cultivator dominated areas. So, the ratio of agricultural labourers to cultivators was the critical variable which distinguished the areas of Communist support. This largely influenced the intentions, the various UF members had regarding the 1969 KLR(A)A.

The CPI and CPI(M) on Agrarian Struggle and Land Reforms

The difficulties encountered in the passage of the 1969 Act were rooted in the different stands the CFI and CPI(M) had on peasant struggles and land reforms. The different tactical lines the CPI and CPI(M) had for peasant struggles influenced their mode of functioning. The CPI believes in the importance of mobilization of small-holding and poor peasantry, but firmly stands by the classical concept of the working class leading the struggle for a proletarian society. On the other hand, the CPI(M) follows the Leninist line of attempting a tactical alliance between the urban proletariat and the poor peasantry. While it attempts to neutralize the middle peasant, the rich peasant is marked out as the main enemy.

while the CPI was not particularly anxious to wage a class struggle in the countryside, the CPI(M) was attempting to adopt a militant, class-struggle tactical line of mixing parliamentary and extra-parliamentary struggle. The

intention was to create a climate of controlled militancy in the rural areas. ¹¹ But in this endeavour, one of the most serious problems the CPI(M) confronted was the contradiction within its rural base: the conflict between the landless labourer and the poor peasant with his meager portion of land.

The theoretical differences between the CPI and CPI(M) on peasant struggles created the context in which differences cropped up on the land reforms to be implemented. The CPI complained that the CPI(M) Revenue Minister was delaying the amendment of the 1964 Kerala Land Reforms Act. But they also wanted the unenforced sections of the Act to be enforced before its amendment. The CPI was keen that surplus lands, in excess of the ceiling, be taken over by the government as per section 72 of the Act. On the aspect of distribution of government waste lands, the CPI(M) minister was accused of delay and favouring of CPI(M) supporters.

The various land legislations since 1957 had resulted in the basic unity between the poor peasants and landless labourers being disturbed. The result was separate struggles launched by agricultural labourers in various part of Kerala. Recognition was granted to these struggles in the forming of the Kerala State Karshaka Thozhilali Federation (KSKTF) affiliated to the CPI, and the Kerala Karshaka

Thorzhilali Union (KSKTU) affiliated to the CPI(M), in 1966 and 1968 respectively. Though these organizations being set up was important for peasant struggles in Kerala, they also resulted in the crystalization of the differences between the CPI and CPI(M) in the long run.

In spite of the differences between the CPI and CPI(M) on tactics and the implementation of land reforms, the CPI(M)-led government managed to get the radical 1969 KLR(A)A passed. There is no doubt that the architect of the Act was the CPI(M), and it represented the essence of its overall commitment to land reform within existing constraints at the administrative and practical level.

The Kerala Land Reforms (Amendment) Act. 1969 13

Compared to land legislation enacted anywhere in India till then, the 1969 Act was radical in nature and some of its provisions were trend setting. The main provisions of the 1969 KLR(A)A, which was an attempt to restore the Kerala Agrarian Relations Act of 1959 were:

(a) No more tenancies would be allowed. From a notified date, all tenanted land would be vested in the government.

Landlordism, thus, stands abolished. Compensation was fixed at 16 times the fair rent. The price the tenants had to pay was fixed at 16 times the fair rent, to be paid in 16 annual instalments or in a lump sum with 25% reduction. Thus, no more eviction of tenants due to

rent_arrears was possible:

- (b) The definition of tenant was broadened to include encroachers on state lands, sharecroppers, tenants of religious and charitable institutions, Possession of land, not legal documents became the criterion of every tenant:
- (c) The definition of small holders was narrowed substantially: cultivators having or owning less than 2.5 standard acres and/or having interest in less than 8 standard acres:
- (d) The right of resumption was restricted: only up to 5 acres could be resumed;
- (e) The ceiling was reduced to 5 standard acres for adult unmarried persons, 10 for families with up to 5 members. For additional members, 1 acre was allowed up to a family ceiling of 20 acres;
- (f) Hutment-dwellers could purchase their huts and the site up to 400 sq. mts. in villages or 120 sq. mts. in cities at 12.5% of the market value, paid in 12 equal instalments. Those who did not buy the land and hut were equally protected against the violation of their rights;
- (g) Exemptions for cashew estates, pepper and arecamut gardens and land in the lagoons of the coastal area was abolished. They were retained however, for coffee,

tea, cocoa, rubber and cardamom plantations, for land under industrial and commercial enterprises, religious, charitable and educational institutions; and

(h) For small holders, who were adversely affected by the law, an agricultural rehabilitation fund was established.

when compared to other land legislations attempted elsewhere, Kerala's tenancy reform as embodied in the 1969 Act, was the most progressive and comprehensive. Its provisions were particularly beneficial to the tenants, and was a new feature when compared to agrarian reform in India prior to that. Kerala's example was followed in this regard by Karnataka in 1973.

Another novel provision in the 1969 Act was that protecting the rights of important sections of the agricultural labour and hutments dwellers. Also, a number of ancillary legislations covering specific categories of rural indebtedness were also introduced as a part of the Act.

Implementation Machinery

The complex and unequal agrarian structure of Kerala made the implementation of the 1969 KLR(A)A difficult. The differences that existed between CPI and CPI(M) on their perception of land reforms, influenced the implementation process.

Like the 1959 KARB, the 1969 Act too provided for popular committees to be associated with the implementation of land reforms. However, these committees mainly functioned at the Taluka or Panchayat levels and invariably as adjuncts to the government bureaucracy. Though an amendment in 1972 to the Act provided for the establishment of village-level popular committees. they were not established completely. In effect, therefore, the implementation machinery used led to an elaborate bureaucratic structure being set up. Ironically, E.M.S. Namboodiripad himself had asserted that implementation of land reform would not be successful, if attempted from above, and needed basically grass root-level participation in the form of popular committees. But this was not to be in practice. Eventually, it was the Revenue Minister who headed the bureaucratic machinery set up to 3 implement the 1969 land reforms.

Revenue Minister

Land Reforms Review Board

Land Board

District Collectors

Taluka Land Boards

Appelate Authorities

Munsif Land Tribunals Special Munsif Land Tribunals Land Tribunals

Village Committees

The Land reforms Review Board was constituted by the Revenue Minister, members of the State Land Board and 6 non-officials nominated by the gover nment. Its function was to review the progress of land reforms in the state. Land Board had control over Land Tribunals and Appelate Authorities, and the authority to interpret policy issues. The District Collectors had dual authority as they dealt with land reforms as well as distribution of government land which was under the purview of the Board of Revenue. The Taluka Land Boards (TLB) were headed by Deouty Collectors and the remaining 6 members in each of the ILBs are non-officials nominated by the government. There were only 4 Appelate Authorities. There were 3 types of Land Tribunals. Special Munsif Land Tribunals exclusively dealt with annuity applications for institutions. The 7 Munsif Land Tribunals were created in 1972 and they dealt with resumption of applications and recovery of arrears. The provision for popular committees at the village level was made only in 1972 and although a 1000 such committees were established. they scarcely functioned. 15 The point to be noted is that though the Act gave importance to popular participation and provision for the same at all levels, the non-officials at the top and intermediate levels were nominated by the government. So, the CPI-led government began implementation of the 1969 Act with a completely bureaucratic machinery.

The CPI(M), out of power then, realized that the CPI-led government would be unable to speedily implement the land reforms with the official machinery at its disposal. To decide the further course of action, the CPI(M) called a mass meeting at Allepey, at important resolutions were passed. It was decided that Kudikidappakars would pay no rent to owners, and they should fence 0.1 acres around their buts and begin taking the yields from that land. All excess land was to be forcibly occupied, and all steps by the government, courts, police and landlords to prevent these actions would be resisted.

This meeting was to be the launching pad for the CPI(M)'s popular struggles for the implementation of land reforms. Though the movement attracted mass participation, the fact that the CPI(M) was leading militant actions before the effective date of the Act coming into effect (1 January 1970), undermined the party's claim that these agitations were merely a response to malafide intentions on the part of the CPI-led government in implementing the land reforms. The result of these mass struggles was large scale violence between landowners and labourers, and local and outside labour.

At that juncture, the lines of conflict between the CPI(M) and the CPI were drawn. The claim of the former was that whatever minimal success the government had

achieved in implementing land reforms was largely the result of de facto land reform carried out through mass action led by the CPI(M). The CPI(M) demanded credit for this success. On the other hand, the CPI charged the CPI(M) of encouraging violence and thereby thwarting reform. The CPI charged the CPI(M) of claiming the credit for reforms, which they were in fact sabotaging. In fact, the claims of both the CPI and CPI(M) merit consideration. As will be analysed later, the mass action led by the CPI(M) did play an important role in making the CPI speeder up the implementation process. But what the CPI(M) did need to realize was that the CPI-led government was working with the same constraints the CPI(M) had when in power, and it would take time and effort on all sides to achieve further success in land reform implementation. To doubt the sincerity of the CPI in implementing the 1969 Act would be a hasty act.

At that juncture, an important and positive point to note was that all parties in Kerala assumed that radical land reform was absolutely essential. Across the ideological spectrum, all groups saw the significance of land reforms. As Robert Hargraved noted, "remarkably, even the right wing Kerala Congress went along with land reform implementation. 17 The consequence of this was tremendous public zeal which the new 1969 Act generated, which both the CPI and CPI(M) harnessed for the successful implementation of land reform.

Notes

- 1 Cited in Justice Krishna Iyer's foreword to M.L. Shrimlal, Land Reforms Promise and Performance (New Delhi, 1985).
- Joan P. Mencher, "Land Reform and Socialism: The Case of Kerala", in S. Devadas Pillai, ed., Aspects of Changing India: Studies in Honour of Professor G.S. Ghurye (Bombay, 1976), p. 164.
- 3 See Government of Kerala, Bureau of Economics and Statistics, Land Reforms Survey, 1966-67 (Trivandrum, 1968), published in 1976 as "Land Reforms Survey in Kerala: Report".
- 4 Ibid. Tables 7.1, 7.5, 7.7, 7.8, 8.1, 9.1 and p. 51.
- 5 From Government of Kerala, Bureau of Economics and Statistics, Statistics for Planning: Agriculture, serial no. 1 (Trivandrum, 1972), p. 3.
- 6 Land Reforms Survey, Op. Cit., Tables 7.8, 9.1.
- 7 Ibid., Tables 7.4, 7.5.
- 8 Ibid., Part III, Statistical Tables; Calculations from Table 1.
- 9 Refer to R.J. Herring, Land to the Tiller (Delhi, 1983), pp. 190-92.
- 10 G. Gopakumar has given a class wise distribution of the Congress strength:

Upper Class - Congress affluent section High income group, industrialists, etc.

Middle Class - Congress majority; School teacher, Petty farmers, middle income group, professionals, lawyers

Lower Class - Congress minority; peasants, labourers, have-nots

Classification of Congress Party Tickets on Government Basis. 1967-77. Kerala Assembly Elections

Year of Elec- tion	Total seats	INC con- tes- ted	Nairs	Ezhavas		Chris- tians			
1967	133	133	34	3 8	11	31	12	2	5
1970	133	56	16	12	4	16	6	2	-
1977	140	54	13	12	7	14	6	1	1

For more details refer G. Gopa Kumar, The Congress Party and State Politics (New Delhi, 1984), pp. 277, 284.

- 11 For details of CPI and CPI(M) positions see Bhabani Sengupta, Communism in Indian Politics (New York, 1972), pp. 307-10.
- 12 See T.V. Sathyamurthy, <u>India Since Independence</u>

 <u>Studies in the Development of the Power of the State</u>, vol. 1, <u>Center-State Relations</u>: <u>The Case of Kerala</u> (Delhi, 1985), p. 243.
- 13 See <u>The Kerala Land Reforms (Amendment) Act</u> (no. 35 of 1969), Gazetted, 17 December 1969.

- 14 Land Reforms (Amendment) Act, 1973, the main features of which were abolition of tenancy and setting up of Land Tribunals in Karnataka. For details of tenancy reform, see P.S. Appu, "Tenancy Reform in India", Economic and Political Weekly, vol. X (1975), pp. 1334-75.
- 15 Refer, for details on implementation machinery, to T.K. Oommen, From Mobilization to Institutionalization: The Dynamics of Agrarian Movement in 20th Century Kerala (Bombay, 1985), pp. 205-16.
- 16 T.K. Commen, "Agrarian Legislations and Movements as Sources of Change: The Case of Kerala", Economic and Political Weekly, 5 October 1975, p. 1579.
- 17 Robert L. Hardgrave, "The Kerala Communists", in P. Brass and M. Franda, eds, <u>Radical Politics in South Asia</u> (Cambridge, 1973), p. 174.

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CHAPTER IV

EXTENT OF IMPLEMENTATION AND IMPACT ON AGRARIAN STRUCTURE IN KERALA

The Kerala Land Reforms (Amendment) Act, 1969, in spite of having radical provisions, had to face many constraints during implementation, due to the political, economic and social structures specific to Kerala, and larger political configurations in terms of the conservative regime at the Centre. But on the whole, the Kerala government must be credited with successful implementation of the Act. This success can best be understood in terms of the extent of implementation and the impact on the agrarian social structure in Kerala.

Extent of Implementation

The total number of resumption applications received for the entire period up to 31 March 1971, was 14,279. Out of this, 8,676 applications were disposed off. The Land Board had received 3,410 ceiling returns up to the end of 1971. The extent of land offered for surrender was 54,460 acres 1 cent. Of this, 21,511 acres and 09 cents were of the Kannan Devan Company. Of the total returns filed. 825 were verified and 111 closed up to the end of

1971. During the year 1970-71, 73,113 applications were received for purchase of Kudikidappu, making the total pending applications for disposal as 198,277. Out of these 65,442 applications were diposed of. There were 27,899 applications for assignment of rights of landlords and intermediaries to cultivating tenants pending disposal and 107,181 applications were received in the period 1970-71. A total of 19,151 applications were disposed of. 1

To understand the pace of implementation, we can review the implementation of the important sections of the Land Reforms Act since January 1, 1970. The 3 important features of the Act were:

- (a) conferment of the right of purchase on Kudikidappukars,
- (b) elimination of all intermediaries between the state and the cultivating tenants and conferring of the landlords' right to them, and
- (c) the enforcement of ceiling law in respect of land holdings and the distribution of surplus lands.
 - (a) Conferment of the Right of Purchase of Kudikidappus

			e of Kudikida		
Receipt	Dispo: Allowed	sals Rejected	No. of certificate of purchase issued	- Other disposal	Balance
335 , 927	206,407	11,972	132, 453	7,881	8,767

(b) Applications for Tenancy Rights (up to 30.9.74)3

Number of Applica- tions received	Disposal Allowed Rejected	certifica-	Other Total Balan- Dispo- Dis- ce sals posals
941,549	357, 207 108, 401	152, 521	47,010 512,618 428,931

(c) Area of Surplus la nd on Implementation of Ceiling Provisions (up to 1.7.1975) 4

			(in acres)
Area of surplus land as per the ceiling returns	Extend ordered for surrender by the Land Boards	Extent taken possession	
105438.72.193	13294.36.262	12646,96,561	3240.44.426

Distribution of surplus land taken over on implementation of ceiling provisions (as on 1.7.1975)

SC	ST	0 thers			(in acres)
Number Area	Number	Area Number	Area	Number	Area
1,444 1197,08.1	17 146	141,50,750 2288	1901.88	559 3878	3240.44.426

Source: Administrative Report of the Land Board and Land Tribunals. 1980-71 (Government of Kerala, 1974).

The landless people derived benefits from the assignment of Government lands. Until June 1975, 328,532 families received an average of 0.97 acres of land from distribution of Government Poramboke and forest lands.

Causes for Slow Implementation

The data shows that the progress in implementation was slow. One of the primary reasons for this, and a major criticism against the state government after the first three years of implementation was that the 1969 Act was not included in the Ninth Schedule of the Constitution. The Act. therefore. remained vulnerable to unfavourable Court decisions. During 1970. the Kerala High Court delivered several major judgements which cripoled implementation. At that stage, the only constitutional protection the Act enjoyed was Article 31A, which protected agrarian reforms from challenge on the grounds of interference with the Constitutional "Fundamental Right to Property". The government's response to the High Court ruling was the Kerala Cultivators and Tenants (Temporary Protection) Bill, 1970. And partly in response to the failure to show progress in implementation of the ceiling-redistribution provisions, and threats by the CPI(M) of mass actions, the government promulgated an ordinance on January 20, 1970, taking over without compensation, sections of the huge Kannan Devan Tea Estate.

Further, the absence of systematic land records posed many difficulties, which was to the advantage of landlords. The implementation of the ceilings provision was hampered by the fact that the government had no machinery or means of its own for finding out surplus lands, and had to rely merely on ceiling returns filed by landowners themselves. The then Chief Minister, Achutha Menon, blamed lapses in implementation on the inadequacy of "administrative mechanisms" and "inadequate mobilization of the people". 7

Also, the inherent weakness of incremental land reform causes discrepancy in implementation. Landowners narrowly escaped a Communist Party land reform in 1959 and had over a decade since, of intervening President's rule, Congress government and coalition instabilities, to rearrange their property holdings. This is apparent from the estimates of surplus land available for redistribution. The Revenue Minister in 1957 estimated a surplus of 175,000 acres; by 1967 the estimate was 150,000 acres; and less than 100,000 in 1970, though the ceiling was essentially the same.

The leader of the powerful youth wing of the Congress Party, A.K. Anthony, was critical of implementation procedures. He went on to charge that illegal transactions among landowners had already concealed most of the surplus land originally available, and the only method to recover that

land was to form local popular committees which included representatives of all popular parties. In fact, the necessity of popular involvement of some kind to parallel the official administrative apparatus was widely recognized by the Left within the Assembly, but opposed by the Courts.

In spite of various legal and practical problems, implementation of the Act was possible because the phase from 1970 onwards was one of primacy of movements and the responsiveness of legislatures to their demands. This is a reflection of the popular movements led by CPI(N) and the positive response of the CPI-led government to radical objectives represented by these movements. 10

Excess Land Agitation

The post-1971 phase was one of primarily CPI(M)led mass agitations for distribution of excess land. It
was clear that structural obstacles to acquiring the
excess land and redistributing it, were considerable, and
the reform law was the first step, but not a sufficient one.
The atmosphere was congenial for mass agitations. In 1972,
the CPI(M) initiated the "Excess Land Agitation". This
involved the entering of surplus lands belonging to selected
landlords by batches of volunteers, and the commencement of
cultivating and harvesting. Even up to 1977, the practice
of indicating occupied land by planting red flags was common

throughout Kerala. A Samara Samiti (struggle council) was formed to investigate land holdings; its publicized results were compared to Revenue Department figures, and significant differences were visible.

This Excess Land Agitation had important successes. In July 1972, the KLR(A)A of 1969 and 1971 12 were included in the Ninth Schedule of the Constitution, thereby protecting it against court rulings. The government further agreed to have the Land Board publish the ceiling returns it received, and to appoint non-official members to the Land Board which would be decentralized by the establishment of Taluk Boards. People's representatives would help the Land Boards in distributing surplus land. A comprehensive Agricultural Workers' Act was envisaged. To implement all these, the government promised to enact an Ordinance. 13

At a more practical level, in the absence of the Land Grab Movement, the hutment dwellers would have experienced grave difficulties in winning the rights guaranteed to them in the Act. The hutment dwellers preferred the encroachment method to the legal method of acquiring their land, due to cumbersome legal procedures. Also, the existence of Samara Samitis, providing their own estimates of surplus land, ready to help poor peasants and agricultural workers fight for their rights, was an important factor in accelerating the implementation process.

The government passed two major pieces of legislation during the two years after the start of the excess land struggle, due to the constant threat by the Samara Samitis to reactivate agitation for securing distribution of excess The Kerala Land Reforms (Amendment) Act land identified: 1972. 14 and the Kerala Agricultural Workers' Act 1974. 1972 amendment was the most significant response in a series of progressive alternations of the reform process to achieve the original objectives of the Act. The continual revision of the Act and implementation procedures represented the capacity of a highly mobilized and politicized political system to respond to the inevitable and formidable obstacles to agrarian structural transformation. 15 So. the period 1969-80 saw the out-of-power CPI(M) adopting the stand that agitation was necessary for ensuring consolidation of hard won legislative gains for the poorer section, whereas the CPI believed that agitation was only of use in bringing into being positive legislation, and not thereafter. tension between the role of agitation and the expectations roused by legislation constituted the agrarian politics of Kerala in 1970s. Yet, agitation even in the post-legislation phase proved crucial and necessary in effective implementation. due to an obstacle-ridden and cumbersome bureaucratic machinery, 16

An important problem of land reform legislations in Kerala was that they didn't address the grievances of

the most deprived class, the agricultural labourers. In fact, it was in 1973 that the CPI(M) took up the theme of poor peasant agricultural worker cooperation, thus accepting the reality that the interests of these two strata had diverged. The problem was that the policy logic of land reforms in Kerala had not treated the labourers as aspiring would-be oeasants. In response to their agitations the Kerala Agricultural Workers Act of 1974 was passed. provided for fixation of working hours, security of employment, the establishment of an Agricultural Workers' provident fund made up of contributions from employers and workers to be administered by a body on which agricultural workers, employers, and government would be equally represented, binding landowners to wages prescribed by government including double wage for overtime, the constitution of a conciliation machinery consisting of conciliation officers, agricultural tribunals, and inspectors who would be empowered to recommend penalties for nonobservation of legislation, exemption from the Act of landowners, with 1 hectare of land or less, so long as they adhered to the provisions in respect of wages paid to agricultural workers, and removal of the jurisdiction of civil courts from matters falling within the scope of the legislation. This was an extremely progressive Act which was considered by some at that juncture as utopian. scheme which was on then was the building of cheap houses for the poor: the 'one lakh' housing programme, initiated by

Govindan Nair (CPI) in 1970-71.

On the whole, the implementation of land reform received a filip during the Emergency, which was declared in 1975. Fear increased the amount of surplus land notified to the authorities while the toning up of the administrative process speeded up its redistribution. 17 Compared to some other parts of India, the course of the Emergency in Kerala was substantially different. The determining factor seems to have been the political system there: the weakness of Congress as a state party; the real strength of the youth Congress in the pragmented party system, the reformist nature of the administration, and the existence of an alternative focus in the CPI(M) for a viable ministry. 18 the CPI-led government did use its powers to suppress CPI(M)-led agitations in this period. The CPI was satisfied that the 20-point programme announced by the Centre was not different from its own policies.

So, Kerala during the '70s, was a good example of a polarization resulting from the debate on whether reform or revolution is the most suitable path of progress, and the agrarian question acted as a good catalyst. Radicalization and a state of 'immobilisme sociale' seemed to go hand in hand, at least on the rural front, and the Emergency seemed to be the political prescription for not allowing the disjuncture between these two manifestations of political

life to be disturbed in favour of further radicalization and possible fresh challenges to the existing political order. 19

At that juncture there was no doubt that the KLR(A)A was radical in nature. The test of radicalism has to be with reference to a given moment of time in the history of a country. There can be no concept of radicalism isolated from the socio-economic and political conditions in the country. A slogan for implementation must have some relation to the same, the strength of the mass movement for the reform suggested and the consciousness of the mass of the people in the country. Judged on this basis, the KLR(A)A, 1969 were the most radical that could be formulated in those circumstances at that juncture.

Impact on Agrarian Structure

An important aspect of the success in implementing the radical Act was the extent of its impact on Kerala's complex agrarian structure. One assessment of this could be through an unpublished survey of 17 villages conducted by the Indian School of Social Sciences (Trivandrum) in 1976. The sample covered 1,700 households; data on land-holdings were available for about half, 836 households.

Relative Winners and Losers in Kerala's Land Reforms 21

(A) By Classes

K	erala State		Capita- list Land- lord		Middle t Peasant		Mixed Class
(1)	Area gained viland reform a of total area possessed	s %	7. 8	17.9	10.9	11,6	9.5
(2)	Area lost via land reform a of total area possessed		5 . 6	1.0	_	-	_
(3)	Net area gain per household		0 .1 8	0.98	0.29	9. 10	0.16
(4)	Net area gain % of average holding	ed as	2, 2	16.9	10.9	11.6	9.1
(5)	Household as 9	6 of	12.2	13.3	11.4	19.1	44.0
(6)	Area gained as of total area redistributed		21.3	3 8 . 7	9 .3	10.1	20.6
(7)	Net area gaine as % of total redistributed		6.0	36.5	9•3	10.1	19.7
		(B)	By Size	of Hol	ding (Acre	<u>s)</u>	
	Kerala State	0-1	0-2	2-5	5-10 10-1	5 15-20	20
(1)	% of House- holds	16.6	33.4	34. 2	11.5 2.5	0.6	1.2
•	% of redis- tributed land gained	0.9	13.5	21.9	31.5 7.6	10.4	14.3
,	Net gain as 6 of total area redistributed		12.7	17.6	23.2 7.1	6, 4	11.2

It appears from the above data that the rich peasant class (they hire wage labour, like capitalist landlords, but also personally work in their fields) benefited most from the abolition of landlordism. They increased their average holdings through the abolition of landlordism by a far larger percentage than other classes and by far more area in absolute terms per household while losing land which came to only 1% of the aggregate area possessed by the class. They benefited disproportionately to their percentage of the population through land distribution.

Part B of the table shows that households with holdings below that level, 84.2% of the sample, gained a far smaller share of the land redistributed than their share of the population. (Households which controlled more than 5 acres, although only 15.8% of the sample, received 63.8% of all the land gained after distribution.)

But one curious aspect of these sample data is that every agrarian class seems to have emerged as a net beneficiary. A genuine land reform is conventionally considered a zero-sum game - some classes benefit at the expense of others. One can recall that the non-communist parties in Kerala were against such a policy.)

Paulini made an assessment of land reforms achieved in Kerala up to 1976-77. Her estimate was that by the end of April 1976, 29% of the cultivated area were

Assessment of Impact of Land Reforms in Kerala (until 1976)

-	Measure	Acreage as on 1.5.76	(acres) Berestimate cia on full implementation	aries Be	res/ nefi- ary
1.	Abolition of Tenancy	890,415	1,500,000	-	-
2.	Sites for Hutment- Dwellers	18,549	25,000	-	-
3.	Ceiling	35 , 616*	100,000**	55 , 005*	0.65
4.	Assignment of State	336 , 228	423,000	353, 356	0.48
5.	Assignment of Arable forest land	10,711	17,200	-	-
6.	Abolition of Intermediaries	357,443	357, 443	557,256	0.64
_	Distribution of Estate Land (Karan Devan Co.) Private Forest (vesting and assignment) Act	}	200,000		
9	To tal	1,631,375	2, 622, 643		
10.	Total Cultivated Area	5, 696, 161	5,750,000		
11	Total as % of total cultivated area	28,6	45 . 6		

^{*} as per 31.7.1977

Source: Theodore Bergman, Agrarian Reforms in India (New Delhi, 1984).

^{**} maximum excess land estimated at 150,000 acres.

in one way or the other touched by land reform programmes.

1.7 million beneficiaries had improved their socio-economic situation to varying extents. R. 180 million were saved to the cultivators as rent-payments, while they had to pay Rs. 44 million for the land. Thus, there was a remarkable redistributive effect, which did influence the living standards of the beneficiaries.

Pre- and Post-reform Land Ownership Patterns 23

Size class	10	966-67	19	82	% Chai	nge
of owner- ship Holding (acres)	House- holds ('000)	Area	House- holds ('000)	Area	House- holds	Area
0.01-0.99	903 (60)	348 (10.2)	2,730 (74,6)	753 (21.6)	202.3	116.4
1 - 2.49	337 (22,4)	510 (15)	567 (15 . 5)	861 (24 .7)	68.2	68.8
2.5-4.99	135 (.9)	481 (14.2)	237 (6, 5)	812 (23.3)	75.6	68.8
5 -9.99	88 (5.9)	602 (17.7)	96 (2,6)	644 (18.5)	9.1	7.0
10-14-99	23 (1.5)	<i>2</i> 72 (8)	20 (0.5)	233 (6.7)	-13.0	-14.3
15_ 19.99	(0.3)	86 (2,5)	6 (0.2)	110 (3.2)	20.0	27.9
20- 24.99	3 (0.2)	76 (2.2)	1 (0)	12 (0.3)	-66.7	-84.2
25 and above	10 (0.7)	1,021 (30.1	(0.1)	54 (1, 6)	-80.0	- 94 . 7
Total	1,504	3,396	3,659 3	, 479	143.3	2.4
Landless hhd	. 2,027			579	-71.4	
Landowning H	bd 1,504		. 3	, 659	143.3	
Total	3,531		4	, 238		

The above data shows that despite limitations in the 3 schemes, the overall impact is still massive and structurally very significant. There is an increase in the land-owning households and decrease in the wide inequalities in land ownership. In absolute terms, the reduction in landless households is by about 14 lakhs, from approx. 20 lakhs in 1966-67 to 6 lakhs in 1982. One of the reasons for this was the land transfers under the second and third schemes benefiting more than 3 lakh households mainly those of agricultural labourers. However, their benefit has only been nominal - 3/4ths of them still own less than 1/2 acre of land.

The comparative data given below does show us that there was an increase in the number of marginal holdings and the average size of the holding too decreased. On the other hand, there was a significant drop in the number of large holdings and their average size.

In terms of the total area of land transferred and the number of households benefited by them, the first scheme, i.e. confer ownership rights on cultivating tenants of the lands leased in by them, seems to be the most important plank of the 1969 Act. The implementation

Comparative Figures on % Distribution of Operational Holdings in Kerala 24

SIZE	As Per Land Reforms Survey 1966-67			As per Land Holding Survey N.S.S. 26th Round 1971-72			As per Agricultural Census. 1976-77		
	% distri	b. of holding of	s Average size of Holding	% distrib ding N.S. Round. 19		Average size of Holding		b. of hol- terms of	Average size of Holding
	Number	Area		Number	Area		Number	Area	
1 ha.	81.80	31.10	0.27	86 .96	40.16	0.22	87.10	42.40	0.22
1 - 2	10.10	19.60	1, 43	8 .3 7	24.77	1.41	8.40	23, 60	1.37
2 - 4	5.60	21.20	2,78	3 . 5 7	20.49	2,73	3.40	18.70	2,70
4 - 6	1.50	9.90	4.92	0.74	7.64	4.89			
6 - 8	0.40	3.3 0	6.74	0.25	3.71	6,96	1.00	11.20	5.50
8 -10	0.20	2.50	9.02	0.03	0.60	9.25			
10 ha.	0.40	12.40	19.82	0.08	2,63	14.86	0.10	4. 10	18.20
All size	e s 1 00	100	0.73	100	100	0.48	100	100	0.49
Absolute Valu es	e 24.79 lakhs	18.28 lakh ha	-	25 .97 lak hs	12.37 lakh ha	a .	35.01 lakh	17.19 lakh ha	-

Source: Agricultural Census. 1976-77. Report for Kerala State, vol. 1, General Report, Directorate of Economics and Statistics (Trivandrum, 1982).

had both positive and negative consequences. 25 Cn the one hand, it has succeeded in laying a heavy axe on the feudalistic agrarian structure in Kerala. It legally abolished landlordism, tenancy and sharecropping. The implementation also broke down many of the very large holdings of the pre-reform period, thereby reducing the extreme concentration of land in a few hands. The implementation of the first scheme obviously increased the percentage of operational holdings of less than 1 acre (from 60% to about 70%) and reduced the average size of holding per household. As a result, if the implementation of the first scheme eliminated the constraint on agricultural production posed by traditional landlordism, it also introduced a new constraint through the fragmentation of holdings. Also, there still has not resulted the equalization of the size of holdings.

The impact of the second scheme, i.e. purchase of their homestead by the hutment dwellers from their land-owners, can be viewed in 2 different ways. On the one hand, it will appear significant when the present landownership of the hutment dweller is compared, as Herring does, ²⁶ with their landlessness and the resultant socio-economic sub-servience in the pre-reform period, or with the situation of landless labourers elsewhere in India. On the other hand, it will pale into insignificance if the extent of land received per hutment dweller is compared with that

received per the cultivating tenant, under the first scheme.

The third scheme, i.e. imposition of ceiling and redistribution of surplus land, was not very effective. As a result of bogus transfers, the landlords managed to conceal surplus land.

Problems of Conceptualization in the Act

affected by certain problems of conceptualization with the legislation. ²⁷ Firstly, tenancy was treated as a homogenous type of production relations, an aspect of feudal society. But, to paraphrase Lenin, there are tenants and there are tenants. For historical reasons, some tenants of Kerala were of relatively high social status and economic power, typically employing sub-tenants or wage labourers to cultivate their holdings. And although the referms conferred land only on 'cultivating' tenants, 'cultivation' as in almost all Indian legislation, was defined to include supervision of hired labour, or arranging for cultivation, or simply bearing the risk of cultivation.

The majority of the tenants who received land in the reform were indeed poor and socially oppressed. But the 0.8 acres they got will leave them poor, even if less socially oppressed. Most of the land went to tenants who were relatively well-off. The very poverty of the small

tenants ensured that they would receive very little land. The problem was that the agrarian structure of Kerala at the time of the 1969 reforms being formulated was such that the abolition of tenancy per se, as a legal form, would have a class-differentiated impact. 28 Most of the area leased in was controlled by tenant operators with holdings larger than the median holding size. Landlords also leased in land. Moreover, because the larger holdings contained a higher percentage of leased in land, whereas the poorest, landless tenants had very small holdings, conferring ownership rights on tenanted lands was certain to benefit relatively rich peasants. A study produced by the Centre for Development Studies (CDS) 29 drew attention to the fact that. in certain areas of Kerala, there was a greater concentration of operational holdings than ownership holdings. It reached the conclusion that, in such areas, conferring ownership rights on tenanted landholdings would intensify inequality of land ownership though, in the state as a whole, the abolition of tenancy would reduce rural inequality in land distribution.

The second conceptual problem was with the ceiling level. The relatively high ceiling and the existence of several nuclear families per household, along with the exclusion of plantations, meant the large holders could not only retain large holdings, but even increase their holdings

by claiming ownership of leased-in lands under the tenancy provisions. The result was the virtual exclusion of the truly landless.

In October 1979, the CPI-led coalition ministry passed an amendment to the Land Reforms Act. The Gift Deeds Bill was passed, by which gifts, from owners with surplus land, to their sons and daughters or sons and daughters of deceased sons and daughters, made between January 1, 970 and November 5, 1974, were rendered valid. This further reduced the total area of land declared surplus (1,46,445 acres) by 14,164 acres (10%), belonging to 1,026 owners.

In the specific case of Kerala, the ceilings legislation affected far fewer landlords than the tenancy legislation. Thus, far more land passed from landlords to tenants already in occupation of landholdings than in the form of excess over ceilings. Herring rightly notes that "land distribution in Kerala was primarily via the abolition of tenancy, rather than via a ceiling reform, and consequently favoured those with a stronger traditional claim on land - the tenants - than that of agricultural labourers". Had there been no provision abolishing landlordism, a much larger area would have been subject to the ceiling measures, and more labourers could have received small plots. "³⁰ Also, if the village level popular committees provided for in

the 1972 amendment to the Act, had been established, further restriction of the scope for evasion of ceiling measures would have been possible. The redistributive effects of Kerala land reform resulting from the implementation of the ceilings legislation cannot be said to be more than marginal.

Another problem is regarding the small landholders. There are numerous 'small holders' who derive a major part of their incomes from not only salaried employment but also trade and other activities. They are, moreover, organically linked to members of the urban middle classes. The CPI(M) in Kerala was reluctant to attack these 'small holders'. The Central Committee defines this attitude in 2 clauses: (1) "Land of small holders owning less than half of the ceiling, but eking out their livelihood in factories, small shops, etc. or in any other profession, even if they are not cultivating their land, shall not be taken... and (2) "Landholders, who are owning on the day of legislation less than the proposed ceiling but more than half the ceiling, but who are not cultivating their land by their physical labour but getting it cultivated by agricultural labour, if they have other professions or means of income, they will be allowed to retain only that amount of land that would be enough to make their total income equal that derived from the land ceiling, "31

Number of Persons actually Engaged in Agriculture by Size of Holding (1966-67) 32

Size of Operational holdings (acres)	Number of Operational holdings (in '000)	Number of persons actually engaged in agriculture (in '000)	Total area of holdings (in '000 acres)	Average area per person engaged (in acres)
Below 1	1,480.0	203.4	360.7	2.76
1 = 2.5	547.6	258.9	843.2	3. 26
2.5 - 5	250.2	209.4	886.7	4, 23
5 - 10	138.7	148.0	957.7	6, 47
10 - 15	37.1	47.7	446.9	9 .37
15 - 20	9.1	8.7	151.0	13 . 2 3
20 - 25	5.0	4.6	110.3	23.98
25 and above	11.4	898.6	4,516.0	5.08

Source: Statistics For Planning: Agriculture, serial no.1. (Trivandrum, 1972).

The above data shows us that the reluctance of the CPI(M) to attack small landholders lets out the numerous non-cultivating owners of highly remunerative pieces of land below half the ceiling, even though they derived the major portion of their income from sources other than agriculture. It seems that the CPI(M) is either unwilling to recognize the existence of this class or not yet prepared to fight it, partly due to middle-class orientation of the party springing from the class origin of the activists and partly out of its concern for preserving its electoral base. 33

Most Kerala tenants were not capable of supporting their families through exclusive reliance on their own land-holdings which were far too small. They were, therefore, compelled to seek extra work outside their holdings either as agricultural workers or in some other trade. Moreover, the fact that a vast majority of these small landholders are not full time cultivators "actually engaged in agriculture", exposes the ambiguity of the claim that the reform was aimed at giving land to the tiller. 34

Moreover, it is well known that cultivators in Kerala with substantial or even not so substantial interests in land, depended heavily on the labourers to cultivate their fields. The study in 1964/65 indicated that even on the smallest farms (less than 1 acre), family labour constituted an average of only 47% of total labour; the remainder was hired. The percentage of hired labour on farms larger than 25 acres was 97%. Capitalist

agriculture was well established in Kerala, and the policy means of separating tenants who were victims of "feudalism" from tenants who were small-scale operatives of capitalism were by no means clear. But if we go solely by the criterion of the use of hired labour as "the principal manifestation of capitalism". Kerala agriculture by and large may be said to be highly capitalistic. According to the Third Dicennial World Census of Agriculture, covering all major crops. the entire agricultural work is done by family labour in 53% of holdings. The percentage of holdings in which the major agricultural work is done by hired labour ranges from about 60% in Palghat District to 39% in Errakulam district. However, it may be incorrect to identify the emergence or existence of capitalism in agriculture on the basis of wage exploitation alone for Kerala as a whole though it may be legitimate to assert the emergence of a capitalist sector in certain parts of Palghat, Cannanore, Idikki and Alleppey districts. 37 So. to identify the capitalist class purely in terms of hired labour may be misleading in Kerala.

The 1969 Act and Agricultural Labourers

What was the impact of the land reforms on the class of agricultural labourers? A common criticism against the reform was that it had little in it for the actual tillers of the soil, the labourers. This class stood to

benefit from two sources - surplus land above the ceiling, and the option to purchase their Kudikidappus or help. Eventually, they benefited only marginally from the former, and the latter was available only to those labourers who already had a housesite in someone's compound. Data from the Land Board indicate that 265,829 Kudikidappukars were allowed to purchase their plots, or 77.4% of the potential beneficiaries estimated in 1966-67.38

At the risk of generalization, it may be said that there are three distinct agrarian groups in post-land reform Kerala. At one extreme, at the top of the agrarian hierarchy. is a small group of rich farmers, who in the pre-reform period were the largest tenant-cultivators and for that very reason became the biggest land owners later too. In this sense, it may be said that the implementation of the first scheme, i.e. abolition of landlordism, resulted in an inversion of classes i.e., a small group of rich landowners who were not so important in the pre-reform period, came to occupy the top position in the agrarian hierarchy, while the landlords of the pre-reform period got relegated to a lower position. other groups remained almost intact, save for the fact that they got the title for the piece of land they held for long. But, at the other extreme is the large group of agricultural labourers, for most of whom the only benefit was the tiny piece of homestead land they received. In between these

two groups, is a large group of poor and marginal farmers, who were small tenants in the pre-reform period.

Communist Party and Conceptualization of the 1969 Act

Before one attempts to make a general evaluation of the success of the land reforms Act in Kerala, it is important to understand the compulsions on the Communist Party in Kerala which led to the Act being conceptualized and implemented the way it did occur. A very clear statement of the policies of the CPI(M), appeared in the Central Committee (CC) resolution adopted in 1973 at Muzaffarpur. 39 The resolution says that the central slogan of the agrarian movement must be: 'abolish landlordism, both feudal and capitalist, without compensation and distribution of land of landlords to the agricultural labourers and the poor peasants free. 40 It also says that while the party should extract the 'maximum possible concessions from the ruling classes. in the concrete reality of the legislative strength of the democratic opposition as well as the mass movements outside, no legislation, however limited. under the present ruling classes and corrupt bureaucratic set-ups. gets implemented...unless powerful mass movements are developed. 41

On the whole there is some equivocation in the stand of the party on rich and middle peasants. In the case of the latter, the 1966 resolution stated: Working class

hegemony over the Kisan Movement can be ensured only if the proletarian party...places its principal reliance on the rural labourers and poor peasants who constitute 70% of the peasantry, while of course not forgetting for a moment, neglecting or ignoring the middle and rich peasants but drawing them into the struggle for agrarian revolution. This task is no doubt a difficult one. The 1966 C.C. resolution also recognised the fact that the task was made more difficult because the bulk of the CPI(M)'s leading Kisan activists came from rich and middle peasant origin rather than from amongst agricultural labourers and poor peasants.

abolishing landlordism into a programme of action by redefining land ceilings so as to ensure that all landlords are caught in the net. Sundarayya explains: "...for fixing up land ceilings, the only point with which we are concerned is what is the demarcating line between a landlord and a rich peasant". 43 Ceilings based on this criterion may affect individual rich peasants but not rich peasants as a class. So, the stand towards rich and middle peasants seems to have been dictated by the consideration that they should not be alienated.

The struggle for wages and the demand for fair prices also entails contradictions which could not be

easily resolved. It is not just the capitalist landlords. but rich and middle peasants too, who employ wage labourers. Sundarayya notes that 'partial struggles for wages can be successful only if the movement can mobilize the support of the poor and middle peasants and other democratic forces to back them. 44 But here the unity has to be achieved by some other means, as in the wage struggle rich and middle peasants will be on the other side of the fence. A factor which offsets this contradiction and works in favour of unity, is the assurance that rich peasants' lands below the ceilings would be left untouched during the course of the struggle for land; also, the fact that a portion of land needs to be distributed to the middle peasants. So, one can see a trade-off between high wage rates and the assurance of the party that certain classes of the peasantry would be left untouched in the land struggle.

In fact, the primacy which the party accords to the unity of the peasant classes pays dividends but it also stultifies the movements. Since electoral victories in Kerala depend more on who is with whom than on the proportion of total votes polled by the individual parties, the CPI(M) could not ignore electoral calculations in formulating its strategies.

Although the provisions of the Act would abolish rentier landlords, it would not still give land to the

"Cultivating" tenants were to be made owners, but tiller. "cultivating" was defined to include supervision of hired labour. If the slogan 'land to the tiller' was to have any significance, then the person who actually cultivates the land either with his own labour or the labour of family members ought to get the benefit of land legislation. But the definition of 'cultivator' was extended to include a person who personally supervises cultivation, although not doing manual labour. 45 This could be justified by the fact that at that historical juncture, attack on feudalism was primary. For this purpose, all non-feudal classes had to be rallied behind an agrarian reform. The distinction between "parasitic" feudal landlords and "entrepreneurial" capitalist landlords was critical, and the latter needed encouragement, while the former had to be destroyed. 46

The strategic priority of attacking the social base of "feudalism" significantly influenced policy logic. In an extremely land-poor economy, there could possibly be two strategies. The meager amount of surplus land available could be redistributed to give economic holdings to a small percentage of the landless, leaving the rest in an unchanged and depressed situation, or it could be distributed equally, providing much less than an economic holding to all claimants. E.M.S. suggested the latter as it would offer the recipients the opportunity to build a free life. The

non-left parties, especially the Congress, preferred the former option. The basic idea of the party was to minimize the dependence of the landless on the landowners.

In fact, one group within the CPI(M) argued against the redistribution of land to the landless altogether. Their analysis posited a danger in the embourgeoisement of the poor peasantry, creating a conservative class in the place of a revolutionary one. However, the analysis that prevailed held that the reform measures gave the rural underclass more security and thus potential for militant action. 47

On the whole, the reform provisions seem to reflect an analysis of both the historical stage of development and the constraints of working within a federal system. The constraints of electoral politics is evident in the fact that more radical options were avoided, so as not to threaten the fragile unity of the agrarian movement.

A general overview of the land reforms Act and its implementation would show us the significant alteration in the structure of ownership and operation of land holdings. The entire class of rent receivers, and intermediaries have been removed and the tenants have turned owners of the land they operated. At least a million of them have become fullfledged owners of land they operated. The magnitude of

the structural change wraught by landlord abolition in Kerala is significant, particularly in comparison with other states in India, and the sub-continent. The amount of land in each tenancy was small (0.8 acres) but the overall impact was dramatic - almost 2 million acres or about 40% of the operated farm area was transferred to tenants. 48 The productivity of land in Kerala being high, to some extent neutralizes the fact that only a small plot of land was obtained. Even the Kudikidappu purchases, though it resulted in just 8 cents of land per head, must be viewed in the background of the enormous deprivation under which this class of labourers used to be, the condition of landless labour in the rest of India, the high monetary value of residential land, and its fertility.

What is important to understand here is that the Kerala land reform legislation must be viewed against the perspectives of its conceptual basis as well as its implementational efficacy. No doubt the rich peasants benefited the most, and the poor peasants and agricultural labourers only marginally. The reason for this lies not in implementation, in spite of some lapses. In the specific case of Kerala, with its long history of peasant and rural political mobilization and consistent record of militant and organized agitation, effective implementation of this radical legislation has largely been successful. Most

observers would find little difficulty in accepting that despite minor lapses, "the gross and extensive evasions and perversion of land reform measures common elsewhere in South Asia are virtually impossible in contemporary Kerala." As already discussed, the conceptual foundation of the Act caused the class-differentiated impact, and more progress for the rich peasants, rather than for the marginal peasants and agricultural labourers.

Rather than condemn or praise the Kerala land reforms legislation of 1969, one must realize that they represented the expressed demands of the agrarian movement in the state and were constrained in important ways by the courts and the Centre. The framers of the reforms were quite conscious of their limitations and argued explicitly that the reforms were necessarily pro-capitalist, antifeudal in character, reflecting the primary contradiction of the period. 50

A look at the implementation of land reforms in Kerala after 1967 in the overall Indian context, indicates the rather successful completion of the process. The Planning Commission, went to the extent of mentioning Kerala as the 'model' state for successful implementation of land reforms in India.

Keeping the Kerala experience as a background, it would be easier to point out various weaknesses the Indian

land reform experience suffers from. Most of these are inherent in our federal-democratic polity. Most importantly, as per the Constitution, the subject of land reforms is in the State List, and therefore, the responsibility of legislation and implementation of land legislation lies This has resulted in different with the state governments. state governments perceiving the priority of land reform differently. Also, the regional tenurial variations and diversity in socio-economic and political conditions have brought in a measure of complexity and variety in land reform laws passed by various states and, implementation too has been at varied levels of efficiency. The Task Force on Agrarian Relations⁵¹ pointed out that the programme of land reforms had been viewed until then, in isolation from the mainstream of economic development. An integrated approach would definitely have yielded better results. Some of the reasons identified for poor performance in land reform implementation in most parts of India were lack of political will, absence of pressure from below, legal hurdles, absence of correct updated land records, and inadequate administrative organization.

It cannot be denied that Kerala too did suffer to some degree from the above mentioned weaknesses. Yet, land reforms implementation was reasonably successful. This

only indicates the presence of some distinct factors particular to Kerala, determining the success achieved. These factors will be discussed in the concluding chapter.

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Notes

- Administrative Report of the Land Board and Land Tribunals. 1970-71 (Government of Kerala, 1974), pp. 1, 13, 21-22.
- 2 Government of Kerala, <u>Proceedings of the Land Board</u>, (Trivandrum, 1974), p. 8.
- Theodor Bergman, Agrarian Reforms in India (New Delhi, 1984).
- Government of Kerala, <u>Proceedings of Land Board</u> (Trivandrum, 1975), p. 9.
- 5 Ibid., p. 10.
- 6 Refer footnote 35, Chap. III.
- 7 See "Land Reform in Kerala: An interview with Chief Minister A. Menon", Yojana, 16: 13 (1972).
- 8 See Ronald Herring, Op. Cit., p. 203.
- 9 T.V. Sathyamurthy, Op. Cit., p. 258.
- 10 T.K. Ooommen, "Agrarian Legislations and Movements as Sources of Change: The Case of Kerala", Economic and Political Weekly, vol. 10 (40), 1975.
- Differences in Excess Land held by 7 Owners by Governmental Records and Records of the Excess Land Agitation Council

Cases	Excess Land according to Revenue Records	Excess land possessed according to the Excess Land Agit Coun	Difference (in acres)
1	2	3	4
. 1	2,064	3,500	+ 1,436

-/-

1	2	3	4	
2	244	3,000	+ 2,756	
3 .	148	1,320	+ 1,172	
4	166	1,000	+ 884	
5	387	532	* 145	
. 6	126	267	+ 141	
. 7	507	369	- 138	
m 1 7	7 500	0.000	6.706	-
To tal	3,592	9,988	+ 6,396	

Source: Oommen, "Agrarian Legislations..." Op. Cit.

It seems certain the true estimate would lie somewhere between that of the Council's and the government's.

- 12 The Kerala Land Reforms (Amendment) Act, 1971 resulted in the process of vesting excess lands in government being speeded up; The rate of compensation payable to landlords was reduced; procedures for assigning lands by the Land Board were simplified; conversion of one class of land into another was rendered practically impossible; provisions relating to Kudikidappukarans were clarified.
- 13 T.K. Ooommen, "Agrarian Legislation as Source of Change: The Case of Kerala", EPW, vol. 10 (40), 1975.
- 14 <u>Kerala Land Reforms (Amendment) Act. No. 17 of 1972;</u> Gazetted, November 2, 1972; KLA, VI: 11: 72 (October 24). Also see pp. 12-14; Chap. III here.
- 15 Ronald Herring, Op. Cit., p. 205.

- 16 T.K. Occommen emphasized certain factors which made mass agitations significant in improving implementation. Their effect was two fold on the burgaucracy. First, the agitations impressed them with the urgency of their task and acted as a deterrent to lethargy, favouritism and corruption in implementation. Second, the concrete information uncovered by popular investigations aided officials in their search through the maze of evasive manoeuvres of landowners. An indirect impact was that the government could use the threat of rural violence as a lever for prying rapid consent from the centre on issues. (See Occumen, Agrarian Legislation, Op. Cit.)
- By July 1977, 409,600 hutment-dwellers had applied for the purchase of their housing-site; of the cases 0.6% only were still pending. Altogether, of the estimated 400,000 hutment-dwellers, 232,000 had received their certificates. Also, 56,600 ceiling returns had been submitted to the Land Board; of these 81% were settled. The Boards ordered surrender of 117,000 acres, but 53% was taken possession of and 30% distributed. 35,600 acres were distributed to 55,000 people without or with little land, an average of 0.65 acres per household.
- 18 See T.J. Nossiter, "State Level Politics in India, 1975-77: Emergency and its Aftermath in Kerala", in Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics, vol. 16 (1978), p. 57.
- 19 T.V. Sathyamurthy, Op. Cit., pp. 266-67.

- 20 C. Achutha Menon, "Land Reforms in Kerala: An interview with the C.M. Achutha Menon", Yojana, 16: 13 (1972).
- 21 Cited in R.J. Herring, "Abolition of Landlordism in Kerala: A Redistribution of Privilege", EPW, 15: 26, June 28, 1984, p. A-64.
- 22 Cited in Theodore Bergman, Agrarian Reform in India (New Delhi, 1984), p. 7.
- 23 Cited in P. Radhakrishnan, <u>Peasant Struggles</u>, <u>Land</u>
 Reforms and Social Change: Malabar, 1836-1982
 (New Delhi, 1989), p. 188.
- 24 Agricultural Census. 1976-77. Report for Kerala State, vol. 1, General Report, Directorate of Economics and Statistics (Trivandrum, 1982).
- 25 See P. Radhakrishnan, "Land Reforms in Theory and Practice: The Kerala Experience", EPW, vol. 16, no. 52, December 26, 1981, p. A. 130.
- 26 Refer R.J. Herring, "Abolition of Landlordism", Op. Cit., p. A-66.
- 27 P. Radhakrishnan, "Land Reforms in Theory and Practice", Op. Cit., P.A-131.
- 28 R. J. Herring, "Abolition of Landlordism", Op. cit., p. A-63.
- 29 Centre for Development Studies, <u>Poverty</u>, <u>Unemployment</u>
 and <u>Development Policy</u>: A Case Study of <u>Selected</u>
 <u>Issues with reference to Kerala</u> (UN: New York,
 1975).

- 30 Ronald J. Herring, "Abolition of Landlordism", p. A-65.
- 31 <u>Central Committee Resolution on Certain Agrarian</u>
 <u>Issues and an Explanatory Note by P. Sundarayya.</u>

 CPI(M), Publication undated, Resolution passed in 1973.

It is interesting to note that the West Bengal Land Reforms Act (Amendment) Bill 1977, brought into being by the CPI(M)-led Left Front Government, has a clause which ensures that such absentee o where forfeit their rights to land.

Also see, N.K. Chandra, 'Major Nove against Semi-Feudal Tenancy", in <u>EPW</u>, 12: 48, November 26, 197

- 32 Statistics for Planning: Agriculture, Op. Cit., p. 3.
- See J.M., "The Left in Kerala", in <u>Frontier</u>, vols-9-11, September 30, 1978. He says: "One of the major reasons why the Marxists are in trouble in Kerala is that many of the local-level leaders are now landowners. And there is a real contradiction here. Those who are leaders of the labourers are also employers of labour. The leaders come from a high social stratum, the agricultural labourers from the lowest stratum.' Even the C.C. resolution of 1973 implicitly recognizes these facts.
- 34 Ronald J. Herring, "Abolition of Landlordism", Op. Cit., A-60-61.
- 35 See Joan P. Mencher, "Agrarian Relations in Two Rice Regions of Kerala", in <u>EPW</u>, 12: 6-7, February 1978; N. Krishnaji, "Agrarian Relations and the Left Movement in Kerala: A Note on recent Trends", in A.R. Desai, ed., <u>Agrarian Struggles in India after</u>

- <u>Independence</u> (Delhi, 1986); Ronald J. Herring, <u>Land to the Tiller</u> (Delhi, 1983).
- India, Directorate of Economics and Statistics, <u>Studies</u> in the Economics of Farm Management in Kerala, 1964-65 (New Delhi, 1972).
- M.A. Oommen, "Land Reforms and Agrarian Change in Kerala since Independence", in M.A. Oommen, ed., Kerala Economy since Independence (New Delhi, 1979), pp. 19-20.
- 38 Land Reforms Survey (Kerala, 1968-76), Part 3, Table 1.
- 39 C.C. Resolution of 1973, Op. Cit.
- 40 Ibid. p. 3.
- 41 Ibid., p. 4.
- 42 Ibid., Sundarayya's note p. 3.
- 43 Ibid., p. 15.
- 44 Ibid., p. 39.
- 45 See C. Achutha Menon, <u>The Kerala Agrarian Relations</u>
 Bill: An Interpretation (New Delhi, 1958).
- 46 Refer E.M.S. Namboodiripad, On the Agrarian Question in India (Bombay, 1952), pp. 27, 49.
- 47 See Ronald J. Herring, Land to the Tiller: The Political Economy of Agrarian Reform in South Asia (Delhi, 1983).
- 48 Government of Kerala, Land Revolution in Kerala (Trivandrum, 1979), Table 3.

- 49 Ronald J. Herring, "Abolition of Landlordism...", Op. Cit., p. A-67.
- Movements as Source of Change: The Case of Kerala", in EPW, 9: 40, October 5, 1975; V.C. Koshy, The Politics of Land Reforms in Kerala, Ph.D. Thesis, JNU, New Delhi, 1976; Henry C. Hart and Ronald J. Herring, "Political Conditions of Land Reform: Kerala and Maharashtra", in Robert E. Frykenberg, ed., Land Tenure and Peasant in South Asia (Delhi, 1977); Ronald J. Herring, Land to the Tiller (Delhi, 1983).
- 51 Planning Commission, Report of the Task Force on Agrarian Relations. March 1975.

CONCLUSION

Land reforms have not been implemented in most parts of India in the direction envisaged just after independence and in the early 1970s. The constraints have largely been due to the influence of the agrarian elite on the regime at the Centre, which is also linked to the limitations of electoral politics in a democratic-capitalist system. Despite this, Kerala, West Bengal and Jammu & Kashmir have shown the way to relatively successful land reforms. In both Kerala and West Bengal, the Communist governments have been largely responsible for these land reforms. It was in Kerala, which this study focuses on, that the first Communist ministry was voted to power in 1957 and from then on land reforms have been an important part of the agenda. The most significant development in this direction was the legislation and implementation of the radical 1969 KLR(A) A under the CPI(M)-led and later CPI-led coalitions in Kerala. As this study has shown, this Act was the first of its kind in the sub-continent and considered a model for the rest of India. The Communist Parties in Kerala were largely responsible, both through parliamentary and extra-parliamentary tactics, for the successful implementation of the Act. 1

As mentioned at the outset, a large amount of literature exists on land reforms in Kerala. A distinct

feature of these works is the emphasis on a dominant factor, such as regime type, peasant struggles, and Communist leadership to explain the success of land reforms. Numerous important factors which also contribute to the process are therefore underplayed or ignored. This study has attempted to look at the whole process of land reforms in Kerala in terms of the range of general and specific factors acting simultaneously to produce successful land reforms in the late 1960s and 1970s. The significance of this study lies in the fact that by avoiding a partial analysis of the land reform process and by looking at all the related factors involved, it is possible to appreciate the shortcomings in the land reform experiences of other states in India.

The rise of Communist power in Kerala and the experience of land reforms are inextricably linked. The Communists organized the peasants and led the peasant struggles most effectively. Even the experience of land reforms in West Bengal underlines the role played by Communists in promoting implementation of land reforms. Seen in the all-India context, it is necessary to recognize the fact that the Communist parties have been able to successfully gauge and utilize the subjective and objective conditions to lead peasant struggles for land reforms.

If we were to look at third world (capitalist) societies with a colonial history, the relevance of state intervention in their development patterns gains relevance. The Indian experience highlights the problems faced by many developing nations. But what needs to be borne in mind as Atul Kohli points out, is the inherent tension between the state's commitment to "develop" and "transform" social structures on the one hand, and the private control of productive resources on the other hand, which results in limited state intervention. The Indian experience clearly reveals this limitation. More than three decades of planned development has failed to improve the conditions of the poor. The distorted and skewed redistribution of resources has been largely due to the dominance of a regime representing the capitalist interests at the Centre. 2 This has obstructed the effective functioning of state governments within the existing federal set-up.

The functioning of the Communist government in Kerala, especially in the period after 1967, when radical land reforms were implemented, however is an example of a progressive regime intervening despite constitutional constraints imposed by the regime at the Centre. The intervention by the CPI(M)-led regime was in the form of legislating the radical KLR(A)A. While reiterating the importance of state intervention in such societies, it would be incorrect

to see it as solely responsible for successful land reforms in Kerala. After all, even in UP and Bihar, such intervention has taken place, but with little success. In fact, in West Bengal, it was a Communist regime which intervened to carry out land reforms, but success was limited. This only indicates the importance in the land reform process. After all, a regime has to function within a context and in constant interaction with ecological, historical, economic and social factors, which determine the direction of the regime's policies. Undoubtedly, as the Kerala case has illustrated, left-of-centre regimes / CPI and CPI(M)-led // would be most efficient operators in a favourable milieu.

Linked to state intervention from above is a process of continuous struggles from below by peasants and agricultural labourers, as the Kerala experience demonstrates so well. These two factors working in conjunction go a long way in enabling successful land reform. The early peasant struggles in Kerala were the first voice of protest against oppression of the peasantry, and earliest expressions of pressure from 'below' for land reform. The Communist Party on coming to power, transformed these into substantial struggles and unrest. The peasantry did emerge relatively better off after such struggles, especially under Communist leadership, which only underlines the necessity of organized and continuous pressure of the peasantry from below. In

stark contrast to Kerala, UP has no history of sustained peasant struggles from below organized by the Communists, 3 while in West Bengal the Communists did not have the leadership experience to handle the peasant struggles as effectively.

While appreciating and stressing the necessity of sustained peasant struggles from below, at the same time to say that "far from being liberal gifts from enlightened governments, land reforms have been historical processes necessitated by peasant struggles". 4 would be stretching their importance too far. It is necessary to see the role of progressive left-of-centre regimes / CPI and CPI(M) in Kerala 7 and long peasant struggles as mutually reinforcing and ful-In Kerala, the 1969 Act was the response of the filling. CPI(M)-led government to sustained peasant struggles from Two more factors were responsible for the responsiveness of the CPI-led government after 1969. In Kerala even the Youth Congress (unlike the youth Congress in other parts of India) was a radical force, and it steadily pushed the Congress Party in the state towards a left orientation. pressed for radical changes in the Congress platform, and then pressurised it joining the Achutha Menon government, The Youth Congress under the leadership of A.K. Anthony was prepared to complement electoral politics with agitational tactics whenever required.

The mass agitation strategy of the CPI(M) in Kerala in the 1969-74 phase, effectively influenced the CPI-led

government to respond with further land legislation and speedier implementation. The pressure exerted by constant threats of forcible occupation of surplus lands by CPI(M) cadres, energized both the Revenue Administration and leadership in Kerala towards effective functioning.

Furthermore, flexibility of the CPI(M) leadership in Kerala, enabled the party to moderate its radicalism and make adjustments necessary to accommodate the imperatives of party competition in a rural economy composed of a variety of classes. It appealed to the "peasant masses" rather than just poor labourers and tenants. While appealing for land reform, its effective implementation, rights and security for tenants and sharecroppers, and improved wages, it did not appeal for elimination of property rights. 5 Following ultra-left policies of redistribution would have alienated the rich and middle peasants. The CPI(M) leadership was being realistic in accepting the constraints of working within a democratio-capitalist federal framework, and aiming at reformism rather than revolutionary change at that The CPI(M) leadership in West Bengal historical juncture. too did accept such a situation.

Further, the leadership in Kerala established links with the local rural intelligentsia or with the "natural" leaders of the peasant movement in a given area. The decision to use village school teachers to awaken and organize tenant

consciousness in Malabar, was a unique political option which was used to strengthen the party's base among the agrarian poor. 7

in the hands of Nairs, and the middle levels were controlled by Ezhavas. The high-caste Hindu leadership generally came from the countryside, and had vast support bases. They successfully mobilized the rural sections for demanding land reform and in implementing it too. This leadership successfully exploited the adverse ecological conditions in Kerala - population density three times the Indian average, levels of landlessness, tenancy and underemployment highest in India - to organize a strong left movement and bring political consciousness to the deprived sections.

A very high rate of literacy in Kerala proved to be important for the Communists in radicalizing the countryside for land reforms. In India, as a whole, the combination of landlessness and literacy is correlated to an extraordinarily high degree with the Communist vote. In fact, the combination of landlessness, high literacy, and heavy pressure on land is highest in Kerala, and this provides the Kerala Communists with the most consistent, strong and reliable base among the rural poor, as compared to any other Communist Party elsewhere. The literate and highly political conscious rural base of the Communists in Kerala helped radicalize and strengthen the movement for land reforms.

The extensive education network in Kerala produced a non-agricultural majority, regardless of the failure of the economic system to employ them. This urbanized population comprised a political support base outside landlord control. A part of this population was the radical student community who felt alienated and faced economic frustration. Their access to the ideology of redistributive justice brought them into political struggle for land reform, instead of indulging in anarchic politics. 10

The split in the Communist movement in Kerala in 1964, resulted in the CPI and CPI(M) consolidating their respective bases amongst the deprived rural sections. But, both realized the necessity of radical land reform at that juncture and spared no efforts towards bringing it about. Though it was the CPI(M)-led government which legislated the radical 1969 Act, it was largely implemented under the CPI-led coalition. The urgency shown by both for land reform accelerated the implementation process. Unlike in other states, in Kerala the CPI(M) was the main opposition to another Communist-led coalition, and this created a radical environment in which land reforms were carried out.

In the implementation process, the land tribunals and other local institutions in Kerala were allowed to "functioning quite effectively, by allowing elected representatives of the villagers in these bodies. The involvement of non-

officials gave a sense of popular participation in the implementation process. The fact that the powerful Kisan Sabha mobilized the rural poor and participated in the land tribunals together with the administrators is another sign of the heightened political consciousness amongst the rural strata. Unlike in Kerala, in West Bengal there existed an extensive network of panchayats under the CPI(M)-led government. But this did not prove as effective as the local institutions in Kerala.

At a more general level, both Kerala and West Bengal have experienced state intervention by Communist regimes and peasant struggles from below. But what has determined the success of land reforms in Kerala. are certain specific factors elaborated above, in consonance with the general factors. The agrarian movements were more intensively organized by the Communists in Kerala and had a solid base. This is due to the high literacy, flexible leadership and its tactics, and sustained land struggles which enhanced revolutionary attitudes. The Communist movement in Kerala during the 60s and 70s has been an effective and militant political phenomenon, with much stronger rural roots than its counterpart in West Bengal. 12 This confunction of forces permitted a breakthrough in the form of radical amendments to the long existing laws of land reform which helped efficient and effective implementation.

If one were to look beyond just the issue of land reforms, the Kerala experience throws up the larger question of problems faced by Communist parties functioning in a parliamentary democracy, and more importantly to what degree can they legislate and implement radical land reforms, in a federal system so full of 'constitutional niceties' that constrain radical change. To a large extent, the Kerala experiment would be the ideal reference point to answer these questions.

Before concluding, it would be useful to make some observations based on the Kerala experience of land reforms, analysed in this study. Firstly, the inherent limitations of legislation as an instrument of change is clearly evident. Once a frontal attack on traditional vested interests is contemplated through radical legislation, these hitherto unorganized groups counter such efforts by manipulating the bureaucracy, courts and/or by leading movements against the proposed changes. This would result in limited changes as against structural changes.

Further, while there is every possibility of the peasantry and agrarian proletariat combining their might against the feudal /landed interests at the initial stages, once the handicaps of the peasants (tenants, sharecroppers etc.) are removed either through legislation or movements or both together, it is quite unlikely that they will

continue to remain allies. The gradual emergence of farmers and agrarian proletariat as separate classes is almost certain when they are organized and mobilized into collective actions based on their specific economic interests. It is only in political struggles that they tend to align. 13

A political party and its agrarian front organizations are likely to face bitter resistance when they initiate radical agrarian reforms, especially when up against a conservative judiciary. A crucial factor is the nature of the regime at the Centre, which will determine the response to land reforms.

The Kerala experience indicates the inadequacies of Huntington's argument that parliament and land reforms are not tenable. The importance of the parliament is that it provides an opportunity for the expression and highlighting of existing inequalities in the agrarian sector. One should not undermine the gains from parliamentarism, especially at the level of policy-struggle in the interests of the peasant masses. If in India today there is no organized lobby clearly upholding and articulating an anti-peasant ideology, it is largely because of the ideological struggle systematically conducted by the pro-land reform forces from the forums of the progressive political parties, the legislatures and parliament, 14

Extra-parliamentary mobilization, and not merely parliamentarism, is another feature of the Kerala experience in land reform. It is the organized pressure from below

which gives urgency and momentum to the process. Kerala has shown the way in striking a balance between "class struggle" and "multi-class alliance", between "agitation for structural reforms" and "constructive work" for development of productive forces, and between pressurising the Government for adopting and implementing policies favourable to the masses and cooperating with it in implementing these policies.

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Notes

Data indicates that out of 24,83,415 applications for ownership rights to tenants, 24,64,276 applications were accepted; out of 2,73,118 applications for Kudikidappu ownership rights, 2,59,410 applications were accepted; and 52,859 acres of surplus land were distributed to landless, between 1970 and 1981. On the whole, success is evident by the fact that 19.7 lakh acres of land have gone to 12.7 lakh households, 2.7 lakh hutment dwellers gained 0.2 lakh acres, and 0.5 lakh acres of surplus land have been distributed to 0.9 lakh households.

__Source: The Administration Reports of the Kerala Land Board and Land Tribunals from 1970-71 to 1981-82 (Trivandrum, 1983)_7.

- 2 For details on state intervention in third-world societies and the 'regime type' argument, see Atul Kohli, State and Poverty in India (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 1-36.
- For details on land reforms in UP, see Kohli, Op. Cit., Chap. 5.
- 4 See Economic and Political Weekly, May 16, 1972, p. 915.
- 5 Refer to Rudolph and Rudolph, <u>In Pursuit of Lakshmi</u>:

 <u>The Political Economy of the Indian State</u> (New Delhi, 1989), p. 363.
- 6 For details on leadership in West Bengal CPI(M), see Kohli, Op. Cit., Chap. III.
- 7 Hart and Herring, "Political Conditions for Land Reforms: Kerala and Maharashtra", in R.E. Frykenberg, ed., Land Tenure and Peasant in South Asia (New Delhi, 1984), p. 283.

Strong confirmation of the stout links of poor Kerala peasants to the CPI(M) is provided by Zagorta, "The Gross Roots of Indian Communism: W. Bengal and Kerala", Monthly Public Opinion Surveys, vol. 18, March 1973, pp. i-xii.

- 8 See, Zagoria, "Social Bases of Indian Communism", in R. Lowenthal, ed., <u>Issues in the Future of Asia</u> (New York, 1969), p. 113; for details of community affiliation of leaders of CPI and CPI(M) in Kerala.
- 9 Refer Zagoria, "Asian Tenancy Systems and Communist Mobilization of the Peasantry", in J.W. Lewis, ed., Peasant Rebellion and Communist Revolution in Asia (California, 1974), pp. 42-43.
- 10 See Indian Institute of Public Opinion, <u>Monthly Public</u>
 Opinion Survey, vol. 18, November 1972, pp. i-vii.
- 11 For the role of Panchayats in the West Bengal land reforms experience, see Kohli, Op. Cit., chap. III.
- For details, see Zagoria, "Communism in South Asia:
 Kerala and West Bengal", Problems of Communism, vol.

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