

**NAXALITE MOVEMENT AND CULTURAL
RESISTANCE : A STUDY OF PEOPLE'S CULTURAL
FORUM IN KERALA (1980-82)**

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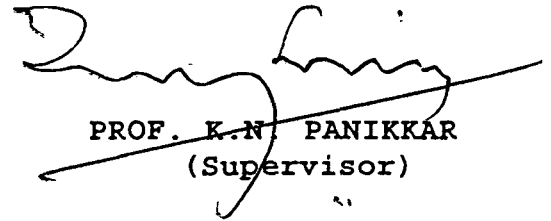
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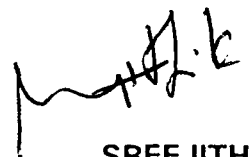
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SREEJITH K.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AICCCR	:	All India Co-ordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries
AIPWA	:	All India Progressive Writers' Association
APRCC	:	Andhra Pradesh Revolutionary Communist Committee
CPC	:	Communist Party of China
CPI	:	Communist Party of India
CPI (M)	:	Communist Party of India (Marxist)
CPI (M-L)	:	Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist)
CPSU	:	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CRC CPI(M-L)	:	Central Reorganising Committee Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist)
CUA	:	Calicut University Archives
DYFI	:	Democratic Youth Federation of India
IPTA	:	Indian People's Theatre Association
KCC	:	Kerala Coordination Committee
KKTU	:	Kerala Karshaka Tozhillali Union
KPAC	:	Kerala People's Arts Club
NDR	:	New Democratic Revolution
PCF	:	People's Cultural Forum
PRKN	:	Private Records of Kunnikkal Narayanan
TUCI	:	Trade Union Centre of India
WTM	:	Workers' Theatre Movement.

INTRODUCTION

The Naxalbari uprising of 1967 was a landmark in the history of the Indian communist movement. Its political message soon spread to other parts of India. In April 1969 the All-India Co-ordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries which had been formed to co-ordinate the struggles in various parts of the country gave way to the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist). The new party stood for 'armed struggle' and resolutely opposed participation in elections and partial struggles through mass organizations which, it believed, lead to 'economism' and 'revisionism'. The Naxalite Movement reached a peak by 1970, but within two years, internal dissensions and state repression effectively ended the first phase of the movement. However, newspaper reports from Bihar and Andhra Pradesh, among other places, are enough to indicate that the movement is far from being finished.

A number of books have appeared so far on the Naxalite movement, of course, from different standpoints. Johari's and Jawaid's books belong almost to the same category which is characterised by a deep-rooted prejudice against Marxism in general, and the Naxalites in particular.¹ In the course of his work Johari constantly uses phrases like "the dastardly and despicable outrages of the Naxalite revolutionaries", "the menace of the Naxalite movement",² and so on which gives the lie to his scholarly pretensions. Jawaid is not far behind as far as hostility for the movement is concerned. Take, for instance, the reason

1 J.C.Johari, *Naxalite Politics in India*, New Delhi, 1-972; Sohail Jawaid, *The Naxalite Movement in India*, New Delhi, 1979.

2 J.C.Johari, op.cit., p.29.

he cites for Jangal Santhal, one of the three most important leaders of the naxalbari uprising joining the movement.

Santhal contested several elections as a candidate of the communist party for the West Bengal Assembly, but was always defeated, which apparently became the cause of mounting frustration in his mind, and diminished his faith in parliamentary means for winning power.³

Jawaid also sees only selfish motives behind the student participation in the movement, especially in Calcutta in 1970-71. "Not only that employment was not available", he writes,

the students were becoming frustrated, indulging in subversive activities as they had a lot of time at their disposal to go about taking part in such lawless activities out of sheer despondency.⁴

And, as if to prove his point he quotes from an interview with a student activist,

How do you expect a sensitive person to remain non-violent in a situation where people live and die on the streets, where laws are made only to be broken, where government exists only with the help of police force, where to be a non-conformist is a sin.⁵

How this selfless statement justifies his strange conclusions, only Jawaid can tell. The approach of Johari and Jawaid is thus too simplistic and superficial. Even though Jawaid has claimed that he shall "concentrate upon the social and economic conditions as the material base of the movement",⁶ and consequently discusses the tribal problems in great detail, he has failed to connect it properly with the Naxalite movement.

3 Sohail Jawaid, op.cit., p.56.

4 *ibid*, p.43.

5 Cited in *ibid*, p.43.

6 *ibid*, p.4.

Mohan Ram's *Maoism in India*⁷ is an attempt to locate the movement in the overall resistance put up by the CPC under Mao against the "revisionist onslaught" initiated by Khrushchev beginning with the 20th Party Congress of the CPSU in 1956. He writes that "since in the Chinese view the CPSU had made India the showcase of revisionist concepts like 'national democracy' and 'peaceful transition' and was commending the model to Burma and Indonesia among other countries, the CPC felt the need for a radical assertion of the Chinese model of revolution for the third world." Mohan Ram's work has been a sympathetic understanding of the movement, a sympathy which, however, does not percolate to Charu Mazumdar whom he considers the bane of the movement, and but for whose 'annihilation line', Srikakulam would have become the 'Yenan' of India. He is also critical of the 'hasty' manner in which the CPI(M-L) came into existence, which he believes was intended to exclude the Andhra unit under Nagi Reddy for whom he has high regard.⁸ In this connection, it would not be inappropriate to take note of Manoranjan Mohanty's main contention that the Naxalite movement was essentially pre-organisational in character.⁹ This was, according to him, due to the following factors: (1) the belief that organisational work before launching armed struggle was a variety of CPI(M) politics, (2) inability of the leaders in the AICCCR to

7 Mohan Ram, *Maoism in India*, Delhi, 1971. In an earlier work, he has argued that the 1964 split of the CPI was a factional one, and hence an ideological split, which became a reality in 1967, was inevitable. Mohan Ram, *Indian Communism: Split within a Split*, Delhi, 1969.

8 Mohan Ram, *Maoism in India*, pp.103-6.

9 Manoranjan Mohanty, *Revolutionary Violence, A Study of the Maoist Movement in India*, New Delhi, 1977.

create a machinery of decision-making by which consensus could be obtained and policies could be formulated, and (3) government repression. Mohanty adds that "Mazumdar's group's greatest blunder was perhaps to assume the character of a well-organized party when in fact they only had a pre-organisational movement".¹⁰

Biplab Dasgupta and Sumanta Banerjee has from different shades of Marxism, approached the same problem with different insights. The former in his *The Naxalite Movement*¹¹ has basically argued that the time was not ripe for a revolution in the country, and criticises the Naxalite leadership for not making use of the parliament to win over the masses, an argument which has a CPI(M) flavour written all over it. Sometimes he goes too far in his criticism of Naxalite activities, as when he compares Naxalite violence with those of the Mods, Rockers, Skinheads, etc. of the West. On another occasion he draws parallel between the Naxalites and Shiv Sainiks! To quote him:

Whereas in Bombay the discontent of the urban middle class found expression through Siva Sena... in Calcutta, the Naxalites became the vehicle through which discontent was experienced.¹²

On the other hand, *In the Wake of Naxalbari*¹³ written by Sumanta Banerjee, a one-time sympathiser of the movement, is one of the most authoritative writings on the subject, he having had access to the proscribed speeches of Charu Mazumdar, and other unpublished internal documents. Even

10 ibid, p.114.

11 Biplab Dasgupta, *The Naxalite Movement*, New Delhi, 1974.

12 Biplab Dasgupta, *The Naxalite Movement*, p.220.

13 Sumanta Banerjee, *In the Wake of Naxalbari*, Calcutta, 1980.

though Banerjee is quite sympathetic to Charu Mazumdar and compliments him for his uncompromising stance against the 'centrism' of the established communist parties, it does not prevent him from criticising Mazumdar and the movement when it is due. For instance, he writes that Charu Mazumdar was 'suffering from a delusion - a delusion of power' which was responsible for the destruction of internal party democracy, its alienation from the masses, and its break up into hostile factions.¹⁴ There was, according to Banerjee, degeneration in the movement at another level. He argues that even though the movement successfully highlighted popular sentiments, in due course, it succumbed to petty-bourgeois notions of martyrdom and began to exhibit a juvenile delight in secrecy, factors which eventually began to substitute Marxism, and gradually evolved into an ideology which formed the core of the motivational structure of CPI(M-L) activists.¹⁵

One of the best analysis of the tribal participation in the Naxalbari uprising comes from Edward Duyker.¹⁶ He argues that in the rural areas at least, the Naxalite movement was a tribal phenomenon. He says that as far as grassroot Naxalite support is concerned, with regard to cultural categories like 'religion', 'language', 'music', mode of violent expression and general attitude towards outsiders ('dikhus'), it shared a common culturally distinct, tribal, that is Santal outlook. The Santals have always given much importance to their cultural identity. Their position, being tribals, in the Indian society was quite

14 ibid, p.361.

15 ibid, p.363.

16 Edward Duyker, *Tribal Guerrillas: The Santals of West Bengal and the Naxalite Movement*, New Delhi, 1987.

paradoxical. On the one hand, their exclusion from the Hindu caste system made them vulnerable to extreme forms of exploitation whereas, on the other, it had freed them from the necessity to consider their lot as part of the natural order of things. Barrington Moore has argued that the caste system may have inhibited a revolutionary response in India. But this view obviously does not apply in the case of the Santals. Duyker writes:

What should be remembered... is that because caste and dharma do not feature in the Santal cosmology, the tribe is out of the mainstream of Hindu society and free from the very tyranny of such cultural constraints. Santal Naxalism is thus all the more explicable.¹⁷

Duyker's explanation is thus essentially a cultural explanation of Santal Naxalism. The Santals, he says, were always determined to safeguard their tribal identity from outside interference. For this they will go to any extent. And, Duyker adds that whenever a political or economic crisis could not be met with routine secular and sacred tribal methods, the Santal response would acquire a 'messianic' character. This was exemplified during the 'Hul' of 1855. Even though the 'Hul' was suppressed, Duyker says, it continued to live in the 'historical' memory of the Santal community, to surface again in subsequent moments of crisis where it expressed itself in violent forms. "Thus, as a form of response to dislocation and crisis caused by certain forms of cultural contact, even Naxalism (in its Santal form) can be regarded as a crisis cult, just as previous Santal messianic movements can be."¹⁸ To prove his thesis Duyker explains how the modalities of the Santal Naxalite mobilisation and

17 ibid, p.111.

18 ibid, p.111.

violence, i.e., the weapons and methods used, are very much similar to those used during the 1855 uprising. Duyker also suggests that it was the 'millenarian' character inherent in Marxism itself which permitted its fusion with the more traditionally oriented tribal millenarianism. Though handy for understanding the Santal participation in the Naxalite movement, the role of the students, and the middle class, from whom the leadership of the movement came lie beyond the scope of this book.

The above summary indicates the broad trends in the existing historiography of the Naxalite Movement.¹⁹ Most of the works cover the movement, at the most, up to the mid-1980s. One exception would be the recent work of Prakash Singh.²⁰ But being a retired police officer, his work is marred by the fact that while having used official government sources extensively, he has hardly touched any party literature. Another feature of the writings on the movement so far is the predominance given by the authors to the struggles in Bengal, Andhra, and to some extent, Bihar, at the expense of other areas where the movement did make an impact. This dissertation hopes to fill the gap partly as it will take up the struggle in Kerala in the context of the cultural movement led by the People's cultural forum in the early '80s.

The history of the Communist parties shows how cultural movements had always been part of the political struggles. In Russia, the writings of Gorky

19 Works which have not been cited in this survey are A.K.Roy, *The Spring Thunder and After*, Calcutta, 1975; Rabindra Ray, *The Naxalites and Their Ideology*, Delhi, 1992, and Sankar Ghosh, *The Naxalite Movement: A Maoist Experiment*, Calcutta, 1974. Apart from them CRC CPI (M-L) in 1982 brought out their evaluation of the movement in a book titled *Towards a New Phase of Spring Thunder*, place of publication not given.

20 Prakash Singh, *The Naxalite Movement in India*, New Delhi, 1995.

and Mayakovsky helped in the consolidation of Leftist forces in the face of internal reaction and external aggression. In China, where Mao had spoken of the need for a 'cultural army' to confront reactionary ideas and values in the course of the New Democratic Revolution, Lu Hsun's writings played a similar role. In the 1930s and 1940s, when the horrors of capitalism became acute, and when the emergence of fascism threatened world peace, Left cultural activists were in the forefront of the struggle. If in the USA, it got expressed through the activities of the Progressive Literature Movement and the John Reed Clubs, in Great Britain, that role was taken up by the Workers' Theatre Movement, film societies and the Left Book Club. India was also no exception to this as the activities of the AIPWA and IPTA proves. In Kerala, the Progressive Literary Movement, which was an offshoot of the AIPWA, played a crucial role during the struggle against feudalism and British imperialism.

In the 1950s, there was a decline in radical cultural politics even as Communist parties all over the world began to lay stress on achieving socialism through parliamentary means. In the Soviet Union, for long the leader of the International Communist Movement, Khrushchev who came to power in 1953, began to speak of peaceful co-existence with American imperialism. A debate between the Communist Party of China and the Communist party of the Soviet Union ensued, at the end of which the former termed the Soviet leadership as 'revisionist'. The 'Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution' which began in China from the mid-60s under Mao's leadership was meant as a resistance to 'revisionism', both national and international. It inspired radical Marxist Movements elsewhere in the world. In India the Naxalbari uprising occurred in 1967, following which the Maoist Movement took firm root in the country.

Naxalbari inspired some cultural movements as well, notably the one by the students of Calcutta and other cities of West Bengal in 1970-71. Both Sumanta Banerjee and Biplab Dasgupta have, in their works, devoted chapters on this aspect, but only in so far as how it contributed to the ongoing political movement.²¹ In the late 1970s and 1980s, more organised forms of Naxalite cultural movements emerged, the People's Cultural Forum in Kerala and the Jana Natya Mandali in Andhra Pradesh being examples. But except for the party brochures giving an outline history of such organisations, no historical work has appeared so far.²²

Antonio Gramsci in *Prison Note Books*²³ provided a functional equivalent in western society for the Bolshevik strategy for constructing communism, without violating the spirit of Marxism. Lenin after taking into account that Russia was characterised by the subordination of civil society to the State under Czarist despotism, saw in organised violence by a revolutionary party the only means of destroying the existing order to bring about an egalitarian society. Gramsci, on the other hand, taking note of the fact that in western societies, regimes ruled more with the consent of the governed than with any excessive use of the coercive state apparatuses formulated a vastly different strategy, with a much reduced role for revolutionary violence and where the

21 Sumanta Banerjee, op.cit.; Biplab Dasgupta, op.cit.

22 K.A.Mohandas, "Resonance of Spring Thunder Over Kerala". That apart, Sumanta Banerjee has edited a collection of Naxalite poems from different parts of the country. Sumanta Banerjee, *Thema Book of Naxalite Poetry*, Calcutta, 1987.

23 Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, New York, 1971.

ethical-cultural aspects of the conquest of power was given primacy. Gramsci observes that:

In Russia the State was everything, civil society was primordial and gelatinous; in the west, there was a proper relation between state and civil society, and when the state trembled a sturdy structure of civil society was at once revealed. The State was only an outer ditch, behind which there stood a powerful system of fortress and earthworks.²⁴

For Gramsci, then, the October revolution was a special case, and not a general model. Gramsci distinguished between the political society (the State) and civil society. The former is composed of the judicial - coercive apparatus of the state (power as force); whereas the latter involves "the thick web of interpersonal relationships and represents the social surface over which is extended the cultural hegemony of the ruling elites (power as consent)."²⁵ It is here that the dominant class creates, through its diffusion of values, myths, beliefs, and ideals, its hegemony. According to Gramsci, a subordinate class should be able to elaborate its own ideological system, one competitive with the dominant system of beliefs and values and provide a political organisation that can sustain the struggle for state power with a unity of goals and will.

The key word in Gramsci, thus, is hegemony, as when he says that the struggle between the classes for domination is in essence a "struggle between two hegemonies". For Gramsci, the struggle to overthrow capitalism and build socialism is essentially a continuum in which the actual transfer of power is only one moment. "In the west", he says "a social group can or rather must

24 Ibid, p.238.

25 Ibid, p.245.

be in control even before it acquires governing power".²⁶ Sounds convincing, for as Franz Schurmann has observed:

Revolutions do not begin with the thunderclap of a seizure of power - that is their culmination. They start with attacks on the moral-political order and the traditional hierarchy of class statuses. They succeed when the power structure beset by its own irresolvable contradictions can no longer perform legitimately and effectively. It is often forgotten that the state has often in the past been rescued by the moral political order than the class hierarchy (authority) that the people still accepted.²⁷

Gramsci called the struggle for ideological hegemony the 'War of position' which is different from the 'war of movement' which characterised, say, the October revolution. But its relevance as a revolutionary strategy is not confined to western societies alone, for many regimes in the East has been found to exist, apart from the use of force, with the active consent of the governed. As Eric Hobsbaum has commented "the struggle for hegemony before as well as during the transition of power is not merely an aspect of the war of position characteristic of western countries but of all revolutionary strategy."²⁸ In India, for instance, the Gandhi-led National Movement has been studied through its efforts to establish an ideological hegemony over and above

26 Ibid, p.235.

27 Franz Shurmann, "System, Contradictions, and Revolutions in America", in Roderick Aya and Norman Miller, *The New American Revolution*, Illinois, 1971, pp.75-76.

28 Eric J. Hobsbaum, "Gramsci and Marxist Political Theory", in Anne Showstack Sassoon (ed.), *Approaches to Gramsci*, London, 1982; p.30.

the colonial ideology through which partly the British regime existed.²⁹

Though the colonial regime used the army, the police and other state apparatuses to suppress the anti-imperialist movement at various times, in the long run, it survived mainly on the basis of the hegemony exercised by the colonial ideology over the minds of the Indian people. The colonial ideology rested mainly on two myths it propagated: (a) the British rule was benevolent, and (b) the British were invincible. A Major aim of the nationalist movement led by Gandhi was to expose them, and counter the colonial ideology through a conscious effort at spreading nationalist consciousness among the people.

This dissertation, though on a relatively minor scale, attempts to analyse the efforts of the PCF to establish the ideological hegemony of the working class in Kerala in the early 1980s. In its activities, the PCF constituted more of a social movement than being an organisation wedded to mere literary and artistic activities. The relationship between the CRC CPI(M-L) and the PCF was stated to be 'dialectical' with the latter upholding the politics of Naxalbari, but having full autonomy in its organisational matters. In many places, the differences between the two were only marginal, with the PCF leading various struggles which a Party would have done in normal circumstances. However, the contradictions between the two proved to be too fundamental, in the final analysis, for them to be united for long. In fact, a major aim of this dissertation would be to show how the attempts by the PCF "to defeat that system of

29 Bipan Chandra, et al, *India's Struggle for Independence 1857-1947*, New Delhi, 1988.

meanings and values" [which an unequal society has generated] through "the most sustained skills of intellectual and educational work", which a Raymond Williams would call the 'Long Revolution',³⁰ came into conflict with the aims of a party led by the Bolshevik concept of capturing power.

Coming to the chapterisation, apart from discussing the ideological origins of the Naxalite Movement in general, the first chapter would deal, more specifically, with the early phase of the movement in Kerala, when its activities were confined to a few attacks on police stations and annihilations of individual landlords. The second chapter gives a general overview of the Marxist Cultural Movements in the twentieth century leading up to the Naxalbari-inspired cultural activities in India. The third chapter takes up the origins of the PCF, the forms it used to create a counter-hegemonic culture, and its relationship with the Party. It also argues how the contradictions between the two, in spite of certain common aims, brought the movement to a premature end.

A major thrust of this dissertation has been to locate the movement from its ideological-political perspective, and hence the sources used have been mostly of an 'internal' nature, with both party literature and the literature produced by the PCF, especially its organ 'Prerana' quoted heavily. In the first chapter, for a discussion on the ideology of the CPI(M-L), the party's journal *Liberation* in English between 1967 and 1972 has been extensively used. Most of these issues are available at the Archives on Contemporary History, JNU.

30 Raymond Williams, "You're A Marxist Aren't You?", in Robin Gable (ed.), *Resources of Hope - Culture, Democracy, Socialism*, London, 1989, p.76.

Apart from that, the "Eight Documents" which Charu Mazumdar wrote between 1965 and 1967 indicate his gradual parting of ways with the CPI(M). For the section on Kerala, the Private Records of Kunnikal Narayanan, Mandakini and Ajitha around whom the Naxalite movement in the State revolved during its early phase have been consulted. They are kept at the Calicut university archives, and contain letters and articles written by them, apart from the party literature. Ajitha's Memoirs (*Ormakurippuka*)³¹ helps to fill in the gaps, as do the newspapers of the time - *Statesman* in English, and *Mathrubhoomi* and *Deshabhimani* in Malayalam.

In the second chapter, for the first section on the Left cultural movements in the 1930s and 1940s in the west sources of a secondary nature have been used. For those portions dealing with the Marxist cultural movements in India like the AIPWA and IPTA, their resolutions and documents which have been collected by Sudhi Pradhan in three volumes have been consulted.³² Works like Thoppil Basi's *Olivile ormakalku sesham* tells us of their activities in association with the communist party in Kerala as well as their later disillusionment with it.³³ For the "cultural revolution" in Calcutta and other cities of West Bengal in the early '70s, *Liberation* again comes in handy. And for the section on the impact of Naxalbari on Malayalam literature, a

31 Ajitha, *Ormakurippukkal*, reprint, Kottayam, 1994.

32 Sudhi Pradhan, *Marxist Cultural Movement in India*, vol.1, 1979, vol.2, 1982, vol.3, 1985, Calcutta.

33 Thoppil Basi, *Olivile Ormakalkkusesham*, Kottayam, 1993.

survey of the Malayalam fiction of the times has been attempted. For the chapter on 'PCF', its 'organ' *Prerana* and the pamphlets it produced have been consulted. So too *Mass Line*, *Comrade* and *Inquilab* which the party brought out during this time. The plays and poems written by the PCF activists enable us to see how they constituted a break from the past. And interviews with former activists have helped to get clarity on many aspects.

CHAPTER I

CPI(M-L) AND THE NEW DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTION: THE KERALA EXPERIENCE (1967-70)

With the fourth general elections, the 20 years of Congress dominance in Indian politics came to an end. In the Lok Sabha, its majority came down from 219 seats in 1962 to a mere 52, whereas in the states it fared worse. In eight states it lost, even though in only four out of those, non-Congress governments could be formed - West Bengal, Kerala, Orissa and Tamil Nadu. On March 2, 1967, the United Front government consisting of the CPI(M), CPI, Bangla Congress and eleven other parties came to power in West Bengal. And with that the seeds for a third split in the Indian communist movement were sown. A radical section within the CPI(M) were unhappy over the recent spate of events - the party's shift to the right symbolised by its alliance with the 'revisionist' CPI and the building up of United Fronts with 'different democratic classes' which, in practise, meant even the congress dissenters and other parties on the right. It was in this situation that Charu Mazumdar, Kanu Sanyal and others belonging to the Siliguri subdivision of Darjeeling district organised the peasants of Naxalbari village for an armed agrarian uprising. March-April 1967 witnessed the peasants of Naxalbari occupying government owned and private lands, forcibly expelling the owners, harvesting the crops, seizing arms, ammunition and money, establishing 'people's courts' to try 'class enemies' and setting up a parallel government. In June, the state committee of the CPI(M) dissolved the Darjeeling district committee and the Siliguri committee and decided to expel the leaders of the revolt from the party. The Communist Party of China gave whole-hearted support to the Naxalbari uprising. When the

United Front Government mounted activities designed to suppress the movement, both the CPI and the CPI(M) came in for heavy criticism from the CPC. And until the rightwing takeover in China in the mid-70s, following Mao's death, the CPC gave unflinching support to the Naxalite movement in India.

The movement did not remain confined to West Bengal. It spread to Srikakulam in Andhra, Bhojpur in Bihar and elsewhere. Many radicals in the CPI(M) rebelled against its leadership, and either left the party on their own or got expelled. In November 1967 Shiv Kumar Mishra and Satyanarayan Singh from Bihar, Charu Mazumdar, Kanu Sanyal and Asit Sen from Bengal and others set up the All-India Coordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries (AICCCR) at Calcutta. Months later, on 22 April 1969, on the hundredth birth anniversary of Lenin, in front of a huge ~~crowd~~ at Calcutta, the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) (CPI(ML)) came into existence.

The party came into being amidst some controversy. There were, within the AICCCR, some people who believed that the party should be built 'from below' in the process of armed struggle. Others argued for the formation of the party after a thorough discussion on ideological issues, following which all 'revisionists' are eliminated. This was not acceptable to the leadership including Charu Mazumdar, and it was stated that:

The idea that the party should be formed only after all opportunist tendencies, alien trends and undesirable elements have been purged through class struggles is nothing but subjective idealism. To conceive of a party without contradictions, without the struggle between the opposites, i.e., to think of a pure and faultless party is indulging in mere idealist fantasy.¹

1 "It is Time to Form the Party", AICCCR Resolution, February 8, 1969, in *Liberation*, vol.2, no.5, March 1969, p.10.

What must have prompted Charu Mazumdar and others to go ahead with the formation of the party in spite of opposition was the belief that the AICCCR was not in a position to coordinate the various struggles emerging from different corners of the country, and that a party was required to lead the imminent revolution. The 'hurried' formation of the CPI (M-L), however, has invited criticisms from various quarters. Mohan Ram, for instance, sees an ulterior motive in the 'hasty' formation of the party, and the exclusion of the Andhra unit from it. He writes that "the two decisions - to expel the Andhra unit and to form a party - were almost simultaneous (the gap was just one day) suggesting an anxiety to exclude it from the new party."² He feels that the Bengal group would not have dominated the CPI (M-L) had the Andhra unit been part of it. Mohan Ram is also critical of the venue for the party formation, Calcutta, and the way it came into existence. With a touch of sarcasm he comments that "it was odd for a rural-based party to have been formed in India's biggest metropolis, and for a secret and underground party pledged to armed struggle to have its launching at a public rally".³ But his contention that many ML groups kept away from the new party does not hold good as, except Nagi Reddy's group in Andhra and as we shall see later, Kunikkal group in Kerala, the rest did join it.

NEW DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTION

Maoist in its ideology, the CPI(M-L) aimed for a New Democratic Revolution in the country. Mao, in the course of the Chinese revolutionary

2 Mohan Ram, *Maoism in India*, Delhi, 1971, p.105.

3 *ibid*, p.106.

experience, had prescribed for colonial and semi-colonial countries, the New Democratic Revolution (or the People's Democratic Revolution) which differed from the bourgeois democratic revolution up to the 20th century. In the colonies and the semi-colonies, because of its links with imperialism and feudalism, the bourgeoisie cannot lead the democratic revolution, especially after the world had got polarized into socialist countries and the imperialist bloc. Thus in these countries all the revolutionary forces including the peasantry and the petty-bourgeoisie should unite under the leadership of the working class and fight to liberate the nation from the yoke of imperialism and feudalism. About the New Democratic Revolution, Mao says that,

it is no longer a revolution of the old type led by the bourgeoisie with the aim of establishing a capitalist society and a state under bourgeois dictatorship. It belongs to the new type of revolution led by the proletariat with the aim, in the first stage of establishing a new democratic society and a state under the joint dictatorship of all the revolutionary classes. Thus this revolution actually serves the purpose of clearing a still wider path for the development of socialism.⁴

The ideologues of the Naxalbari were also clear about the New Democratic nature of the Revolution in India. According to them in 1947 India got transformed from a colonial, semi-feudal country to a semi-colonial, semi-feudal country. The over-dependence on agriculture, absence of proper land reforms, concentration of landholdings in a few hands, evictions, exploitation by moneylenders, and primitive methods of agriculture were pointed out as evidences for the semi-feudal nature of society; whereas the increasing hold of US imperialism and 'Soviet Social imperialism' was shown as indicative of

4 Mao Tse Tung, *Selected Works*, vol.II, Peking, 1975, p.344.

India's neo-colonial status. Sushital Ray Chaudhari, the editor of the Naxalite organ 'Deshabrati', wrote that the present stage of the Indian revolution,

is people's Democratic in nature; this is not a socialist revolution. At the present stage this revolution is directed towards overthrowing imperialism, big and monopoly native capital and feudalism and towards establishing a People's Democratic State.⁵

The agenda before the Marxist-Leninist forces in India in 1967, like before Mao in pre-revolutionary China, was not the immediate establishment of socialism, but instead the creation of a more democratic and egalitarian society, free from the yoke of imperialism and feudalism. The political resolution of the CPI (M-L) glorified the Telengana Struggle of 1946-51, and endorsed the strategy known as the 'Andhra thesis', which had been defeated by Ranadive at the second congress of the CPI in 1948 and the Communist party steered towards a 'Trotskyite' theory of both the democratic revolution and the socialist revolution at one stroke.⁶ 'The four mountains' weighing the Indian people down, according to the CPI(M-L), were US imperialism, Soviet social imperialism, feudalism and comprador bureaucratic capitalism. The last two were stated to be the props of imperialism in the country and was represented by the Indian ruling classes, the 'lackeys' of imperialism. Of all the contradictions in the country - between imperialism and the Indian people, between capital and labour, between the ruling classes themselves, and between feudalism and the masses of the people - for the CPI (M-L), the last one represented the principal contradiction, the solution of which would solve

5 Sushital Ray Chaudhuri, "Ranadive Tries to Deceive", *Liberation*, vol.1, no.1, November 1967, p.17.

6 Political Resolution of the Communist Party of India (Marxist Leninist), *Liberation*, vol.3, nos.7-9, May-July, 1970, p.15.

all other contradictions. The New Democratic Revolution, through a 'protracted people's war' under the aegis of the working class was to settle that. "The revolution" it was stated,

will establish the dictatorship of the working class, the peasantry, the petty bourgeoisie and even a section of the small and middle bourgeoisie under the leadership of the working class. They together constitute the overwhelming majority of the Indian people. It will be a state guaranteeing democracy for 90 percent of the people and enforcing dictatorship over a handful of people. That is why it is people's democracy.⁷

The drawing up of parallels between pre-revolution China and post-independent India has brought forth criticisms. Souren Bose, one of the leaders of the movement during its early phase, in a later article, pointing to the emergence of the rural bourgeoisie, the kulaks and the kulak economy, notes that there were drastic changes in the Indian rural scene, which the early Naxalites failed to notice.⁸ He also argues that the traditional landlords were fast losing their political clout and that the old theory of homogeneity of the peasant class was losing validity owing to the appearance of vast numbers of rural proletariat along with the consolidation of the kulak class, which distinguished the Indian agrarian scene from the pre-revolution Chinese countryside.⁹ Thus, by the 80s, Souren Bose had some reservations regarding the slogan 'Chinese path is our path', which he, as part of the Naxalite movement, had upheld once.

7 ibid, p.16.

8 Souren Bose, "Maoism in India: Theoretical Inconsistencies and Historical Roots", *The Marxist Review*, vol.6, no.11, 1 May 1983, pp.403-4.

9 ibid.

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TACTICS AND STRATEGY FOR THE REVOLUTION

For carrying out the New Democratic Revolution in India, the M-L forces in the country borrowed heavily from the tactics and strategy of the CPC in pre-revolution China. One amongst them was the United Front tactics, whereby all the revolutionary forces in the country were to be brought under the leadership of the working class in the fight against feudalism and imperialism. The CPI and the CPI(M) for whom united front tactics meant the forming of alliances before and after the elections 'to form the government and stay in power' was criticised,

the party that is not engaged in directing an armed struggle has no business in talking about a united front.... A united front can be successfully built up only by directing successfully an armed struggle... only a revolutionary party can carry out this task.¹⁰

With regard to elections, it was observed that as revolutionary situation prevailed both nationally and internationally, giving parliamentary illusions to the people will only benefit the ruling classes. According to a Resolution passed by the AICCCR in April 1969:

our experience, like the experience gained by many other parties, shows that the so-called interweaving of parliamentary and non-parliamentary path, in practise, amounts only to the degeneration of the party into a parliamentary party, into the position of appendage to the reactionary ruling classes.¹¹

However, there were differences of opinion amongst the M-L forces on the question of elections. For the central leadership, constituted mainly by those from West Bengal, the boycott of elections was a basic question of

10 Charu Mazumdar, "The United Front and the Revolutionary Party", *Liberation*, vol.1, no.1, July 1968, p.6.

11 Resolution on party organisation, 22.4.1969, *Liberation*, vol.3, no.7-9, May-July 1970, p.17.

revolutionary struggles for a whole period, whereas for the Andhra unit under Nagi Reddy, it was a mere tactic to be used after taking into account the time context and region specificities. Nagi Reddy felt that in those areas where the revolutionary movement was weak, participation in elections was alright if only to propagate politics and to bring the broad masses into the movement. He refused to resign from the Andhra Legislative Assembly within the time specified by the AICCCR, and his expulsion from that organisation thus became inevitable. The Andhra unit later got itself constituted as Andhra Pradesh Revolutionary Communist Committee (APRCC).

It has been argued that the CPI(M-L) decision to boycott elections was faulty as China, whom it was comparing with India had no tradition of parliamentary democracy whereas India had. Lenin's using of the *duma* is also cited as proof for positing that parliamentary means as a tactic is not anathema to Marxism. Biplab Dasgupta, for instance, writes that "by their blatant refusal to participate in parliamentary activities, the Naxalites have failed to use the legal facilities made available in elections, and also to use the machinery of parliament to propagate their views and mobilise public opinion in their favour."¹² But then such observations point to an inability to understand properly the ideological break which gave rise to the Naxalite movement in India.

More controversial was Charu Mazumdar's stand on mass organisations. Opposing the stand of people like Parimal Dasgupta who overemphasised the role of trade unions, he went to the other extreme of totally negating the role

12 Biplab Dasgupta, *The Naxalite Movement*, New Delhi, 1974, p.126.

of trade unions which he believed were the source of economism and revisionism. At one point of time Mazumdar went to the extent of saying that mass organisations are obstacles in the path of armed revolution. Questioning of this position came from within itself. Promode Sengupta, for example, as early as 1970, warned that "To say that the revolutionary party will not engage in trade unions is tantamount to escaping from the battlefield with the entire working class left to the wolves."¹³ A CPI(M-L) document of the early 80s making an evaluation of the movement, and which is otherwise quite sympathetic to Charu Mazumdar, also criticises his views on trade unions:

the formulation that the trade unions and mass organisations are needed only where there is no revolutionary situation is basically wrong. When he [Mazumdar] relates this formulation to the specific situation in India, and totally negates the necessity of building up mass organisations, the gravity of the mistake increases.¹⁴

The CPI (M-L) claimed itself to be the 'party of armed struggle', and hoped through 'a protracted people's war' to 'liberate' the nation from the clutches of imperialism and vestiges of feudalism. China, again, served as the model. There, as Lin Piao succinctly put it: "To rely on the peasants, build rural base areas and use the countryside to encircle and finally capture the cities - such was the way to victory in the Chinese revolution."¹⁵ In India too because of the uneven development in different parts of the country, the party believed

13 Promode Sengupta, *Naxalbari and Indian Revolution* (first published in Bengali entitled *Biplob Kon Pathe* in 1970), Calcutta, 1983, p.71.

14 CRC CPI(M-L), *Towards a new Phase of Spring Thunder*, place and publisher not given, 1982, p.75.

15 Lin Piao, "Longlive the Victory of People's War", *Liberation*, vol.1, no.8, June 1968, p.68.

that power could not be seized through an urban insurrection nor could there be a country wide uprising. Instead, like in China, only an area-wise seizure of power through armed guerilla warfare was possible. According to Charu Mazumdar, 'annihilations' constituted an important part in the struggle. To quote him, "the annihilation of the class enemy is the higher form of struggle while the act of annihilating class enemies through guerilla action is the primary stage of the guerilla struggle." Annihilations liberates the people from the oppression of the landlord class and its state, and leads to the formation of 'liberated zones' which he defined as "a peasant area from which all the class enemies have been ousted."¹⁶

Charu Mazumdar's annihilation line has come in for much criticism. Mohan Ram, who believes that the Srikakulam movement had all the potential of becoming the 'Yenan of India', but for the 'annihilation line' writes that "when the CPC was underscoring the importance of organising '90 percent of the masses', the CPI(M-L) was embarking on an infantile adventure in the countryside, resorting to the killing of individual landlords,"¹⁷ and that "Mao specifically meant annihilation - and not killing - the enemy (that is, the Japanese occupation army) and not any class enemy."¹⁸ With regard to the feudal system it is pointed out that Mao had said "our task is to abolish the

16 Charu Mazumdar, "It is by Fighting Against Revisionism that the Peasant Struggle will have to be Taken Forward", in *Historic Eight Documents*, no place, no publisher, 1974., p.59.

17 Mohan Ram, op.cit., p.116.

18 ibid, p.132.

feudal system, to wipe out the landlords as a class not as individuals."¹⁹ Souren Bose, too, once the staunchest supporter of Charu Mazumdar, in a later article tried to establish parallels between many of the Mazumdar's principles - the method of forming 'guerilla units', asking the students to give up education, the doctrine that those who have not made their hands crimson with the blood of class enemies would not be called a communist, etc. -and classical anarchism.²⁰ The CPI (M-L) leadership was obviously led by the belief that the ruling classes in India being totally alienated from the people, an armed revolution was possible even without political propaganda. They clearly underestimated the sway of ruling class ideology over the people. The result was "in the absence of political propaganda", as Biplab Dasgupta observes, "villagers saw in the campaign for the liquidation of class enemies not more than the murder of a co-villager by strangers from towns."²¹

In spite of the setbacks, Charu Mazumdar held optimistic views about the revolution. In Late 1970, when a group of peasants snatched some rifles from the police at Magurjan in Purnea district, he declared that the 'People's Liberation Army' of West bengal had emerged and confidently wrote that "I do not indulge in day-dreaming when I say that by 1970-71, the People's Liberation Army will march across vast areas of West bengal".²² However, his

19 ibid, p.134.

20 Souren Bose, "Modern Anarchism and the Naxalite Movement", *The Marxist Review*, vol.15, no.2, August 1981, p.133.

21 Biplab Dasgupta, op.cit., p.58.

22 Charu Mazumdar, "March Onward, Day of Victory is Near", *Liberation*, September-December 1970, pp.2-3.

hopes were belied when by 1972, the first phase of the movement had collapsed due to internal dissensions and State repression. In July 1972, Mazumdar was arrested and he died while in police custody. But before that the movement had spread to Bihar and Andhra and made its presence in places like the Punjab, Assam and Kerala, the last of which we shall discuss next.

NAXALITE MOVEMENT IN KERALA (1967-70)

In Kerala, in the assembly elections of 1967, the Congress was reduced to a minority of 9 seats. The United Front consisting of 7 parties including the CPI(M), CPI, RSP and the Muslim League won 117 out of the 133 seats, the CPI(M) alone capturing 52 seats out of them. A united front government with E.M.S. Namboodiripad as the Chief Minister assumed office in March 1967. But within two years contradictions within the front had caused the downfall of this government. The same period witnessed the emergence of the Naxalite movement in the State.

IDEOLOGICAL ORIGINS

It was Kunnikkal Narayanan, a CPI (M) member in the 27th division of Kozhikode district, who from 1965 onwards took it upon himself to 'expose' the leadership of the party. Like in West Bengal, the beginning were made in the ideological front, the rebels claiming that the 'neo-revisionist' leadership was trying to befool the revolutionary ranks by deferring the ideological and political questions, and instead putting the organisational tasks in the forefront.

Kunnikkal wrote to E.M.S. Namboodiripad about this:

You say that such an ideological discussion is not necessary for our immediate practical activities... the Dange clique refused to conduct an ideological discussion. Our C.C. is deferring to conduct the same while you consider such a discussion now not at all necessary.... It looks as if ideological discussion is a spare

time job, meant to be conducted leisurely and when the party has no pressing problems before it....²³

Namboodiripad rather bluntly replied that "having made your criticisms in this letter, you are bound to accept and carry out the decision of the central committee".²⁴ But this was not the end of the matter, and the debate was to continue in the coming months.

Meanwhile, the Indo-Pak war of 1965 had brought the rift within the CPI(M) into the open. Charu Mazumdar, not swayed by patriotic emotions, made his position very clear on this issue:

By attacking Pakistan, the ruling class again wants to create a tide of bourgeois nationalism. But this time it is clear as daylight that India alone is the aggressor. So, as a result of the defeat of the Indian army, the anti-government struggle will fast crystallize among the masses. So Marxists want today that the aggressive Indian army should be defeated.²⁵

At the same time E.M.S. Namboodiripad, on behalf of the C.C. had issued a statement which claimed that the war had broken out because Pakistan had sent infiltrators into Kashmir and that "our national territory has come under attack... this demands of our party that it helps the government in the defence measures it is taking to resist any Pakistani attack."²⁶ He was also worried that,

23 Letter from Kunnikkal Narayanan to E.M.S. Namboodiripad dated 5.7.1966, Private Records of Kunnikkal Narayanan [hereafter PRKN], Calicut University Archives (hereafter CUA), Acc No.9.5, Correspondence [hereafter C] 175 vol.3.

24 Letter from E.M.S Namboodiripad to Kunnikkal Narayanan dated 15.7.1966, PRKN CUA, Acc. No.9.5 C179 vol.3.

25 Charu Mazumdar, "What Possibility the Year 1965 is Indicating"?, *Historic Eight Documents*, p.34.

26 *People's Democracy*, vol.1, no.20, 7 November 1965, p.3.

the social consequences which follow from these economic transformations will radically alter the face of Indian society.... Shortages of consumption goods, disruption of family life, inadequate facilities for the education and public health of citizens, etc. will raise innumerable problems and lead to acute social conflicts.²⁷

Kunnikkal wondered why E.M.S. Namboodiripad should be worried because "capitalist society", as Lenin pointed out, "has always been an endless horror".²⁸

The war also brought the nationality question in India, especially the Kashmir issue to the forefront. E.M.S. Namboodiripad who had spoken out for the different nationalities in India in the 1940s had by the mid-sixties changed his position dramatically. In 1965, on Kashmir, he wrote:

It does not serve any purpose if India tried to occupy that part of Kashmir which is in Pakistan's possession or if Pakistan tries to occupy that part in India's possession... these problems must be solved through peaceful means.²⁹

Earlier, when the Kashmir issue was being debated at the UN, E.M.S. Namboodiripad had written:

Now the problem has been raised in the UN as well. It is going to be difficult for our representative to explain things there. If only it had been made clear that the people in the Indian part of Kashmir enjoys more autonomy than the Pakistanis, Baluchis or the Kashmiris living in Pak-occupied Azad Kashmir, our position would have become more secure.³⁰

27 ibid.

28 During the first World War Lenin had said:
...capitalist society has always been an endless horror. And if this most reactionary of all wars is now preparing a horrible end for that society, we have no reasons to drop into despair. V.I. Lenin, *Selected Works*, vol.5, London, 1944, p.78.

29 *Deshabhimani*, 14 October 1965.

30 ibid, 28.9.1965.

E.M.S. Namboodiripad was criticised for "reducing the Indo-Pak conflict on Kashmir to one of grabbing territories" and for "advocating each party to the dispute to be satisfied with what each has already grabbed."³¹ Kunnikkal sent a letter to *Deshabhimani*, the CPI(M) daily in Malayalam, which was promptly returned for being "too harsh and not in line with the paper's policy". When he wrote about it to Namboodiripad,³² he was curtly told that "... our party has taken a decision which considers Kashmir as a part of India, but with a special status" and that "any effort to disturb those arrangements made in the Constitution which conferred a special status on Kashmir would be wrong...."³³ Clearly, the Kashmiri people had no role to play in Namboodiripad's scheme of things. For the CPI(M) too, by then, "self-determination" and secession of nationalities were no longer in the agenda. But for the rebels within the CPI(M), and indeed for the CPI(M-L) formed later, there was no doubt that the demand of the Kashmiri people for self-determination should be supported. In an editorial in *Liberation*, the organ of the CPI(M-L), it was posited that:

Marxist-Leninists should support the right of the Kashmiris on both sides of the cease-fire line to determine their own fate. If the toiling people of India refuses to support this very just demand and to adopt a revolutionary programme on the national question and continue to rally behind their common enemy, the imperialist -

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- 31 Kunnikkal Narayanan, "More on EMS", CUA, Acc. No.9, 3 English Article [hereafter EA I], vol.1.
- 32 Letter from Kunnikkal Narayan to EMS dated 5.9.1965, PRKN, CUA, Acc. No.9.5. C82, vol.3.
- 33 Letter from EMS to Kunnikkal Narayanan dated 3.10.1965, PRKN Correspondence, 1956-66, CUA, Acc No.9.5C91 vol.3.

feudal - comprador combine, that oppresses both the toiling people of Kashmir and themselves, they can never be free.³⁴

For the naxalites, the settlement of the nationality question was part of the New Democratic Revolution in the country.³⁵

More fundamental were the differences on the question of 'revisionism'. For the rebels within as CPI(M), revisionism was an international phenomenon beginning with the 20th congress of the CPSU in 1956. Khrushchev's Soviet Union which advocated peaceful co-existence, peaceful competition and peaceful transition to socialism, for them, had become Soviet imperialist, and was in alliance with US imperialism. What was put across by the CPSU leaders at the 20th Congress was a "Social democratic concept in essence, veiled in revolutionary trimmings in order not to rouse the suspicion of its loyal followers in the Indian Communist Movement."³⁶ But for the CPI(M) leadership, represented amongst others, by E.M.S. Namboodiripad 'revisionism' was only a local phenomenon. It was only a question of Dange and others in the CPI 'distorting' the Soviet leaders' views, and there was no shift to a 'new' parliamentary orientation. Says Namboodiripad: "A careful study of these pronouncements of the Soviet and other leaders would... show that the interpretations put on them is nothing but a distortion and that there is no

34 *Liberation*, vol.1, no.4, February 1968, p.2.

35 Victor M. Fic claims that apart from the agrarian question, the nationality question in India provided the Naxalites with the 'main source of social power of tremendous potential' in Victor M. Fic, *Kerala: Yenan of India Rise of Communist Power: 1937-1969*, Bombay, 1970, pp.417-19.

36 Kunnikkal Narayanan, "More on EMS", op.cit.

question of a new parliamentary orientation."³⁷ He added that there was no justification in the view that Khrushchev's leadership had accepted the "social-democratic concept of winning socialism through the bourgeois parliamentary democratic state".³⁸

However, in the textbook *Fundamentals of Marxism-Leninism*, published by order of the 20th Congress of the CPSU, in a subsection titled "on utilising parliament in the revolution" it was stated that:

... the situation has now changed and the revolutionary parties have a different attitude to the parliamentary struggle. Analyzing the conditions of the working class in our day, the 20th congress of the CPSU arrived at the conclusion that the working class can now make use of the machinery of parliamentary democracy to win power.³⁹

There was thus a definite shift in the position of the Soviet leadership on the question of transition to socialism, a shift which had its impact on the Indian communist movement as well. The Polit Bureau of the CPI observed in as early as 1957 that "Parliament and the state legislatures have become the most important forums of fighting for the cause of the people and the country."⁴⁰ In 1959, E.M.S. Namboodiripad himself said that "... because India enjoys some democratic rights it is possible to use the parliamentary methods in the fight against imperialism and feudalism."⁴¹ The Party went on to contest

37 E.M.S Namboodiripad, "On the Party Programme", in *People's Democracy*, vol.2, no.2, 9 January 1966, p.6.

38 *ibid*:

39 *Fundamentals of Marxism-Leninism*, Moscow, 1963 (second ed.), p.27.

40 *New Age*, vol. 6, no.10, September 1957, p.21.

41 *New Age*, vol.3, no.7, July 1959, p.57.

elections, and in 1957 under Namboodiripad's leadership won the assembly elections in Kerala. Two years later, in the wake of the so-called "liberation struggle" against it led by the reactionary forces in the state, the central government dismissed the first communist ministry from power. In the 1967 elections the communist parties in the state aligned with the Muslim League, one of those very forces which had brought it down in 1959. By then the battlelines had been clearly drawn inside the CPI(M). During the elections, wall writings in the name of 'Red Guards' appeared throughout the state denouncing E.M.S. Namboodiripad, as the "no.1 revisionist in league with the revisionists of the CPI who fondly believed that communism could be achieved by the ballot box and democratic means."⁴²

TOWARDS A SPLIT

During this time the rebel activities in the north of the state were centred around the family of Kunnikkal Narayanan, consisting of himself, his wife Mandakini, a retired headmistress of Gujarati high school, Calicut and their only daughter Ajitha. In the beginning their activities were purely ideological. Around 1966, in the name of one T.V.Appu, a veteran party worker who had recently become inactive due to ill-health, they started "Marxist publications" which later became "Rebel publications" from Calicut. The initial problems of lack of funds and translators were gradually overcome. The first pamphlet they published was "Stalin, an evaluation" from the CPC publication, *The Great Debate in the International Communist Movement*. Later, "the General Line in the International Communist Movement", "Proletarian Revolution and the

42 Rabindra Ray, *Naxalites and Their Ideology*, Delhi, 1992, p.93.

Revisionist Khrushchev", and most of Mao's important articles including "combat liberalism" were published.⁴³ Their target was the CPI(M) leadership who continued, according to them, to be pro-Soviet in spite of their public utterances. The party leadership was not happy over these activities, and the state committee issued a statement to the press clarifying that the CPI(M) "has got no connection with those publications".⁴⁴ Azheekodan Raghavan, party's joint secretary, advised T.V. Appu to "discontinue the publications".⁴⁵ When that failed to evoke the desired result Kunnikkal Narayanan, who was considered to be behind these activities, was expelled from the party in January 1967.

Undeterred by the expulsion, the rebels continued with their activities. In March, following the naxalbari uprising, they set up at Calicut a 'Naxalbari Karshaka Samara Sahayaka Samithi'. Such organisations came up in other parts of Kerala too, including Palghat and Trivandrum. In August, when Sundarayya, the CPI(M) general secretary came to Calicut to attend a party convention, he had to confront a hostile pro-naxalbari crowd with placards denouncing CPI(M)'s stand on the Naxalbari uprising.⁴⁶ This event got reported in *Deshabradi*, the Naxalite organ in Bengali. Evidently, the happenings in Kerala were getting the attention of the revolutionary leadership in West

43 Kunnikkal Narayanan, "Mao Tse Tung Thought Sheds its Brilliance over Kerala", PRKN, CUA, Acc No.9.3 EA 14, vol.1.

44 *Deshabhimani*, 16.7.1966.

45 Letter from Azheekodan Raghavan to T.V.Appu, PRKN, CUA, Acc. No.9.5.c. 223 vol.3.

46 K. Ajitha, *Ormakurippukal* (first published 1982), Kottayam 1994, pp.21, 22.

Bengal. In November, when the AICCCR was formed at Calcutta, Kunnikkal and N.C.Sekhar, an old-timer in the CPI(M) who had recently got into trouble with the leadership leading to his ouster later, were invited for its first conference. N.C.Sekhar could not make it to the conference, but Kunnikkal and Philip M. Prasad, former State Secretary of the students federation attended it, where they were told to organise Naxalbari type of struggles in Kerala. After a meeting at Ernakulam in February 1968, those who had come out of the CPI(M) in the state including some Trade Union leaders like Vazhoor Vishwam, Jose Abraham, and P.K. Gopalakrishnapillai, along with Kunnikkal set up a Kerala Coordination Committee(KCC) to coordinate revolutionary activities here. The KCC issued a declaration denouncing the 'revisionist' CPI and the 'neo-revisionist' CPI(M) for betraying the Indian revolution. It pledged to uphold Marxism-Leninism Mao Tse Tung thought, and to carry out armed struggle in the state as part of the New Democratic Revolution. The KCC also decided to bring out a Malayalam magazine *Idathupaksham* from Ernakulam.

Meanwhile, some of the actions of the United Front government angered the Naxalites further. T.V.Thomas, the Industry Minister, went to Japan to 'plead' for foreign investment in the State. K.R.Gouri, the Revenue Minister declared that the government had no qualms in importing food from the U.S., which was then busy bombing Vietnam. And, when some anti-U.S. protesters in Trivandrum set fire to a USIS van, E.M.S. Namboodiripad, the Chief Minister expressed regrets and promised prompt action against the guilty.⁴⁷ The Naxalites claimed that the new government was anti-working class in its

47 Partha Chatterjee, "Phrases and Facts About Kerala", *Liberation*, vol.2, no.3, January 1968, p, 74-75.

orientation on August 6, 1967, Manjooran, the Labour Minister had said in an interview that though "his government would protect the legitimate rights of the Workers to agitate, it would also ensure that the legitimate rights of the management were equally protected".⁴⁸ Later, police actions were initiated against the management of 'Hindustan Construction Company', which with the help of the Canadian government was building a Rs.68 crore hydro-electric project.⁴⁹ Matters got worse when contrary to promises made before the elections, the food and employment situation deteriorated during the united front regime. As E.M.S. Namboodiripad himself admitted "People today have... less food than ten months ago. The problems of unemployment has also become worse during the last ten months."⁵⁰

The CPC gave fillip to the Naxalite activities in the state through their constant criticism of the United Front government. The *Peking Review* observed that:

the Kerala State government which enforces the fascist rule of the central government is part of the State machine operating in the interests of the landlords and bureaucrat-comprador bourgeoisie. Namboodiripad has dispatched police units to suppress the peasants' struggle to seize land. The State's minister has forbidden the workers to take part in struggles to besiege capitalists and has sent police to suppress them....⁵¹

48 *Statesman*, 6.8.1967.

49 Partha Chatterjee, op.cit., pp.74-75.

50 "EMS Answers the Washington Post", *People's Democracy*, vol.4, no.2, 14.1.1968, p.6.

51 *Peking Review*, vol.10, no.37, September 8, 1967, pp.38-39 quoted in Victor M. Fic, op.cit., p.427.

In the evolving scenario many did come out of the CPI(M), the rebel leadership claiming the support of around 25 percent to 35 percent of the cadres, whereas Sundarayya put it around 15 percent. At its peak, the number of Naxalites in Kerala stood around 4,000.⁵² In the South of the State, K.P.Kosala Ramdas, an advocate and former mayor of Trivandrum, apart from being a Legislative Assembly member and leader of the All-Kerala Electrical Workers Union had got expelled from the CPI(M) for criticising the party's policies. The rebels in the South had tried unsuccessfully to get M. Anirudhan, a party leader in Trivandrum district punished for attacking the Chinese during the war and for donating blood. At that time E.M.S. Namboodiripad had defended Anirudhan who got a parliamentary ticket and went on to defeat R. Sankar, the former Chief Minister. Further north, in Canannore district, KPR Gopalan, the legendary hero of the communist movement in the 1940s had also broken away from the party. But he refused to have anything to do with Kunnikkal Narayanan and later formed his own Bolshevik Revolutionary communist party. There was thus very little co-ordination between these various revolutionary groups and individuals in the state. The attempts at coordinating the movement through KCC did not take off. *Idathupaksham*, its organ did not come out after a few issues. But being opposed to party bureaucratization and the imposition of strict discipline from a central leadership above, the Naxalites in Kerala, like elsewhere, did not mind carrying out actions which were not

52 Robert L. Hardgrave, "The Kerala Communists: Contradictions of Power", in *Essays in the Political Sociology of South India*, New Delhi, 1979, p.237.

done after consultations with a central leadership. The actions in Tellicherry and Pulpally are a case in point.

TELLICHERRY-PULPALLY ACTIONS

In Canannore district where the sway of the CPI(M) was quite strong, defections were few. Still a few important members did break away from the party and join hands with Kunnikkal. Among them were K.P. Narayanan, one-time state Vice President of KSYF, and Kandalot Karunan, a CPI(M) state committee member in 1965 and district commandant of the party's 'Gopala Sena'. Others included A. Achuthan, K.C.Nandan and A. Balakrishnan. Events in Canannore district in the mid-60s provided the objective conditions for their agenda of armed struggle. The weaving industry, depending on the vagaries of the international market was going through a bad phase, rendering many unemployed. The situation was made worse when, following the state government's passing of Minimum Wages Act, the owners of Ganesh Beedi shifted their units from Canannore to Mangalore in Karnataka state and overnight some 20,000 workers were thrown into unemployment. The political parties they approached did not do anything concrete except organising them "in the usual picketing of government offices, mostly the central ones, public processions and public meetings while at the same time holding negotiations with the owners".⁵³ The unemployed workers were forced to take up work as agrarian labourers which put added pressure on the already crowded agrarian sector bringing the wages down considerably. It was in these circumstances

53 "Tellicherry-Pulpally Station Raids - A Review", unsigned article, no date, PRKN CUA, Acc No.9.3 EA 9, vol.1.

that the rebels who had come out of the CPI(M) set out to work amongst them, to organise them for militant action.

But the Maoists they were, the Naxalites in Canannore district were convinced that the revolution must begin from the countryside. And in Wynad, 3,500 ft. above sea level, surrounded by the Western Ghats on three sides, and bordering Mysore, they found the ideal place for that. Here was one area in Kerala where the land reforms had passed by without bringing about any perceptible changes - plantations which constituted a high percentage of cultivated area here being excluded from the reforms - and where the 'semi-feudal, semi-colonial' situation could be said to have existed. Foreign planters owned about one lakh twenty five thousand acres of tea and coffee plantations. Of the rest of the cultivable land, 75 percent was owned by Dewaswam officials and individual jenmies, the former owning 27,000 acres of forest land as well.⁵⁴ The Kurichyas who had a long history of militant tradition which was exemplified during the beginning of the last century during the Pazzashi rebellion and other tribals constituted 20 percent of the population, owning little land and being exploited by the jenmies, the Dewaswom -forest officials, and moneylenders. Then there were the Christian immigrants, mainly from Meenachil taluk in Kottayam district, owning small plots of land, the uncertainties of the world market system deciding their destinies. There was acute tension in the area, with over 800 cases of illegal occupation of land against the peasants, mostly tribals. And to prevent any

54 "Nalpathiattamathe Manikkoril Mattonnu Sambavichu Athanu Pulpally", Unsigned article, no date, PRKN, CUA, Acc. no. 9.3, Malayalam Article [hereafter MA], vol.2.

untoward happenings, the government had set up an MSP camp and wireless station at Pulpally.

The politics of Naxalbari had reached Wynad as well, with Varghese, Sankaran master, Narayanan Nair, Thettamala Krishnankutty and K.K. Annan coming out of the CPI(M) protesting against the party's policies. They got in touch with Kunnikkal and the stage was set for the Tellicherry-Pulpally actions. Tirunelly, a forest area in Wynad was chosen to be their 'liberated zone', from where activities could be expanded later. The plan was to attack the Tellicherry police station which was situated some 40 miles west of Tirunelly first, collect arms and then march to Tirunelly where they would be joined by a group who would have attacked the Pulpally MSP camp and wireless station twenty-four hours after the Tellicherry police station raid. This way they hoped to link the struggle in Wynad with the one in Tellicherry. The Tellicherry action was entrusted to a High Command consisting of Kunnikkal, K.P.Narayanan and V.K.Balan. For conducting the raid, four companies consisting of six to nine squads of ten members each with a leader and a deputy were also formed. In Wynad a seventeen member Revolutionary Council with a five-member High Command consisting of Varghese, Philip, Ajitha, Krishnankutty and Kunhaman were set up.⁵⁵

Before the actions could take place, however, the differences which had existed from the beginning between Kunnikkal and the central leadership reached a flashing point. In May 1968, Kunnikkal had come back from the second conference of AICCCR with apparent differences. KCC's declaration of

55 *ibid.*

February 1968 was not published in *Liberation* until June and that too only after a revolutionary journal in the Punjab *The People's Path* had done it. Charu Mazumdar and others constituting the central leadership was obviously swayed by the persistent allegations of Kunnikkal's 'CIA connections'. In fact, Nagi Reddy's main condition for joining the AICCCR had been that Kunnikkal should not be part of it. Mazumdar had by then begun to recognise Kosalaramdas and Ambadi Sankarankutty Menon as his organisation's representatives in Kerala. Finally, almost inevitably, Kunnikkal was expelled from the AICCCR in October 1968. Though it must have come as a shock to them Kunnikal and others decided to go ahead with their plans.

At Tellicherry, on the night of November 20th, the squad responsible for carrying out the raid assembled at K.P.'s tutorials, a few yards away from the police station. This tutorial owned by K.P.Narayanan had served as a venue for secret meetings and study classes in the past. That night on learning that there was extra security at the police station, they postponed the raid. Next night they met again but the attack took place only in the wee hours of the 22nd. Only around 300 people had turned up instead of the 600 expected from throughout the State. Apart from Kunnikkal, there was Stephen from Kottayam, Vasu from Kozhikode, and some comrades from Wynad, but most were from in and around Tellicherry. Of those who participated "90 percent were beedi workers, and the rest agricultural labourers, primary and secondary schools teachers and college students from Tellicherry."⁵⁶ The attack, however, proved to be a disaster. On reaching the police station "with spears,

56 *ibid.*

knives, acid-bulbs and dynamites,"⁵⁷ they heard the shouting of the policemen, following which almost everyone fled. A dynamite thrown at the police station did not explode. After the fiasco, the group split and scattered to different parts of the state, but within days, almost every one was rounded up, with Kunnikkal himself surrendering at the Trichur police station two weeks later.⁵⁸

Their comrades in Wynad were not aware of the disaster at Tellicherry, their only means to know about it being a radio transistor which gave but a brief mention of the raid. In the early hours of the 24th, the Pulpally action took place. A group of 60 out of the 'recruited' 400 first attacked the wireless station and the MSP camp using country made bombs and spears, killing a wireless operator and seriously injuring a sub-inspector. In the process, one of their own men was injured by a bomb he was carrying, forcing them to give up plans for attacking the nearby police station and Dewaswom office as well as the destruction of the Registrar office. From Pulpally they set out for Tirunelly, and on their way, looted the houses of two landlords/moneylenders. Their moneylending accounts were destroyed and the grain looted was distributed. They reached Tirunelly, where in the forests they met with further disaster. Kisan Thomman, a peasant guerilla got critically injured when the bombs he was carrying blew him apart. To relieve him of the pain, on his request, one amongst them, shot him dead. Their wait for the Tellicherry comrades also proved to be futile. When no news came of them, they decided

57 *Mathrubhoomi*, 23 November 1968.

58 *Mathrubhoomi*, 8 December 1968.

to split, promising to meet again. However, except Varghese who was to carry out more actions a year later, all were caught.

In the wake of the Tellicherry-Pulpally actions, the opposition in the state demanded the resignation of the government, claiming that the latter was involved in these actions. P. Parameswaran, the All India President of Jana Sangh alleged that CPI(M)'s 'Gopalasena' had participated in these raids.⁵⁹ But even though some people like K.P.Kesavan, a former captain of a local unit of "Gopalasena" were arrested in connection with the case, there is no evidence to suggest that the CPI(M) was consciously involved in these actions. On the other hand the polemics it used against the 'extremists' in the coming days suggests otherwise. In December, a resolution of the CPI(M) State Committee stated that "the activities would neither help the revolution or mass movements, on the other hand, they would only betray the revolution and give a handle to the enemies of revolution".⁶⁰ The party's general secretary Sundarayya saw "CIA hands in these actions" and "attempts to oust the popular united front government", and warned that the party was prepared to face the challenge posed by the "extremists", and if necessary field 35,000 strong volunteer corps including 10,000 women to counter them.⁶¹

More startling to Kunnikkal and others must have been the reaction of other Naxalite groups. KPR Gopalan saw police, CPI(M) and CIA hands in these

59 *Mathrubhoomi*, 1 December 1968.

60 *Statesman*, 4 December 1968.

61 *Statesman*, 4 December 1968.

actions,⁶² and declared that these raids "have put the revolution in the state behind by at least 100 years."⁶³ The response of Charu Majumdar and *Liberation* was lukewarm, whereas Nagi Reddy repeated his CIA allegations. However, the Srikakulam comrades opposed to Nagi Reddy upheld the Tellicherry-Pulpally actions. About the uprising in Wynad, their organ 'People's war' observed that

Because it is a struggle of the peasant masses of Wynad, directed against the local feudal elements as well as the entire reactionary ruling classes represented by the State power... it is an anti-imperialist, anti-feudal struggle.⁶⁴

And there was no doubt on its part that the movement was indeed Maoist.

... it has adopted a strategy of first establishing a revolutionary base area in the villages and then gradually extending it to the villages through the process of a protracted revolutionary war and thus encircling the cities and towns - the bastions of the enemy - by the liberated villages and finally capturing them from the hands of the enemy.⁶⁵

The Naxalites in Kerala apparently got support from the CPC.⁶⁶ But their actions were far removed from the Chinese revolutionary experience. The

62 *Mathrubhoomi*, 24 November 1968.

63 *Mathrubhoomi*, 5 November 1968.

64 *People's War*, vol.2, no.2, February 7, 1969, p.6.

65 *ibid.*

66 It was reported in the press that some of the leaders of the Tellicherry-Pulpally actions, Kunnikkal and Philip, had received financial help from the Chinese embassy. *Mathrubhoomi*, 7 December 1968 and 14 December 1968. The press also reported that the police had got hold of letters written by the Chinese embassy to P.K.Balakrishnan and K.P. Narayanan who had participated in the Tellicherry action. *Mathrubhoomi*, 4 December 1968. On the 9th of December Balram Bhagat, the Finance Minister, claimed in the parliament that China was indeed helping the "extremists". *Mathrubhoomi*, 10 December 1968.

beginning made in Tellicherry, a town proper, itself went against Maoism as the latter clearly dictates that the struggle must begin from the countryside. They also held a very mechanical view regarding the formation of a guerilla army which got reflected in the attack on Tellicherry police station by a very inexperienced and indisciplined group. Years later, the leadership, while evaluating the movement, admitted that "absence of a party organisation" and the "belief that the revolution should be conducted by a few revolutionaries instead of mobilising and arming the oppressed for whom it was all about", were causes for the failure.⁶⁷

The failure of Tellicherry-Pulpally actions and the arrests that followed were setbacks for the Naxalbari movement in the state, but the ideological debate continued even as the leadership remained in prison. And all the while, the differences with the central leadership in Bengal was getting exacerbated. In April 1969 when the CPI (M-L) came into existence, Kunnikkal called it "another revisionist party formed from above", arguing that it was not time yet to form a revolutionary party. He was also critical of the "iron discipline" imposed from above by Charu Mazumdar and what he called the "self praise" of the latter, a reference to Mazumdar's constant usage of phrases like "My country", "My party", and "My people", and using Mao's words, reminded him that it was "the people, and the people alone who are the motive force in the

67 Red Guards editorial board (Ajitha et al), "Tellicherry-Pulpallyum Vikasaparnamangalum", *Red Guards*, vol.1, no.2, March 1980, p.20.

making of world history."⁶⁸ In October, Charu Mazumdar while on a visit to Kerala came to Calicut, but refused to meet Kunnikkal.

When the CPI (M-L) political resolution came out, Kunnikkal expressed his differences on that. Claiming that Peking Radio had not broadcast it fully, excluding that portion which said that "the principal contradiction in India was between feudalism and the Indian people". Kunnikkal and others published the resolution in Malayalam with that section in brackets, hinting that the CPI (M-L) leadership had got it wrong there. For the Kunnikkal group, "the principal contradiction was between the Indian masses and imperialism which is in alliance with native feudal classes and comrador-bureaucratic bourgeoisie... the principal character of the revolution is anti-imperialist".⁶⁹ This debate on principal contradiction was later taken up, following the publication of Ajitha's "Memoirs", with K. Venu, by then the most important Naxalite leader in the state arguing that:

in semi-colonies like India where imperialism is not directly operating but exploiting the people through indirect means, the contradiction between the native ruling classes who are controlled by imperialism and the oppressed people is the principal contradiction It is the feudal classes who are directly exploiting the over 70% population of the country constituted by the peasantry. It is the still prevalent feudal system in the country which is providing the social base for imperialist exploitation.⁷⁰

68 Kunnikkal Narayanan, "Fight Revisionism in Leading Positions Inside the Party Right Now", 512-69, PRKN, CUA, Acc. No.9, 3 EA 3, vol.1.

69 "Anjarakandy Sakhakkalude Kurippinu oru Marupadi", unsigned article, 23.10.1969, PRKN, CVA, Acc. No. 9.3 MA 17, vol.2.

70 K. Venu, "Ajithayude Ormapishakukal", *kala Kaumudi* (Weekly), no.251, September 12, 1981, p.32.

According to Venu too much should not be read into the fact that Peking Radio avoided a part of the resolution, for, if the CPC really did have some misgivings about it, it would not have upheld the formation of CPI (M-L) nor taken the trouble to publish the political resolution, even partially.⁷¹

The question of principal contradiction also settled the tactics and strategy of the revolution. For the Kunnikkal group, the armed forces of the state, which protected ruling class interests, had to be targeted first. Tellicherry-Pulpally actions best exemplified this belief. It had its followers too. On December 18, 1969, a group loyal to Kunnikkal attacked another police station at Kuttiadi, 75 miles east of Calicut. A Sub-Inspector was injured, and one of the Naxalites killed in police firing.⁷² A week before the attack, posters had appeared in the area extolling the Tellicherry-Pulpally actions. The Kuttiadi raid was upheld by the Kunnikkal group.⁷³ When somebody questioned the wisdom of attacking police stations and the killing of policemen instead of landlords, it was pointed out that:

our task is to organise armed struggle against armed counter-revolution. This should not be reduced to the killing of jennies. Unless you eliminate the armed forces protecting the interests of the ruling classes first, you will not get anywhere.⁷⁴

71 ibid.

72 *Mathrubhoomi*, 19 December 1969.

73 "Dhira Rakthasakshi Sakhavu Koyapilli Velayudhanu Kerala Janathayude Viplava Abhinandangal", unsigned article, 24.12.1969, PRKN, CUA, Acc. No. 9.3, MA 24, vol.2.

74 ibid.

It was also observed that this confusion was created by the wrong line propagated by *Liberation* - "by annihilating landlords you can liberate a village."⁷⁵

Charu Mazumdar's annihilation line had its takers in Kerala, mainly the leadership of the Kerala state organising committee of the CPI (M-L), Kosalaramdas and Ambadi Sankarankutty Menon who through their few issues of Malayalam *Liberation* upheld this line. On 9th February 1970, a guerrilla squad under Varghese annihilated a landlord at Trichillerry and an alleged police agent at Tirunelly, both in North Wynad. Charu Mazumdar hailed it as "the first peasant guerrilla action in Kerala" which was spreading to other parts of the state.⁷⁶ The CRP was called into Wynad, and on the 18th Varghese was, according to the police version, killed in an encounter.⁷⁷ But more annihilations followed - on 10th April at Tavam, on 23rd July at Vellathuval in Kottayam district, in the same month at Kongad in Palghat district....⁷⁸

In 1970, K. Venu who had earlier been associated with a CPI(M) publication unit, without ever having been a party member came over to the Naxalite stream. From Trivandrum he brought out a monthly in Malayalam titled *Inquilab* which generally toed Charu Mazumdar's line. After having met Mazumdar at Calcutta, he had come back and tried to bring about unity in the revolutionary ranks. A conference in Nagarur having failed, *Inquilab* was used

75 *Liberation*, vol.3, no.1, November 1969, p.7.

76 "Peasant Guerrilla Struggles Spread to Kerala", *Liberation*, vol.3 and 4, September-December 1970, p.25.

77 *Mathrubhoomi*, 19 February 1970.

78 "Peasant Guerrilla Struggles....", op.cit., p.26.

for the same, without much success. Then in late 1970, more "annihilations" followed, at Nagarur, Kumil and Kilimanur. K. Venu was arrested along with others in November and spent almost 5 years in prison.⁷⁹ The first phase of the Naxalite movement in Kerala was effectively over by the end of 1970. Disunity in the revolutionary ranks and police repression had taken its toll.⁸⁰ It was however, not without success, the starting of the Dinesh Beedi factory in Canannore district by the State government, the granting of pattayam to immigrant farmers in Wynad and the Adivasi Land Alienation Act there being the most obvious examples. But the movement as such failed to catch the popular imagination of the people of Kerala.⁸¹ Not surprising as the 'annihilations', looked out of place except may be in areas like Wynad where semi-feudal forms of exploitation existed. But in other parts of Kerala there

79 In March 1975, he came out of prison, but during the emergency following the Kayanna police station raid in February 1976, he was again arrested.

80 In 1970 PTI put the number of Naxalite prisoners in Kerala at 55, and the number of activists killed at one. In Andhra, at the same time, the corresponding figures were 84 dead and 609 people in prison. *Times of India*, 18.3.1970

81 The movement, however, had its sympathizers, who for various reasons, could not actively join the Naxalite cause. One Balan Vaidyar, a sympathiser wrote to the Tellicherry-Pulpally comrades on why he could not join them in their actions - "It's better to highlight my cowardice and stay put in my house instead of hiding my cowardice and setting out only to betray the cause at a critical juncture." PRKN, CVA, Acc No.9.3 MA 62 vol.2. Similarly, years later Ajitha received a letter from the celebrated Malayalam fiction writer O.V.Vijayan saying that though he 'did not look at things the way' she did and that though he had 'fundamental differences with the Marxian epistemology', he was a 'de-nationalised' individual and had the 'greatest respect for radical action'. He also added that 'violence and its absence can be evaluated only in an elaborately human context.' Letter from O.V.Vijayan to K. Ajitha, Private Records of Ajitha, CUA, Acc. No.18.5 C 129 vol.1.

was a sea change from the rest of the subcontinent as far as class polarisation and forms of exploitation were concerned. Attempts to rectify the mistakes of the first phase of the movement were done later in the post-emergency period, when the party took 'a mass-line' approach partly through the "People's cultural forum" and made a big impact on the social life of Kerala. That shall be discussed in the third chapter.

CHAPTER II

MARXISM AND CULTURE: FROM YENAN TO NAXALBARI

Political movements, more than anything else, can influence the evolution and trends in literature. At the same time history has shown us how radical literature and the arts play a part in the struggle for the transformation of society. It is well known, for instance, how the political writings of Voltaire and Rousseau, and the fiction of a Victor Hugo contributed in the destruction of the Ancien Regime in France, clearing the path for a bourgeois social order. But in the colonies and semi-colonies of Africa, Asia and Latin America, the bourgeois democratic revolution, which characterises early Modern Europe, was conspicuous by its absence. For these countries as we saw in the last chapter, Mao formulated the New Democratic Revolution. The NDR has cultural tasks as it has economic and political tasks to fulfil. That is, alongside the NDR, attempts should be made to create a New Democratic culture. Mao defined the New Democratic culture as "the anti-imperialist and anti-feudal culture of the broad masses which can be led only by the culture and ideology of communism and not by the culture and ideology of any other class."¹ During the war against Japanese imperialism and native feudalism, after having established a communist base at Yen-an, Mao spoke of how "In our struggle for the liberation of the Chinese people these are various fronts, among which are the fronts of

1 Mao Tse Tung, "The Historical Characteristics of China's Cultural Revolution", *Selected Works*, vol.II, p.373.

the pen and of the gun, the cultural and the military fronts."² He also had clear-cut views regarding the tasks of the cultural front:

With regard to the enemy, that is, Japanese imperialism and all the other enemies of the people, the task of revolutionary writers and artists is to expose their duplicity and cruelty and at the same time to point out the inevitability of their defeat, so as to encourage the anti-Jap army and people to fight staunchly with one heart and one mind for their overthrow.³

For Mao, Lu Hsun, who wrote a number of socially-oriented stories until his death in 1936, epitomised what a revolutionary writer should be during the stage of the New Democratic Revolution. The late 1930s and 1940s witnessed more creative artists joining the revolutionary cause in China. Inspired by the discussions at the Yen-an forum, in 1944 the Party School organised the writing of 'Yangko' plays, a type of new-style folk opera, such as 'Brother and Sister Tilling Virgin Soil' and 'the White Haired Girl', which dealt with landlord oppression and peasant resistance. The Yen-an forum also inspired a variety of popular arts, including woodcuts which were developed at the Lu Hsun Art Academy in Yen-an led by the artist Ku Yuan. The period also saw the flourishing of Novels in the traditional style of story-telling, such as Chao Shu-Li's *Rhymes of Li Yu-tsai*, and poets learning to imitate the rhythms and idiom's of folk song.⁴ In short, people became central to the cultural activities during the New Democratic Revolution in China. For, as Mao said,

2 Mao Tse Tung, "Talks at the Yen-an Forum on Literature and Art", *Selected Works*, vol.III, Foreign Languages Press, Peking, p.69.

3 Ibid, p.70.

4 See Roger Howard, *Mao Tse Tung and the Chinese People*, New York, 1977, pp.193-5.

In the last analysis... works of literature and art, as ideological forms, are products of the reflection of the life of the people in the brains of revolutionary writers and artists.⁵

Cultural movement associated with Marxist political movement, however, had earlier beginnings. In Russia, for instance, Lenin was fully aware of what progressive art and literature could do to propel the working class movement forward. About the characteristics of a proletarian literature, as early as 1905, he was to write:

It will be a free literature, because the idea of socialism and sympathy with the working people, and not greed or careerism, will bring ever new forces to its ranks. It will be a free literature, because it will serve, not some satiated persons, not the bored "upper ten thousand" suffering from fatty degeneration, but the millions and tens of millions of working people - the flower of the country, its strength and its future. It will be a free literature, enriching the last word in the revolutionary thought of mankind with the experience and living work of the proletariat, bringing about permanent interaction between the experience of the past (scientific socialism, the completion of the development of socialism from its primitive, utopian forms) and the experience of the present (the present struggle of the worker comrades).⁶

Such literature were produced during the course of the Russian Revolution, Gorky's *Mother* being the best amongst them. There were others too who inspired, through their writings, the success of the revolution. For instance, Mayakovsky, the famous Russian poet, during the civil war, spoke for the 'Left'.

Deploy in marching ranks!
There is no room for verbal tricks.
Silence, you orators!
Your turn to speak,
Comrade Rifle

5 Mao Tse Tung, "Talks at...", *Selected Works*, vol.III, p.81.

6 V.I.Lenin, "Party Organisation and Party Literature", *Collected Works*, Eng. ed., Moscow, 1962, vol.X, pp.48-49.

Enough of living by the law
Given by Adam and Eve.
We will ride the mare of history till she drops.
Left!
Left!
Left!⁷

In the post-revolution period, radical cultural activities in Russia were centred around the organisation 'prolekult' under the leadership of Bogdanov and Lunacharsky. Among its various activities were the organising of schools for workers in many Russian towns. Valdimir Kirilov, in a poem 'we', called for the proletariat to destroy museums "in the name of our tomorrow".⁸ Later, he and Mayakovsky shifted their allegiance to a group called the 'Futurists' which stood for the uprooting of all the culture of the past. The Party was not happy over these extreme positions, and the central committee in July 1925 issued a warning against "a frivolous and disdainful attitude towards the old cultural heritage and towards literacy specialists."⁹ Hereafter, the state was to take more active control over the formulation of policies pertaining to cultural affairs. The best of Eisentein's films including his 'Battleship Potemkin' came out during the early stage of this period.

LEFT CULTURAL MOVEMENTS IN THE '30S AND '40S

From the late 1920s onwards, for almost a decade, western capitalist societies went through a slump. Millions were unemployed, and there was poverty all around. The period was marked by hunger marches and mass

7 Cited in Donald Treadgold, *Twentieth Century Russia*, Chicago, 1976, p.244.

8 Ibid, p.245.

9 Ibid, p.246.

demonstrations against unemployment. Communist parties and other left groups, apart from conducting political agitations also engaged in cultural activities to expose the horrors of the capitalist system.

In America, the Proletarian Literature Movement which had emerged in the early '30s in close association with the Communist Party there 'sought to replace the primarily psychological 'artsy' literary production of the time with a more 'down to-earth' socially oriented genre more appealing to a working class audience.'¹⁰ Earlier, in January 1929, Martin Russak while discussing Jack London as America's first proletarian writer, had said:

A real proletarian writer must not only write about the working class, he must be read by the working class. Furthermore, a good proletarian writer must possess bitter hatred, absolute class solidarity, and revolutionary passion.¹¹

At around the same time, the John Reed club had come into existence in New York, intending to bring together creative writers into contact with the labour movement, and to develop proletarian talent as well. The Report of the club published in 'New Masses' in January 1930 exhorted the writers to attach themselves to an industry and become thoroughly familiar with it, so they could write "from inside".¹² The John Reed club which had 12 units having around 900 members in Detroit, Boston and elsewhere by 1932, organised for the Working class Workshops on writing, graphics, photography, painting, theatre,

10 Arthur C. Ferrari, "Proletarian Literature: A Case of Convergence of Political and Literary Radicalism", in Jerold M. Starr, *Cultural Politics: Radical Movements in Modern History*, New York, 1985, p.173.

11 Martin Russak, "Jack London: America's First Proletarian Writer", *New Masses*, vol.4, January 1929 in *ibid*, p.174.

12 *Ibid*, p.175.

etc. And through their activities brought many an American to the Left, when the future of capitalism looked bleak.

England was also passing through a social turmoil in the 1930s, with over three million unemployed, and many more millions undernourished. Added to these problems were the threats of a World War, in the context of emerging fascism in many European countries. Left cultural activists in England, apart from making a critique of the existing social order, also conscientised the people regarding the dangers to world peace. There compared to U.S.A., Left cultural activities were more varied, making their presence felt, apart from literature,¹³ in the world of theatre and films as well.

The Workers' Theatre Movement (WTM), founded in 1926, was a product of the communist movement of Great Britain, and its activities were based largely on an agit-prop concept of theatre, what Raphael Samuel has called a "Cultural Shock-brigade approach".¹⁴ The rise and extension of the WTM has been located with what has been called the 'left' turn in the comintern line which got reflected in the 'class against class' position of the communist party of Great Britain.¹⁵ The WTM had a clear idea on what theatre should be - all art was propaganda and the theatre itself a weapon of struggle. One of their first performances was the dramatised version of Robert

13 For a review on three novels written during this time on the travails of working class life - Walter Greenwood, *Love on the Dole*; Walter Brierly, *Means Test Man*; and Lewis Jones *Cwmardy* - see Carole Snee, "Working Class Literature or Proletarian Waiting", in John Clark et al (eds.), *Culture and Crisis in Britain in the 30s*, London, 1979.

14 Raphael Samuel, Editorial Introduction, History Work Shop, issue of Autumn, 1977, p.106.

15 Ibid, p.104.

Tressell's famous novel, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, which dealt with working class problems and its psychology in 1927. Another was the 'Meerut' sketch, a short piece about the jailed trade union agitators in India. By 1933, when fascism loomed large on the European horizon, and when a united front was the need of the hour, the rather 'sectarian' line of the WTM was given up. The New Theatre League was formed with the intention to subsume the WTM in a larger umbrella organisation which would link all amateur dramatic groups with progressive ideas and also obtain the cooperation of professional artists. By 1936 WTM was dissolved, and had been replaced by 'unity' theatre. Jon Clark opines that 'the very name 'unity' theatre announced the new political orientation towards the policy of a united or popular front against fascism and a break with the more sectarian goals of the WTM.'¹⁶ In the autumn of 1938 'unity' staged Brecht's powerful anti-fascist play on the Spanish civil war, 'Senora Carrar's Rifles', the first ever performance of a full-length Brecht play in Britain. Another was Clifford Odets' play about a New York taxi drivers' strike, 'Waiting for Lefty'. Apart from these big stage plays, 'unity' also went for agitprop plays in the open air, from the backs of lorries, taking them to the factory gates where there was a strike, or taking part in demonstrations. On such occasions, topicality was of vital importance. The living newspaper was the ideal form of theatre to achieve immediacy and intervene actively in ongoing campaigns and struggles. As one of the activists records, "our performances were based on events which had happened during the week or during the day, so that the audience never knew

16 Jon Clark, "Agitprop and Unity Theatre: Socialist Theatre in the Thirties", in Jon Clark, et al (eds), op.cit., p.225.

what they were going to see that night unless they had read their daily newspaper."¹⁷ Apart from theatre, Left Cultural activists in Britain also made use of films, both feature and documentary, to attack the capitalist system. In 1929, John Grierson, Emile Burns and others founded the London Workers' Film Society "for the purpose of facilitating the exhibition and production of films of value to the working class".¹⁸ This society and the Workers' film and Photo League formed in 1935, apart from exhibiting the best of Soviet films, including those of Eisenstein and Pudovkin, also pioneered the documentary film movement in that country. The best of such documentaries dealing with unemployment and 'poverty in the midst of plenty' was Grierson's 'Drifters'.

Another of the Leftist experiments in England during this time was the Left Book club begun in 1936 by the publisher, Victor Gollancz. As the editorial of the first issue of *Left Book News*, it brought out, stated,

The aim of the Club is a simple one; it is to help in the terribly urgent struggle for world peace and for a better social and economic order against Fascism, by giving all who are determined to play their part in this struggle such knowledge as will immensely increase their efficiency.¹⁹

The club offered a book a month at a much lesser price than usual to subscribers, who had to undertake to purchase the monthly choice for at least a six-month period. The book was chosen each month by a selection committee comprising of Harold Laski, John Strachey and Victor Gollancz

17 Andre Van Gyesehem, "British Theatre in the Thirties: An Autobiographical Record", in *ibid*, p.211.

18 Ralph Bond, Cinema in the Thirties: Documentary film and the Labour Movement", in *ibid*, p.247.

19 Cited in Betty Reid, "The Left Book Club in the Thirties", in *ibid*, p.194.

himself. R.P.Dutt's *India Today* and Edgar Snow's *Red Star Over China* were some of the monthly choices made by this committee. By 1939, its membership had risen to 58,000 and the groups to 1,200. Apart from the distribution of books, the clubs also conducted discussions on the burning issues of the day. Often they organised Russian and Spanish film shows, Aid for Spain, and from 1937 onwards centrally sponsored speakers toured the groups, J.B.S.Haldane speaking on Air Raid precautions, others on Czechoslovakia, China etc.²⁰ The activities of the Left Book Club and other such groups were enough, if not for the communists to become a dominant force in British politics, for at least the Labour Party to win the elections in 1945, and to create a favourable public opinion in favour of granting Independence to India two years later.

In India, the Communist movement emerged in the mid-1920s. Growing disillusionment with Gandhism, further pauperisation of the peasantry and the working class in the post-World War I years, combined with state repression had created the right climate for it. The success of the Russian revolution gave an impetus to Communist activities. In 1925, the Communist Party of India came into existence. It was not long before the party's sympathisers initiated progressive cultural activities. Inspired by the 'World Congress of Writers for the Defence of Culture' convened at Paris to resist the fascist onslaught, Sajjad Zaheer and others had organised the Indian Progressive Writers' Association at London in the same year. In April 1936, the All-India Progressive Writers'

20 See Noreen Branson and Margaret Heinemann, *Britain in the Nineteen Thirties*, London, 1971, p.277.

Association came into being with its first conference held at Lucknow. Munshi Premchand presided over the meeting. The Association felt that:

...the new literature of today must deal with the basic problems of our existence today - the problems of hunger and poverty, social backwardness and political subjection.²¹

It was also stated that

Anything that drags us down to passivity, inaction and un-reason we reject as reactionary. All that arouses in us the critical spirit, which examines institutions and customs in the light of reason, which helps us to act, to organise ourselves, to transform, we accept as progressive.²²

Though there were a lot of communist sympathisers in the AIPWA, the organisation was never projected as a communist organ, the objective having been to attract as many creative writers as possible, who stood against imperialism and for democratic values. The approach conformed to the United Front tactics of the communists during this time. In keeping with this line, Sarojini Naidu attended AIPWA's first conference and Rabindranath Tagore presided over its second conference at Calcutta in 1938. Promotion of regional languages being on the agenda of the AIPWA, provincial branches of the organisation were set up in different parts of the country.

Between 1939 and 1942, however, the AIPWA became quite inactive, partly due to certain political events. The struggle between the Rightists and the Communists within the CSP took a turn for the worse, and in 1940, the Communists including to E.M.S. Namboodiripad and Sajjad Zaheer were expelled from the party. This political crisis apart, the absence of a bulletin for

21 Manifesto of the AIPWA, Sudhi Pradhan, *Marxist Cultural Movement in India*, vol.I, Calcutta, 1979, p.21.

22 Ibid, p.21.

the central organisation through which activities all over the country could have been coordinated and given direction, also posed problems for the leadership during this time. A revival was made after 1942 when Hitler's attack on the Soviet Union brought the progressive forces in the country together. In April, the 'Anti-Fascist Writers' and Artists' union was formed and the AIPWA was revived with a more dynamic Sajjad Zaheer taking over the General Secretaryship of the organisation. The CPI which became legal during this time because of its 'people war' stand on the war, held its first congress at Bombay where the Indian Peoples' Theatre Association (IPTA) came into being.

In its very first bulletin, IPTA made it clear what it stood for:

It is a movement which seeks to make of our arts the expression and the organizer of our people's struggles for freedom, economic justice and a democratic culture... It stands for the defence of culture against imperialism and fascism and for enlightening the masses about the causes and solution of the problems facing them.²³

Though IPTA was not a party organ, and was led by a reformist leader, N.M.Joshi, most of its members were inspired by communist ideas. And, the keynote of all IPTA performances during 1942-47 - with regard to Hindu-Muslim unity, release of congress leaders from prison, demand for the formation of a national government, etc. - was in conformity with the political line of the CPI. IPTA's most important contribution came during the Bengal Famine when its troupes travelled the length and breadth of the country and collected funds for famine relief. The famine in fact became the theme for its best-known artistic productions - Shambu Mitra's drama 'Navanna', K.A.

23 Indian People's Theatre Association, Bulletin No.1, July 1943, *ibid*, p.129.

Abbass' film 'Dharti ki Lal', the ballets, 'the spirit of India' and 'India Immortal', Usha Dutta's 'the Hunger and Epidemic Dance', and 'Navajibaner Gan', a song drama composed by Jyotindra Moitra. The IPTA remained quite active leading up to India's independence in 1947, reflecting in their plays, songs and ballets, the ongoing struggles in the country.

In Kerala too the resonances of these activities were felt. In 1937, the communists within the CSP like K.Damodaran and E.M.S.Namboodiripad had founded the 'Jeeval Sahitya Prasthanam', which was seen as the provincial unit of AIPWA. Apart from using literature as one of the media in the struggle against international fascism, British imperialism and feudalism it also attempted to create a literature which would be close to the millions of working people. K. Damodaran's two plays written during this time 'pattabhakhi' and 'Rakthapanam' amply illustrates this ideal. During the people's war stage of the Second World War, the communists in Kerala staged several anti-fascist plays like 'Jap agents' and 'Chinese heroine'. That apart, old forms of dancing like 'Kathakali' and 'Ottamthullal' were taken out of the temple premises and staged before huge audiences with new themes. As a Report of the times observed:

Instead of Kurukshetra they have Stalingrad and Wangpoo or the many scenes of our national struggle for freedom, and instead of Kauravas and Pandavas they have Stalin and Pandavas, they have Stalin and Hitler, Tojo and Roosevelt, Churchill and Gandhi....²⁴

As we saw earlier, the early 40s was a period when the CPI followed a united front strategy. The 'Jeeval Sahitya Prasthanam', in its old form, where only communist writers could become members, had no place in such a set-up.

24 Report from Malabar in *ibid*, p.154.

Thus in January 1944, a more broad-based 'Purogamana Sahitya Prasthanam' (Progressive Literature Movement) came into existence after a conference at Shoranur. M.P. Paul who presided over one of its sessions stated that "the progressive literature Movement was not just a communist business, but had room in it for all progressive thinking and artistic expression".²⁵ The Movement called for a united front of cultural workers against imperialism, feudalism and for national liberation. Many non-communists like Sankara Kurup and Kesavadev joined the movement and in fact helped the Communists in preparing a 'manifesto' for the progressive literature movement, according to which (a) all writings should be purposive, and (b) the purpose for which the writers were to dedicate themselves was the progress of society which included freedom from imperialist rule and radical socio-economic changes.²⁶

The Progressive Literature Movement reached a stalemate in 1948 following irreconcilable differences between the non-Communists and the Communists within it. The former were not happy over the question of 'political commitment' of writers insisted by the latter. They felt that commitment to any political party would make the writer lose his creative freedom. There were also differences on the question of transfer of power. Even though the progressive Literary Movement did not last for long, during its short existence, it had been able to give a new sense of direction to the Kerala society. Accommodating anything which critically re-read the society for the

25 . Report on All Kerala Progressive Writers' Conference, in *ibid*, p.152.

26 Dharmaraj Adat, "Purogamana Kala Sahitya Sangham Charitavum Aahvanavum", Mavelikara, n.d., p.10.

benefit of the majority, it propagated the noble principles of democracy, equality and secularism, and broke the prevalent aesthetics of feudal literature.

The Left Cultural Fronts which had a strong presence in the 1930s and 1940s, had become a spent force a decade later. Partly this was related to the fortunes of the Left political parties in the respective countries, and also the way the established Left parties looked at these cultural activities. In England, for instance, the Labour Party, after a certain stage, viewed the Left Book Club with open hostility. Ernest Bevine, a party leader, at one point of time declaring that the main object of the club was "to undermine and destroy the Trade unions and the Labour party as an effective force."²⁷ In the U.S.A., the Communist Party there by the mid-40s had started wooing the middle classes, and joined the Roosevelt bandwagon in the days of the popular front, in the process, shedding whatever radical posture it might have possessed in the past. The utter confusion that prevailed in the communist movement in the West got reflected in 1968, when, in the wake of the massive uprising, the French Communist Party dragged its feet and let a golden moment slip by.²⁸

In India, the fifties marked a turning point in the history of the communist movement. From 1951 onwards, parliamentary means began to be used by the party for achieving Socialism, a trend which only got strengthened over the next few years. The Party, during this time, also characterised a section of the ruling class as nationalist bourgeoisie, with whom it was possible to cooperate,

27 Quoted in John Lewis, *The Left Book Club: An Historical Record*, London, 1970, p.94.

28 See Eric J. Hobsbaum, "May 1968" in *Revolutionaries*, London, 1973, pp.239-40; Daniel Singer "Twenty Years on: May 1968", in *Monthly Review*, vol.40, no.2, June 1988, pp.24-28.

all of which diluted any radicalism that might have remained in its programme. This dilution of radicalism was seen in the position of IPTA as well. During its 1953 annual conference the Drama Commission's Report stated that only "broadly speaking, we must glorify those who are on the side of social progress and condemn those who impede this progress."²⁹ In the 50s, the IPTA leadership's concept of a united front reached bizarre levels with Sachin Sengupta arguing that people's theatre is for the whole people, and Balraj Sahni hoping to get the help of the big bourgeoisie to create progressive cinema! As Sudhi Pradhan observes "a policy of united front with bourgeois and petty-bourgeois interests on the question of war and peace led to the infiltration of bourgeois ideas into cultural work and defused the theory of class war."³⁰

In Kerala, the Progressive Literary Movement, and later the Kerala People's Arts club whose drama *Ningalenne Communistakki*³¹ was a phenomenal success, had won for the Communist Party in the state many sympathisers. The party went on to win the 1957 assembly elections in the State, and while in power, by bringing about radical legislations with regard to land reforms, social security and minimum wages, helped the labouring classes to improve their material condition. However, once it began to lay stress on economic struggles, trade union politics, etc., and switched over to electoral politics, there has been a weakening of its radical stance against the contemporary cultural situation. The struggle of the early communists in Kerala

29 *Crossroads*, 4, April 26, 1953, p.18 quoted in Gene D.Overstreet and Marshall Windmiller, *Communism in India*, Bombay 1960, p.437.

30 Sudhi Pradhan, op.cit., vol.I, Introduction, p.11.

31 Thoppil Basi, *Ningalenne Communistakki*, 2nd ed., Ernakulam, 1956.

had been one against a feudal society and its ideological and institutional structures. But in a post-feudal society, a product of radical reforms, it has not been able to continue the political/cultural struggle in the same vein. It was in this context that the 'Janakeeya Samskarika Vedi' (People's Cultural forum) emerged in the State. The People's Cultural Forum was led by the politics of Naxalbari, which in turn had been influenced by the Cultural Revolution in China.

The 'Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution'

Thus the decline of radical cultural movements in the 1950s was directly related to the dilution of radical politics by the communist parties themselves. This had a linkage with the shift in line of the International communist movement, of which the Soviet Union had been the undisputed leader. There in 1953, Khrushchev came to power, and by the twentieth congress of the CPSU in 1956, the process of 'de-Stalinisation' had begun in earnest. A debate was to ensue between the CPSU and the CPC from 1957 onwards, by the end of which in the mid-1960s the latter termed the Soviet leadership as revisionist, and declared that capitalism had been restored in the Soviet Union.³² Inside China too the turmoil was about to begin. On the belief that 'capitalist roaders' had got entrenched in the party and the government, Mao set forth a movement symbolised by his call 'Bombard the Headquarters'. The movement was the 'Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution'. More than a struggle in the realm of culture, it was a political struggle. As William Hinton observes:

32 See *The Great Debate: The Polemic on the General Line of the International Communist Movement*, Kollam, 1994.

It has been a class struggle to determine whether the individuals representing the working class or individuals representing the bourgeoisie will hold state power. It has been a struggle to determine whether China will continue to take the socialist road and carry the Socialist revolution to the end, or whether China will abandon the Socialist road for the capitalist road.³³

The Cultural Revolution began with the debate centred around the play 'Hai Jui Dismissed from office', written by Wu Han, the Vice-Mayor of Peking, symbolically dealing with the dismissal of P'ing Teh-Huai the Defence Minister by the 'new emperor', Mao. The message of this play was that Ping-Teh-Huai was a good man, an official concerned about the welfare of the people, and that he should be returned to office and allowed to lead the country. On November 10, 1965, Yao Wen-Yuan, with the help of Mao's wife Chiang Ching published an article in the 'Shanghai Wenhui-pao' entitled 'on the New Historical play Hai Jui dismissed from office', making a scathing attack on the play. As Wu Han was the friend and protege of P'ing Chen, Mayor of Peking and also close to Lui Shao-chi, 'China's Khrushchev', an attack on him was therefore an indirect assault on the great hierarchies of the party then dominated by the 'right wingers'. The cultural Revolution often took violent turns before the left forces under Mao established their supremacy, only to lose it to the other side following the death of Mao in 1974.

Though basically a political struggle, the Cultural Revolution in China made an impact in the field of arts and ideas as well. Mao, during a meeting with 'Red Guards', had told them to overthrow "old ideas, culture, customs, and habits of the exploiting classes" and replace them with the "new ideas,

33 William Hinton, *Turning Point in China: An Essay on the Cultural Revolution*, New York, 1972, p.17.

culture, customs and habits of the proletariat."³⁴ The new spirit in arts was best reflected in the new operas like 'the Lakeside Village' and 'Taking the Bandit's Stronghold', produced during this time, of which Joan Robinson comments,

the new operas are concerned with stories taken from the period of the long and multifarious struggles that led up to liberation, and contemporary themes such as the Korean war. Abandoning the subtlety and refinement of a palace art, they depict heroes and Villains in Strong, simple lines. They are extremely popular, and evidently have a powerful appeal to their audiences.³⁵

The Cultural Revolution in China which became part of the struggle by the Left forces under Mao's leadership against 'revisionism', both national and international, inspired radical political movements elsewhere. In India it was experienced through the Naxalite Movement, which had an impact on cultural activities as well.

CULTURAL IMPACT OF NAXALBARI

In India, alongside the New Democratic Revolution, the naxalites also attempted to create a New Democratic Culture. Not surprisingly, the first attacks on the symbols of feudalism and imperialism were witnessed in West Bengal.

'CULTURAL REVOLUTION' IN WEST BENGAL, 1970-71

Immediately after the Naxalbari struggle, a revolutionary youth movement emerged in West Bengal. Students and a section of the workers staged demonstrations and conducted other propaganda work in support of the Naxalbari struggle. This was followed by what was called the 'cultural

34 Ibid, p.58.

35 Joan Robinson, *The Cultural Revolution*, London, 1969, p.49.

revolution' of the students of Calcutta and other cities of West Bengal which lasted from March 1970 up to the middle of 1971. This cultural upsurge by the students did not come as a surprise, because by then they had become an alienated lot, the curriculum satisfying only ruling class needs. About the contemporary education scenario, Sumanta Banerjee writes:

the class character of the nation's rulers was not only reflected in the pattern of imparting education, but also in its content. Stress was placed on the non-violent aspect of the anti-imperialist movement in the history text books, and on the western capitalist theories of development in the courses of economics and political science. Although the Sepoy Rebellion - because of its massive nature, it could not be ignored - was hailed as the first war of Independence, the pro-British role of the contemporary Indian social reformers and intellectuals was glossed over in the history books. The hundreds of peasants' revolts that preceded and followed the great rebellion, seldom found a place in the text books.³⁶

Apart from that there was widespread corruption and educated unemployment. As frustration mounted, youth anger often found outlet in the "tearing of diplomas at convocations, disruption of convocation with demand for jobs, mass copying at examinations reducing the system to a farce..."³⁷ The CPI (M-L) which had come into existence in 1969 tried to provide a political direction to the spontaneous outbursts of the students by giving them an ideological justification. An article in *Liberation* in March 1970 ran thus:

The boys and girls in our country are brought up through the educational institutions in a way that they look down upon the poor masses of workers and peasants, respect everything concerning the imperialist powers, and become lackeys or agents of these powers. Moreover, in a man's life the age between eighteen and twenty-four is the period when he can work hardest and can be most vigorous, most courageous and most loyal to his

36 Sumanta Banerjee, *In the Wake of Naxalbari*, Calcutta, 1980, p.230.

37 *ibid*, p.231.

ideas. But the students and youths of this age group in our country are forced to pursue anti-people courses of study and try to pass exams.... It will give me the greatest pleasure if you plunge yourselves into the revolutionary struggle here and now instead of wasting your energy in passing examinations.³⁸

The 'cultural revolution' in Calcutta can be said to have begun on March 3rd 1970 with the attacks by youths and students on seven cinema houses in Calcutta where the film 'Prem Pujari' was being shown. The film was seen by them as being 'blatantly anti-China'. Later, the revolutionary students organised raids on educational institutions and gave a call for boycotting examinations as part of their attempts to expose the class orientation of the courses in schools and colleges. Between April and May, 1970 fifty-one such attacks were made on educational institutions throughout West Bengal, including the one on Gandhi Centre at Jadavpore University on April 21, 1969. During these raids they destroyed the statues of certain 'anti-people' leaders of the nineteenth century like Vivekananda, Vidyasagar, Ram Mohan Roy and Gandhi to discredit them and the ideas for which they stood for. Students in each college or other institutions would destroy the statues and photos of these leaders, "after which they would hoist a red flag over such institutions".³⁹ These iconoclastic measures later spread to areas outside college campuses, and before long, numerous statues were destroyed on the streets. The State government did not sit idle, and when the desecration of statues were taking place all over Calcutta, it "strove to play upon the public's respect for these

38 "A Few Words to the Revolutionary Students and Youths", *Liberation*, vol.3, no.5, March 1970, p.13.

39 CRCCPI (M-L), *Towards a New Phase of Spring Thunder*, Place of pub. not given, 1982, p.104.

leaders of the past by using their utterances against violence in posters and hoardings all over the cities".⁴⁰ The CPI (M-L), predictably, came out defending the actions of the revolutionary youth. In an article titled "Forge closer unity with peasants' Armed Struggle", Charu Mazumdar wrote:

the people of India fought to overthrow British rule; many heroes laid down their lives in the course of the struggle. But they have not been depicted as models, their images have not been installed; on the contrary, it is those who have served and defended the interests of imperialism that are held up before the students and the people as models and whose images have been built, that is why those who accuse the students and youths of waging war against the national tradition are in reality singing hymns in praise of the tradition created by imperialism's lackeys. A genuinely patriotic, revolutionary India cannot be built unless the images of these lackeys are swept away.⁴¹

Saroj Dutta, another ideologue of the party, writing in his pseudonym, Sasanka, also came out with an article supporting the iconoclasm. He noted, for instance, that Gandhighat had been constructed by the ruling classes at Barrackpore "in response to Lord Mount Baton's secret request to efface the unpalatable memory of this armed nationalist uprising (1857 Revolt), described by Karl Marx as the first war of Independence of the Indian people against the British, and of its first hero, Mangal Pande."⁴² In the same article, he had asked:

Why is the 150th birth anniversary of Vidyasagar being used as an opportunity for worshipping him with so much fanfare? Did not Vidyasagar, as the principal of the Sanskrit college, permit the

40 Sumanta Banerjee, op.cit., p.235.

41 Charu Mazumdar, "Forge Closer Unity with Peasants' Armed Struggle", *Liberation*, vol.3, no.3, August 1970, p.6.

42 Sasanka, "In Support of Image-Breaking" (written and published earlier before he became a martyr in August 1971), *Liberation*, August 10, 1972, p.48.

conversion of the college into an army barrack for suppressing the revolt at about the time when Mangal Pande was hanged at Barrackpore and there was the possibility of armed revolt flaring up all over Bengal? Did not Vidyasagar write in the precincts of Sanskrit college the 'History of Bengal' glorifying the British at about the time Mangal Pande was being taken to the gallows?⁴³

He added that when the masses had demanded the replacement of the statue of outram at Park Street by one of the Rani of Jhansi, Nehru, the 'British agent' had replaced it with Gandhi's statue "and thus pleased his masters."⁴⁴ The replacement of outram's statue by Gandhi's, he argues, was "symbolic of India's transition from a colony to a neo-colony".⁴⁵

According to the CPI (M-L), the cultural upsurge of the revolutionary youths in Calcutta and elsewhere was not an independent movement of its own, but instead was intrinsically connected with the rural uprising. Charu Mazumdar wrote:

This struggle is taking place because the armed agrarian revolution has emerged as a real fact in the state of West Bengal. The base is crumbling under the blows of the peasants' armed revolutionary struggle; as a result the superstructure too is and shall be pounded by blows.... It is the call of this agrarian revolution which has made the students and youths restive and they are directing their attacks against the images of those persons who have ever tried to put out the flames of armed revolution of the peasant masses by preaching the message of peace and reforms. That is why this struggle of the students and youths is part of the armed peasant struggle.⁴⁶

Saroj Dutta, similarly, wrote that:

43 ibid, p.48, 49.

44 ibid, p.50.

45 . ibid.

46 Charu Mazumdar, "A Few Words to...", *Liberation*, vol.3, no.5, March 1970.

This mass youth movement is a product of the revolutionary peasant struggle, began and directed by the revolutionary party; therefore this movement does not have an independent existence, nor is it spontaneous.⁴⁷

However, there were some critics within the party who did not toe the party line regarding the 'iconoclasm'. For instance, Sushital Ray Chaudhuri, the editor of the party's Bengali organ *Deshabrati* is said to have come out with a document sometime in the autumn of 1970 urging that some sort of "distinction should be made between Gandhi and the congress leaders on the one hand and social reformers like Ram Mohan, Vidyasagar and Rabindranath on the other."⁴⁸ While he supported the attack on the former, he felt that the latter who were bourgeois intellectuals, belonged to the "bourgeois democratic revolution" of our country.⁴⁹ Charu Mazumdar's swift response to this was that in India as a colony, the first condition for bourgeois democracy was the attainment of national independence, which these 'comprador' leaders' never attempted, and that any attempt to discover bourgeois democrats among them would go against the party programme.⁵⁰ The one yardstick on which the party evaluated these 'honourable men' was:

on which side of the barricade were they? Were they on the side of the Indian people's war of Independence of 1857, on the side of the innumerable peasant revolts (the only genuine freedom struggles), on the side of the people struggling to remove the two

47 Sasanka, op.cit., p.57.

48 CRC CPI (M-L), op.cit., p.107.

49 ibid.

50 Cited in Sumanta Banerjee, op.cit., p.375.

mountains - imperialism and feudalism - or on the side of the enemies of the people.⁵¹

The answer, according to the party leadership, being the later, it had no qualms in whole-heartedly supporting the image busting spree by the revolutionary youths. At the peak of these activities in mid-1970, it declared that:

The Red Flag flying proudly over educational institutions inspire the people with the hope and the faith that the day of the victory of the Indian revolution is not far off and a new culture, a new educational system will soon arise on the ashes of the old...⁵²

Such hopes, however, were belied when by the end of 1971, the movement had been totally crushed. Part of the reason for its failure was that the revolutionary youths did not get their priorities right. Throughout 1970 and 1971:

Not a single of those upper class expensive schools, those phoney replicas of the British public school system, that adorned the fashionable lanes behind Park Street, Lower circular road or theatre road were attacked.... Nor were modish clubs, bars, restaurants and discotheques of Park Street or Chowringhee attacked.⁵³

Another reason for the decline of the movement was the entry of lumpen elements inside the organisation. Through their indisciplined ways, they weakened the organisation and gave it a bad name. This, however, does not belittle the role of some committed activists who became martyrs to a cause they held dear, and in the process, gave the movement its revolutionary aura.

51 "Revolutionary Youths and Students Wage a Valion Struggle", *Liberation*, vol.3, no.10, August 1970, p.68.

52 *ibid*, p.68.

53 Sumanta Banerjee, *op.cit.*, pp.274-5.

IMPACT OF NAXALBARI ON MALAYALAM LITERATURE:

It did not take long for writers to take up Naxalbari in their writings.

Kumar Vikal, the Hindi poet, for instance wrote:

When my child
Returns from school,
And not finding the name of the village
In his geography map
Asks me
Why it is not there,
I am frightened
And remain silent
But I know -
This simple word
of four syllables
Is not just the name of a Village,
But the name of the whole country.⁵⁴

The four-syllabled name of the village is - Naxalbari.

Malayalam literature did not prove to be an exception as far as the impact of 'Naxalbari' was concerned. N.V.Krishna Variar had written his poem 'Naxalbari' in late 1967 itself, but for him, it was but a theme of social tragedy of hunger, divorced from its political implications. Similarly, *Agneyam*, a novel written by Vatsala made the revolutionary movement in Wynad its background,

54 Quoted in Sumanta Banerjee, *Thema Book of Naxalite Poetry*, Calcutta, 1987, p.37.

but in the absence of a political grasp, did not do justice to the theme.⁵⁵ It was, as has been rightly pointed out, only through 'Bengal' and other poems of K.G. Sankarapillai that "the historicity of Naxalbari found expression in politically conscious poetic idiom for the first time in Malayalam."⁵⁶ In 'Bengal', the poet, through the mythical figure Dhridrashtra, shows how the complacency of the bourgeoisie is shaken by the events in Naxalbari.⁵⁷ Later, Udayabhanu, Civic Chandran, Balachandran Chullikkad, Satchidanandan and Kadamanitta Ramakrishnan followed the same footsteps. Ramakrishnan, in one of his poems, wrote of what the ruling classes were doing to the country:

. . . .

On the table they spread out
 My evergreen earth, a mere picture
 They have hollowed out my fecund mother
 Into a handy sphere nailed on to the table
 Pencil marks, points of arrows and the
 excesses of lust
 Have broken her.
 Claimants to her limbs have torn her helpless
 They handle her about like a rolling trophy
 No life, no mass, even the gravitational force

55 P. Vatsala, *Agneyam*, Kottayam, 1974.

56 K.A. Mohandas, *Resonance of Distant Thunder: The Cultural Impact of Naxalbari in Kerala* (Pamphlet), Trichur, n.d., p.12.

57 K.G. Sankarapillai, 'Bengal', in K. Satchidanandan, ed., *Pudhupiravi* (Collection of Malayalam Poems), Trichur, 1980, pp.20-30.

weakened.

The speaker goes on speaking.

Shadows of snores fall criss-cross on the table.

'We can settle things round this table',

They say.⁵⁸

The poem, however, ends with subtle hints thrown at the political stirrings in the subcontinent:

.

Seas begin to boil, eyelashes blossom

Pupils grow dark, round tables crumble

The hands pressed on them, loosen

The black cat vanishes into a mole

The arrows that pierce my eyes turn into visions,

I see my earth moulting and waking up

Still,

'We can settle things round this table',

They say.⁵⁹

This poem, as well as 'Cancer' by Attoor Ravi Varma⁶⁰ indicates how the urban middle class poets often used morbid symbols of decadence and carefully selected images of revulsion to explain the existing system. The most famous poem of Kadamannitta during this time, however, was 'Kurathi', which the

58 Kadamannitta Rakamrishnan, "They Say" in Sumanta Banerjee, *Thema Book of...*, p.49.

59 * *ibid*, p.50.

60 Attoor Ravi Varma, "Cancer", in K.Satchidanandan, *op.cit.*, pp.52-54.

CPI(M) found to be an 'extremist poem'.⁶¹ It was widely used by the PCF activists during their 'poetry evenings'.⁶² Kadamanitta and his ilk, unlike their predecessors, were not bothered by other worldly anxieties, but instead were led by a harsh political reality,

When to speak of trees is almost a crime

For it is a kind of silence about injustice.

[Brecht]

To shake the readers out of a complacency bred by familiarity, they resorted to 'linguistic shock'. Thus, in their poems, "soft melodies of birds", for instance, are absent, and instead, we hear only "the roar of landslides and floods".⁶³ In fiction, Pattathuvila Karunakaran and M. Sukumaran made Naxalite politics the content of their art with remarkable success. Karunakaran "through the monologues of an upper class intellectual who sympathises with the revolutionary movement tried to observe it with some kind of artistic detachment" whereas Sukumaran "depicted the specific contexts within the ideologues through allegoric expressions."⁶⁴ Apart from them, writers like

61 Kadamanitta Ramakrishnan, "Kala Kalakku Vendiyo", *Kala Kaumudi* (Weekly), no.883, 15 August 1992, p.27.

62 Basu Surendra Babu, Unnikrishnan, "Ariyuka Samara Theekshanamaya Innalayude Youvanam", *Kalakaumudi* (weekly), no.895, November 8, 1992, p.35.

63 Satchidanandan, "Kavitha, Manushyan, Viplovam" (Introduction) in '*Pudhupiravi*' (Collection of Poems), Trichur, 1980, p.18.

64 K.A.Mohandas, op.cit., p.12.

N.S. Madhavan and U.P. Jayaraj were also inspired by the Naxalite movement.⁶⁵

The Naxalbari-inspired literature had emerged at a time when Malayalam literature was being dominated by 'modernism' represented by the writings of people like M. Mukundan and O.V.Vijayan. Modernism itself had originated here as a kind of reaction against the 'revisionist' literature which could not break the shackles of bourgeois consumer culture and aesthetics. As 'Prerana', the mouthpiece of the PCF observed:

For the revisionists, human beings get satisfied with the acquisition of consumer goods.... Those who see the acquisition of material goods as the sole basis for human emancipation is actually trying to make the working class a capitalist one. Here the mechanical culture of the revisionists gets subjugated by the consumer culture of capitalism.⁶⁶

Satchidanandan, who was an important figure in the PCF during its peak days wrote that "as revisionism had accepted capitalist institutions and yardsticks, and hoped to bring about a revolution through them, it followed the same capitalist market laws in its art too."⁶⁷ The rather mechanical approach the 'established Left' in the state took towards culture is proved by a 'model poem' it sent to one of the poets associated with its cultural organisation, to emulate.⁶⁸ 'Modernism' thus emerged as a reaction, but it had its own

65 N.S.Madhavan, *Choolai Medile Shavangal* (first pub. in 1981), Kotayam, 1994; U.P.Jayaraj, *Nirashabaridanaya Suhrutinu Oru Kathu*, Calicut, 1994.

66 "Thiruthalvathavum Viplavasamskaravum", unsigned article, *Prerana*, no.8, July 1980, p.3.

67 Satchidanandan, op.cit., p.11.

68 Attoor Ravi Varma, interview, in *Prerana*, vol.2, no.6, February 15-28, 1985, p.17.

problems as well. The 'modernists' with their middle class subjectivity took their readers away to an imaginary intellectual sphere far removed from the hardships of the common people and their daily resistance.⁶⁹ This could only have benefited the ruling class and its ideology. Through 'modernist literature', a generation of Keralites were led to believe that they were experiencing the "alienation and inhumaneness of the western post-industrial societies in the atmosphere of Kerala" where there was not any industrialisation worth its name and where there "still existed the idyllic tenderness of rustic life."⁷⁰ The PCF as we shall see later placed the struggles against both 'Revisionism' and 'Modernism' high on its agenda.⁷¹

Following the decline of the first phase of the Naxalite Movement in West Bengal and elsewhere by the early seventies, revolutionary cultural activities also came to a standstill. The early phase of the Naxalite Movement did not witness any organised revolutionary cultural activities, even though small beginnings were made in places like Andhra Pradesh where the armed struggle had a certain continuity. 'Jana Natya Mandali' founded by the famous poet Gaddar is a case in point. But in places like Kerala where the first phase of the Naxalite Movement was confined to certain 'annihilations' by a party without any social base, organised cultural activities got initiated only in the post-emergency period due to certain favourable factors, which we shall presently see.

69 For instances, O.V. Vijayan, *Khasakkinte Itihasam*, Trichur, 1967; and M. Mukundan, *Mayyazhi Ppuzhayute Tirangalil*, Kottayam, 1975.

70 K.A.Mohandas, *op.cit.*,

71 'Janakiya Samskarika Vedi', 'Naya Prakyapanarekka', pp.5-6.

CHAPTER III

THE PEOPLE'S CULTURAL FORUM (1980-82)

Organised revolutionary cultural activities did not exist in Kerala prior to the Emergency. However, radical journals espousing Marxism-Leninism like *Prasakthi* and *Yenan* did make their appearance in the first half of the 1970s. But they came to a premature end. At a time when the naxalite movement in the state itself did not have the backing of the masses, and when democratic freedom was at a premium, an organised movement in the realm of revolutionary culture, not surprisingly, did not take root.

After the Emergency, in a more democratic set-up, the situation changed somewhat. The Emergency had been an eye-opener for the various Naxalite groups in the sense that it made them realise that, in ordinary times, the Indian form of bourgeois democracy does offer some space, however limited, for avenues of protest. The Emergency had been one of the darkest periods in the history of post-independent India. As Mulk Raj Anand put it,

From the tortures of detenus, the conscious imposition of atrocious prison conditions and the calculated cruelties practised on Naxalites, the surveillance exercised through radio monitoring stations, dossiers on every minister at the centre and the states, the watch on almost every public man, the adroit use of intellectuals against each other - the record of her [Indira Gandhi's] misdeeds is equal to that of early Hitler.¹

In the post-emergency period, the Naxalite groups began to field various legal and semi-legal mass organisations, which reflected their new orientation.

In Kerala after the Emergency the Naxalites reorganised themselves into the Central Reorganising Committee Communist Party of India (Marxist-

1 Mulk Raj Anand, "Writer and Emergency", in Balraj Puri (ed.), *Revolution, Counter-Revolution*, New Delhi, 1978, p.40.

Leninist) [hereafter CRC CPI(M-L)], and resumed the publication of the party organ '*Comrade*'. More intellectuals were now prepared to side with revolutionary democracy, and *Prerana*, the Malayalam magazine which later became the mouth-piece of PCF was started in 1978. In the elections of 1977 when the Congress was ousted from power in Delhi and many North Indian states, the people of Kerala had returned the Congress to power, and Karunakaran became the Chief Minister of the state. But stories of the excesses committed during the Emergency which came out later, especially the celebrated 'Rajan case' forced him to step down from office. P.Rajan, an engineering student from Calicut, had been picked up by the police following the Kayanna police station raid of February 1976, after which no one ever saw him again. But it was evident to the people of Kerala that for being a 'Naxalite sympathiser', he had been tortured to death at the infamous Kakkayam police camp in Kozhikode district.² Rajan's father went to court, and the Kerala High court demanded that the state government should produce Rajan in court, on which the latter admitted that he had been killed in police custody. In April 1977 Karunakaran resigned. The Rajan case had a tremendous impact on the Malayalee psyche making the people in the State aware of the social reality they were living in. It was at a time when popular mood against all forms of authoritarianism was at its peak, that the People's Cultural Forum came into existence.

2 Cheriyan Philip, *Kaal Noottandu* (first pub. 1984), Kottayam, 1995.

ORIGINS OF THE PEOPLE'S CULTURAL FORUM

After being released from prison following the withdrawal of Emergency, Naxalite cultural activists like Civic Chandran and Madhu had engaged themselves in staging plays, especially in Wynad where the 'Wynad Samskarika vedi' was quite active. The latter had been founded in late 1977 at Meenangadi in Wynad, where during its inaugural convention, the noted dramatist N.N. Pillai, who inaugurated the convention declared that "there is only one solution. And that is revolution".³ The Convention had also issued a manifesto of revolutionary writers and artists which declared the need for transforming the production relations of capitalist system and its ideological and cultural meaning. To carry out the programme it called for a struggle in the superstructure. In August, 1980, revolutionary cultural forums from different parts of the state met at Antikkad in Trichur district, and founded the People's Cultural Forum ('Janakeeya Samskarika Vedi'). Important cultural figures of Kerala like poets Satchidanandan and Balachandran Chullikkad, filmmaker Pavitran, playwright Madhu and noted thinker P.K. Balakrishnan attended this convention.⁴ On the 28th of August, the day the convention ended "hundreds of people attended a rally".⁵ The convention set up a state committee with Kaviyur Balan as State Secretary and B. Rajeevan, Civic Chandran, K.S. Sadasivan, amongst others, as members.⁶

3 Interview with Civic Chandran, *Sukrutham*, vol.2, no.3, June 1995, p.8.

4 *Prerana*, nos. 30, 31, September-October, 1980, p.42.

5 *Mathruboomi*, 1 April 1980.

6 *Prerana*, nos. 30, 31, September-October 1980, p.42.

The Manifesto of the PCF declared that the primary duty of the revolutionary cultural activists was to create a New Democratic Culture in the country, allying with all the forces of New Democratic Revolution.⁷ It foresaw struggles at different levels, important of which were against:

- a) The still prevalent feudal culture which tries to "take us back to the medieval ages with its emphasis on caste, religion, and the promotion of spiritual atmosphere which is an obstacle to the growth of scientific ideas."
- b) The all-pervading "consumer culture which develops base instincts amongst the people and take them away to a fantasy-world far removed from his material existence."
- c) 'Modernism' which 'inactivates people and creates pessimism and alienation among them, and
- d) 'Revisionism' which "propagates a mechanical culture, and by preventing Man from realising his full potential and creativity, prepares the ground for the growth of social fascism."⁸

Louis Kampf has defined the tasks of radical culture as the attempts "to bring about a social revolution; to make institutions democratic; to make us free; to make life more beautiful and humane."⁹ For the PCF too the 'cultural activities were not confined to art and literature alone, but instead included whatever activities that revolutionised the consciousness of man. To be more

7 Janakeeya Samskarika Vedi, *Nayaprakyapana Rekka*, p.7.

8 *ibid*, pp.5-6.

9 Louis Kampf, "Towards a Radical Culture", in Prescilla Long (ed.), *The New Left: Collection of Essays*, Boston, 1969, p.423.

precise, it represented a social movement rather than being a cultural organisation of the conventional type.

The PCF leadership was aware of what had happened in the Soviet Union and other former socialist countries, where cultural activities had become a mere tail to the political and economic agenda of the party. It wanted to set the record straight and declared that its relationship with the party would be of a 'dialectical' nature.¹⁰ The Manifesto of the PCF thus stated that even though "cultural activists should have ideological affinity with that political organisation which upholds working class politics, this unity should not be at the cost of making cultural activities organisationally subjugated to it."¹¹ The party was quite happy with this definition, as a reply its organ gave to a question on the relationship between the party and the PCF indicates - "the party and the PCF work in two different fields. The Party's main duty is to transform the economic base in the production relations of the existing system. The PCF stands for transforming the superstructure".¹² However, as we shall see later this ideal relationship between the two was difficult to achieve, especially during the later stages of the movement.

FOR A 'PARALLEL' CULTURE

Even as the Marxist-Leninist movement attempted to change the political/economic system the PCF was busy trying to transform the

10 "Kapada Pracharanangalum Yadhartyangalum: Janakeeya Samskarika Vedi - Entu, Entinu?" (Pamphlet published by the PCF State Committee), no place, n.d., p.8.

11 * *ibid*, p.2.

12 *Comrade*, vol.7, no.26-27, May 17, 1981, p.6.

superstructure. It stood for a 'parallel people's culture', as against the 'elite' ruling class culture and ideas. About ruling class ideas Marx had said:

[They] are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e., the class which is the ruling material force of society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas; hence of the relationships which make the one class the ruling class, therefore the ideas of its dominance.¹³

This being the case, however, ruling class ideas are always contested and new ideas and ways of life are proposed. In Kerala, this reached a high point during the PCF phase.

To spread socialist ideas in the society, the PCF made wide use of 'street plays', which was ideally suited for an organisation like it, as they were less costly, could be staged even without prior notice to the administration, and could reach more people. Some of the plays staged by the PCF during this time includes *Amma* based on Gorky's *Mother* and *Spartacus* dramatised from Howard Fast's famous novel. The 'Poor theatre' of East Europe and Badal Sarkar's 'third theatre' had a big influence on PCF plays, as the discussions on these new forms of theatre in *Prerana*, the PCF organ shows. For the PCF, a local issue or a contemporary injustice were materials for a play. Their play 'MLA' staged during assembly elections in the state, and 'Chasnala' dealing with minor's tragedy amply proves this. In these plays the PCF aimed at topicality so as to get the people to respond to local and immediate issues.

13 Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, Moscow, 1964, p.60.

As part of their criticism of the 'established Left' in the state the PCF activists, during this time, made a critique of Thoppil Basi's famous play *Ningalenne Communistakki*¹⁴ (You made me a Communist) which had played such an important role during the early phase of the Communist movement in Kerala. Civic Chandran, for instance, wrote that in this play, the cruelty of landlord oppression is shown to be an individual aberration, and as a consequence, feudalism as a system goes unscathed.¹⁵ It also portrayed the drama as one where the last cry of feudalism is heard, whence the younger generation in feudal families along with some of their elder members go over to the winning side i.e., communism.¹⁶ In a later article he was to trace the origins of the present commercial theatre tradition in the state - "a little bit of revolution, a little bit of comedy, a little bit of love" - to '*You made me a communist*' which had all these 'ingredients' to ensure a commercial success.¹⁷

Seen in this context, the play '*Nadugaddika*' staged by the PCF at hundreds of places throughout the state, constitutes a radical break from the past, not least because a majority of whom were involved with it were 'Adivasis' themselves. '*Nadugaddika*' illustrates how the Naxalite cultural activists, unlike their communist predecessors, were able to use the folk

14 Thoppil Basi, *Ningalenne Communistakki*, Ernakulam, 1956.

15 Civic Chandran, "Nadugaddika Teaminte Anubhavangalilude", *Prerana*, no.28, July 1980, p.11.

16 *ibid.*

17 Civic Chandran, "Ningalenne Communistakkiyil Ninnu Nadugaddikayilekhulla Dooram" in K.J. Baby, *Nadugaddika*, Wynad, 1983, pp.14-15.

traditions and myths of a people to convey, from a working class perspective, the oppression they had been going through for generations. 'Gaddika' a tribal ritual of the Adiyars of Wynad, was used to exorcise 'evil spirits'. Here the 'Gaddikakaran' (exorcist) trying to exorcise the 'evil spirits' - read exploiting classes - is none other than Varghese, the legendary Naxalite who became a martyr in Wynad during the early phase of the Naxalite movement in the state.¹⁸

'*Nadugaddika*' ends with the tribals reclaiming the red flag from the landlords who had become communists in 1957, following the party's victory at the hustings. The 'gaddikakaran', at one stage, pointing to the red flag, tells the landlord that "this is not meant for making your loin cloth".¹⁹ The Left

18 This was not the only instance where Varghese, affectionately known as 'Peruman' amongst the tribals finds a place in Naxalite literature. For instance, Civic Chandran, in his famous poem 'Kabani', wrote:

.....

Radhakrishnan, the journalist, just back from the
trip

To the hills of Brahmagiri and Narinirangi
says

That his tribal guide cherishes warm memories
Of a fighter he calls the 'Peruman'.

He says that the summer forests of Wynad
are waiting for

Their spark
and the rock of Kumbarakuri is bleeding still
that the corridors of the press club are still
haunted by a pair of eyes gouged out of their
sockets

Radhakrishnan, the journalist, upon the
testimony of

Marachathan, his guide
Says for certain that the River Kabani will turn
red again

Civic Chandran, "Kabani", in Sumanta Banerjee (ed.), *Thema Book of Naxalite Poetry*, Calcutta, 1987, pp.75-76.

19 K.J. Baby, op.cit., p.64.

Front government which had come back to power in the State in 1980, expectedly, did not take kindly to the staging of this play, and CPI(M) attacks on PCF activists on this account were not rare. "Once a day after a CPI(M) attack, PCF artists and activists with bandages on, staged the play at the same place where attacked. Later under pressure from the local people, the CPI(M) attackers were made to apologise publicly."²⁰

Malayalam poetry acquired a new meaning during the PCF days. What Sumanta Banerjee said of Naxalite poetry in general applies to PCF activities as well:

In the Naxalite Movement, there was a deliberate attempt to bridge the gulf between the two [between the culture of the middle classes of the cities, and that of the folk poets of the countryside] - by reversing the direction of literary activities from concentration in major cities to the villages, to make literature a possession of the masses.... In the poetry that was born on the boundaries of these two cultural worlds folk art and urban symbolism enriched each other.²¹

This synthesis in Malayalam poetry is best found in the Naxalbari-inspired poems of K.G.Sankarapillai, Kadamanitta Ramakrishnan and Satchidanandan, which we already referred. These radical poets, through 'poetry evenings' and 'Kavya yatras' tried to take poetry to the masses. Another new form they used was 'poster poetry' - i.e., posters containing lines and stanzas from the poetry of communist legends like Mao and Che Guevara, apart from the radical Malayalam poets themselves. '*Prerana*' also introduced the poetry of people like Mayakovsky and Neruda to a larger Malayalee audience.

20 Mukundan C. Menon, "Kerala: People's Cultural Forum", *Frontier*, vol.13, no.46, July 11, 1981, p.9.

21 Sumanta Banerjee, op.cit., p.10.

The PCF had to force a lot of opposition in its activities, especially from the State government. In one extreme case of intolerance in July 1980, the ruling Left Front government arrested the poet Satchidanandan, K.S.Sadasivan, the editor of '*Prerana*', and two others for 'instigating the people against the government' by singing 'the working class international', using section 197 IPC which the British government had resorted to, in colonial times, to deal with the 'anti-socials'.²² They had been organising public protests against the police atrocities on striking labourers in Nadvarambu area in Trichur district.

In the realm of arts, the PCF, by organising workshops on, for instance, painting under the initiative of the famous painter A.C.K.Raja tried to make them more people-oriented.²³ The PCF and Marxism-Leninism in general had an impact on Malayalam films as well. John Abraham, through whose films Malayalam cinema got its political maturity, for instance, was led by communist ideology.²⁴ As a film-maker, he felt his duty was "to make our people aware" and to "provoke them into activism".²⁵ In an interview to *Prerana*, he says that he was inspired by the myths and folk traditions of the Dravidian south, which had a long history of resistance.²⁶ His film 'Agraharathil Kazhudhai' illustrates this aspect of his beliefs. In the early eighties, he along with Satchidanandan, B. Rajeevan and others had written a script for filming the

22 *Prerana*, no.28, July 1980, p.1.

23 Interview with K.Sachidanandan, New Delhi, 7.5.1996.

24 John Abraham, "Cinimayanente Ellaam", in K.N.Shaji (ed.), *John Abraham*, Ernakulam, 1993, p.23.

25 *ibid*, p.23.

26 *Prerana*, vol.3, no.14, October 16-31, 1981, p.10.

'Kayyur Revolt', which marks a militant phase in the early communist movement in the state. But due to lack of funds, the film could never be made. But his film 'Amma Ariyan' made up for that. Completed in 1987, this film shows how the spirit and politics upheld by the PCF, though it had become inactive by then, lived in the minds of at least some people.

For making this film, John Abraham had collected money from the masses and thus avoided being shackled by the constraints of commercial cinema. The film shows, though not in the conventional narrative style, an individual who is later joined by a group, going to tell a mother about her son's death. The son, a tabla player, had been a sympathiser of the Naxalite movement. He commits suicide after his right hand had been made senseless by repeated torture in police custody. During their journey, the camera scans various scenes of struggles including the fishermen struggle in fort Cochin, anti-privatisation agitation at Calicut Medical College etc. all of which occurred during those heady days of late 70s and early 80s. 'Amma Ariyan' was screened free of cost at various places in the state under the initiative of 'odessa', a film society set up by John Abraham and others in 1984, at a time "when the film society movement which had come up against the commercialisation of Malayalam cinema and thereby the poisoning of people's aesthetics, had become confined to an elite minority, and got alienated from the masses...."²⁷ Odessa stood for a film culture whereby good films are 'not confined to a few civilised minds' but instead 'reaches the vast majority of the

27 *odessa Journal*, vol.2, May 30, 1988, p.47.

people'.²⁸ The PCF and later 'Odessa' screened the best of the 'avant-garde' films from the West, including those of Godard and Bunuel, for Malayalee audiences. Many of the leading lights of the PCF like A. Soman and Madhu were associated with 'Odessa'.

The PCF did not confine its activities to mere art and literature, as culture, for it, meant a lot more. "From border disputes to domestic discords, from hospital picketing to bonus strikes, from social pledges against liquor to rehabilitation of prostitutes", the PCF intervened.²⁹ During the Tellicherry violence between the RSS and CPI(M) activists in the first week of April 1981 which took a heavy toll of human lives and when all the major parties remained silent, the PCF undertook a 'peace march' throughout Canannore district.³⁰ Earlier in March, it had led a memorable agitation in Canannore city against 'State-sponsored' gambling during exhibitions. Having got the licences to conduct these 'skill games' from the municipal committees dominated by the CPI(M) the organisers allegedly "got support from the local police and DYFI activists".³¹ The PCF organised the local people against the gambling. On March 9th its activists started a hunger strike, following which, three days later the District Collector banned gambling.³² But the gambling organizers

28 *ibid*, p.48.

29 Basu Surendra Babu, Unnikrishnan, "Ariyuka Samaratheekshanamaya Innaleyude Youvanam", 4, *Kala Kaumudi*, 495, November 8, 1992, p.35.

30 Mukundan C. Menon, *op.cit.*, p.9.

31 Mangalat Raghavan, "Kannur Kathu", *Mathrubhoomi*, 4 April 1981.

32 "Kannur Sambavangalepatti", unsigned article, *Comrade*, vol.7, no.22, April 5, 1981, p.2.

continued with the conducting of 'Tambola', on which the PCF led a protest march to the gambling venue, destroyed the gambling equipments and set fire to the shed where it was being held.³³ On the same day, at a different part of the town, hoodlums hired by the gambling organizers stabbed to death, in broad day light, Ramesan, a PCF activist who had been in the forefront during the struggle.³⁴

Ramesan's killing did not go unprotested. On March 23rd, the death anniversary of Bhagat Singh, Kaviyur Balan, state secretary of PCF and 5 women activists got inside the legislative assembly in Trivandrum, and from the visitors gallery threw pamphlets, and shouted slogans like 'Bhagat Singh long live', 'Naxalbari Zindabad', and 'Down with the gamblers both inside and outside the legislative assembly.'³⁵

PEOPLE'S POLITICAL POWER

Apart from the attempts at the creation of a 'parallel culture', during this period, the CRC CPI(M-L) and the PCF were also trying to establish 'parallel' centres of 'people's political power'. Citing examples from Russian and Chinese revolutionary experiences, and from India's own Santal Rebellion in the mid-nineteenth century up to the Naxalbari uprising, the party spoke of the need for the creation of 'people's political power' during the process of class

33 *ibid.*

34 *ibid.*

35 Mathrubhoomi, 24 March 1981. All of them were sent to prison for one week.

struggle.³⁶ It was pointed out that the view that it should be attempted only in the post-revolutionary era was faulty as it then would prevent the growth of self-confidence amongst the people, and also, in its absence after the revolution, political power might lapse in the hands of the party, or worse, 'a new ruling class'.³⁷

For the Naxalites, the bourgeois courts were institutions meant for the protection of the private property of the bourgeoisie, and its other interests. In this context, they viewed 'people's courts' and 'people's trials', which ran counter to the bourgeois system of justice, as tools for the establishment of 'people's political power' at the regional level.³⁸ Attempts in this direction achieved a fair degree of success in Calicut when in March 1981, the PCF tried a corrupt doctor through a people's court.

The Calicut Medical College had become one of the major centres of corruption in the state. A Report on the goings on in the college prepared by the PCF showed how inhuman callousness on the part of the doctors, motivated only by material gains, had played havoc with the lives of the poor in the region.³⁹ Once, a patient, who was afflicted with cancer on the cheeks, was discharged by the radiologist as he was too poor to give 'bribes' to the

36 Albert, "Janakeeya Kodathi, Entu, Entinu" - II, *Comrade*, vol.7, no.29, May 24, 1981, p.3.

37 "People's committees - some new experiences in Kerala", *Liberation*, organ of the CRC CPI(ML), vol.8, no.3, December 1982, p.55.

38 Albert, "Janakeeya Kodathi Entie? Entinu?", *Comrade*, May 17, 1981.

39 "Vicharanakku Mumbu", *Prerana*, April 15, 1981.

doctor. Within three days he died.⁴⁰ It was in these circumstances that the PCF became quite active in the college "for almost one month now" with "extremists like Madhu and Surasu frequenting the place".⁴¹ It mobilised the local people against this state of affairs, through wall writings, public meetings and pamphleteering. It was reported in the press on March 18th that a pamphlet issued by the PCF "did not make much impact" in the hospital.⁴² Following that, on March 21st, the 'Action Committee' set up by the PCF involving the local people at a public meeting in the vicinity of the college, declared that corrupt doctors will be tried by 'people's courts.'⁴³

It had been decided by the PCF to try Dr. K.M. George first, as he 'headed the corruption list'. On the morning of March 23rd, after he arrived at the hospital, Dr. George was forcibly led away by PCF activists to a traffic island in front of the hospital, all the while shouting slogans like "This is the cruel and corrupt doctor K.M. George. He is going to be tried in the midst of the people", and "People have the right to revolt against injustice".⁴⁴ The doctor was forced to climb on to the traffic island wearing a 'cross-belt' on which was written "I am the corrupt doctor K.M. George". Someone read out a chargesheet against him, after which he was forced to admit his wrongdoings. Finally, however, he was forgiven and let free for the time being, in conformity

40 *ibid*, p.10.

41 *Mathrubhoomi*, 18 March 1981.

42 *Mathrubhoomi*, 18 March 1981

43 *Prerana*, vol.3, no.7, April 15, 1981, p.5.

44 *Mathruboomi*, 24 March 1981.

with the majority verdict, with the stern warning that further misdeeds would invite severe consequences.⁴⁵

The 'trial' seemed to have had support within the medical community. For, the next day when a protest strike was called for by the doctors against the treatment meted out to Dr. George, "600 of the medical staff and 288 NGOs kept away from it."⁴⁶ Also, later when the arrests in connection with the case were continuing, two doctors from the Calicut Medical College, Dr. C.P. Sreedharan and Dr. Abdul Aseez, who 'sympathised with the PCF' were taken into police custody.⁴⁷ A clear sign that not everyone within the medical community was happy with the state of affairs in their profession. At any rate, the trial was well-received outside the medical community with even the then chief justice forced to say during a public meeting that 'the people's trial was the sign of a social revolution' and that 'it was the resistance of the people against injustice.'⁴⁸

The ruling Left Front government, however, took a different view. The CPI(M) organ *Deshabhimani* wrote that "if we concede that a strong agitation is the people's trial conducted by the Naxalites, then, tomorrow, the same Naxalites would be prepared to kill doctors in the name of corruption" and that "the killing of one corrupt official would not reduce corruption even by one

45 *Prerana*, vol.3, no.7, April 1-15, 1981, p.14.

46 *Mathrubhoomi*, 25 March 1981.

47 *Mathrubhoomi*, 6 June 1981.

48 Y.B. Chandrachud quoted in *Malayala Manorama*, 10 July 1981.

degree."⁴⁹ It also added that "the PCF which from experience knows that it can get support from the central government" is bent upon "creating red terror in the towns and villages" and that the 'people's trial' was actually meant "to destroy people's faith in the democratically elected state government."⁵⁰

The 'people's trial' at Calicut was only one in a series of interventions whereby the PCF tried to establish a 'parallel system of justice'. Even before the Calicut trial, in August 1980, it had made its presence felt in Trichur district. There, following a dispute between the chambers of commerce and 'trade union capitalists' of CITU-AITUC camps, entire shops and business centres were closed for a couple of weeks, and essential commodities went underground, resulting in hoarding and blackmarketing. As it was the occasion of Onam, the most important festival of the Keralites, the people really had to suffer. It was then that the PCF activists raided shops in the Kodungallur area to recover essential commodities, which were later distributed to the consumers at official prices.⁵¹ Similarly, at Alleppey and Kottapuram, 'people's justice' was implemented when PCF activists forcefully confiscated hundreds of kilos of ration sugar which were being sold in the black market, and distributed them amongst the people at a just price.⁵²

At Vypin in Ernakulam district, where the 'liquor tragedy' took a heavy toll of lives, the PCF and the party organised an agitation which included the

49 *Desabhimani*, 22 April 1981.

50 *ibid.*

51 Mukundan C. Menon, *op.cit.*, p.4.

52 Albert "Oru Putiya Neethibodhathinte Unarvu", *Comrade*, vol.7, nos.17-18, March 8, 1981, p.4.

'social boycott' of the culprits. ~~The agitation did not remain confined to~~ ~~yy?in~~. The State committee had issued a call to the people to force closure of all arrack shops in the state unless the government made concrete arrangements for ensuring that the arrack sold is safe. In Wynad, where the party had a strong base, the movement was fairly successful.⁵³ In Malappuram, a 'people's committee' set up by the PCF publicly tried a 'moulavi' near a mosque, and made him apologise to a girl he had raped years back causing her mental derangement.⁵⁴ 'People's committees' and 'People's courts' were not always successful, though, and in at least one case, a fiasco resulted when certain party activists near Guruvayoor, through a 'people's committee' tried to bring together a warring couple. They publicised it, made it a public issue and ultimately earned the wrath of that couple!⁵⁵

The activities of the PCF had also won popularity for the CRC CPI(M-L) in the State during this time. The party leadership, however, was caught in a dilemma. It was unhappy over the way the 'military line' of the party was being sacrificed at the altar of 'mass line', and feared that the sole emphasis on the latter would lead to 'revisionism' and become an obstacle in the path of guerrilla warfare. Its decision to put the 'military line' back to the forefront led to the annihilation of Madathil Mathai, a 'people's enemy' at Keninchira in Wynad in May 1981. A year earlier on January 16, 1980, Thomas; son of

53 *Liberation*, organ of CRCCPI(ML), December 1982, p.66.

54 *ibid*, p.58.

55 Albert, *op.cit.*, p.4.

Mathai had been 'annihilated' by the party.⁵⁶ But then, the party had claimed responsibility only after almost a month had passed, and the police repression, which was in evidence after Mathai's killing, was not there. Mathai's 'annihilation' was more daring. He was the Panchayat Vice-president, but his atrocities on women and workers had made him very unpopular in the region.⁵⁷ Twice he had been tried by 'People's courts', the last time on May 1st, when, after refusing to pay the salary arrears to one of his former employees, a lorry cleaner, dismissed him. Following the 'people's trial', Mathai had agreed to pay back all the arrears.⁵⁸ Thereafter, Mathai had filed a case against 60 odd party activists, after which the police repression began in Keninchira, forcing many activists to leave the area. In the second week of May, the party organised an armed protest march whence it was declared that "police terror will be met by Red terror".⁵⁹ Posters appeared after that declaring that Mathai will be annihilated within twelve days. And, in spite of being provided with police protection, on the night of May 19th, "around hundred armed Naxalites" were able to kill him.⁶⁰ In the police firing, one

56 *Mathrubhoomi*, 21 May 1981.

57 "Keninchira Veendumoru Anveshana Report", *Comrade*, vol.8, nos.28-29, June 1-15, 1982, p.6.

58 P.C.Josey, "Keninchira Nalkiya Nishedadmakamaya Uttaram", *Red Guards*, vol.1, no.1, February 1982, p.14.

59 *Mathrubhoomi*, 29 May 1981.

60 *Mathrubhoomi*, 21 May 1981.

Naxalite, K.T.Rajan was killed, even though, later the party claimed that he had died of police torture in custody.⁶¹

POLICE REPRESSION

The CRC CPI(M-L) state committee upheld the Keninchira struggle as "a model for the whole of the country".⁶² The day after the 'annihilation', and in fact until May 22, when the 'white terror' really started, the party held street corner meetings at different places of Wynad - Meenangadi, Ambalavayal, Poothadi, etc. - justifying Mathai's killing. Posters which appeared all over the state greeted "the peasant revolutionaries who annihilated Mathai".⁶³

The Left Front government viewed it differently. The CPI(M) secretariat issued a statement saying that "the Naxalites who had put an end to their annihilations after getting isolated from the masses have resumed them" and that it was "those who were not prepared to give money to the party who were being targeted".⁶⁴ It was quick in taking action against Naxalite/PCF activities. The holding of 'People's Trials' were declared punishable.⁶⁵ The PCF mouthpiece *Prerana* was threatened with confiscation. It also tried to obstruct street plays. On May 29th, while K.J. Baby and his troupes were staging their famed play 'Nadugaddika' at Kozhikode, the police intervened and arrested

61 *ibid.*

62 *Comrade*, vol.7, nos.36-37, July 1981, p.4.

63 *Mathrubhoomi*, 22 May 1981.

64 *Mathrubhoomi*, 30 May 1981.

65 *Mathrubhoomi*, 30 May 1981.

them.⁶⁶ Even as it loudly proclaimed that it will never use the National Security Act used by the Centre then against 'terrorism', the state government revived the Travancore-Cochin Public Safety Act which Sir C.P. had used against the communists in the 40s, to deal with the Naxalites.⁶⁷ Section 17(1) of the 1908 Criminal Law Amendment Act which the British used to arrest Tilak on the charge of sedition, was also used by the government to round up the Naxalite activists.⁶⁸ On July 9th, T.K.Ramakrishnan, the Home Minister stated in the Legislative Assembly that 191 cases had been registered so far against the 'extremists' and that there had been 930 arrests.⁶⁹ The movement could not survive this 'white terror'.

THE DEBATES WITHIN AND THE EVENTUAL DECLINE

There was a section within the party itself who were unhappy over the 'Keninchira action'. One state committee member went to Wynad along with some others to prepare a report on the 'Keninchira struggle' in which he was so critical of the 'action' that the party refused to publish it, forcing him to publish it elsewhere. In the report he had pointed out that as Keninchira was an agrarian area where the feudal relations of production had been totally destroyed, and where capitalist type of farming had emerged, the 'annihilation line' of Charu Mazumdar meant to release the initiative and class hatred of poor

66 *Mathrubhoomi*, 30 May 1981

67 *Comrade*, vol.7, nos.36-37, 1 July 1981, p.3.

68 *Mathrubhoomi*, 29 May 1981.

69 *Mathrubhoomi*, 10 July 1981.

landless peasants was not applicable there.⁷⁰ He disputed the claim of the party that through the 'annihilation', 'people's will' in the area had been implemented. Instead, he says that those involved in the annihilation went only to the house of activists and sympathisers seeking support for the 'annihilation', and that the party was being seen in some quarters, as a 'protector' of the people which prevented people's participation and initiative. He concluded that instead of the contradiction between the people and "people's enemy" getting resolved, through the annihilation, only the contradiction between the party and its enemy had been settled.⁷¹

The annihilation also brought swift criticism from a section of the PCF. Satchidanandan saw elements of 'fascism' in the action.⁷² In late May 1981, during a Human Rights Convention, some PCF leaders, unhappy over the annihilation, declared that even if "a real working class party" came to power, it would "revolt against injustice".⁷³ In a letter to a popular weekly, Satchidanandan wrote that the annihilation did not "suit the civilised political sensibility of Kerala" and that it "nauseated a big section of the populace, including the middle peasants".⁷⁴ The differences between the party and the PCF only got accentuated in the coming months, and in a situation where the

70 P.C.Josey, op.cit., p.10.

71 ibid, p.11.

72 Satchidanandan, letter to *Kala Kaumudi* (Weekly), 305, 28 June 1981, p.31.

73 *Mathrubhoomi*, 28 May 1981.

74 Satchidanandan, letter to *Kala Kaumudi* (Weekly), 305, 28 June 1981, p.31.

party continued to uphold the 'annihilation', six members from the PCF, including its State Secretary, Kaviyur Balan, resigned from the organisation. It was also stated that 'Nadugaddika' which had played such a crucial role in the growth of the party and the PCF during this time would not be staged again under the party's banner.⁷⁵

The 'annihilation' brought the ideological differences between the party and the PCF to the fore. There had been within the PCF a section who were influenced by the New Left, and who, at times, exhibited anarchist tendencies, which did not go down well with the official party line. For instance, there was a debate between the two from the beginning on the relative importance of politics and culture. For the party, obviously, politics had primacy, which was not acceptable to some within the PCF. These differences got reflected in a rejoinder Satchidanandan wrote to the 'Manifesto of Revolutionary writers and Artists' which had stated, apart from other things, that the currents in society get reflected first in politics, and then only in art and literature. He wrote that "the currents in the base gets reflected in politics and art/ literature at the same time, and not first in politics."⁷⁶ This position was later attacked by K. Venu, representing the party leadership.⁷⁷

A source for this conflict was the way the two looked at the 'Cultural Revolution' in China. For the PCF represented by the likes of Satchidanandan, it was basically a revolution in the cultural sphere. As Mao had declared during

75 *Mathrubhoomi*, 11 June 1981.

76 Satchidanandan, *Prerana*, September 1978, p.27.

77 K. Venu, "Kala Samskarika Rangathe Innathe Kadama", *Swatantiriytine Sakshatkaram*, Alwaye, 1985, p.12.

the 'cultural revolution' that in the socialist stage, emphasis should be laid on the revolution in the superstructure, they assumed that he meant that primary should be given to the cultural struggle.⁷⁸ But Mao, in his Yen-an speeches, had clearly stated that politics constituted the most important factor in the superstructure, and as such the economic/political struggle should be given primacy. According to him, "literature and art are subordinated to politics, but in their turn exert a great influence on politics.... When we say that literature and art are subordinate to politics, we mean class politics."⁷⁹ For the Marxist-Leninists, the 'Cultural Revolution' in China, though it had other dimensions as well, was basically a resistance by the socialist forces under Mao against revisionism in the International Communist movement, and also against a resurgent bourgeoisie which had got entrenched in the CPC. It was, in fact, a continuation of the class struggle in a Socialist society. Thus the cultural revolution was a political struggle, more than anything else. In the realm of culture, it had given a blow to the bourgeois belief that arts and the sciences are the monopoly of a few intellectuals, and instead restated that it was the working classes who alone are the creators of culture. This lesson, according to the CRC CPI(M-L) leadership was not imbibed by a section of the PCF who continued to be influenced by bourgeois thinking. It attacked the *Prerana* editorial board for making it a periodical which could be understood "by only a handful of middle class intellectuals" and for not "going to the masses".⁸⁰

78 "Janakeeya Samskarika Vedi, Entu? Entinu?", pp.10, 11.

79 Mao Tse Tung, *Selected Works*, vol.III, p.86.

80 K.N. Ramachandran, "Prerana, Samskarika Vedi Ippozhum Bourgeois Liberalisathinte Swaathenathil", *Prerana*, no.52, May 1982, p.14.

For the Naxalites, the New Left was an attack on Marxism from within. And there were, according to CRC CPI(M-L), some in the PCF who were influenced by it, for instance, by Wilhelm Riech's *Mass Psychology of Fascism*.⁸¹ According to Riech, a patriarchal society by denying sexual freedom paves the way for a slave mentality amongst the people, which in turn, provides fertile ground for the growth of fascism. So, Riech says, a sexual revolution must precede a social revolution. Clearly anti-Marxist, this. An example of Riech's influence on some members of the PCF could be seen in a rejoinder to the PCF manifesto by a member: He laments that the party in its rigorous attempts at class war, ignores the sexual needs of the activists!⁸²

Lukacs too had a big influence on the Marxist intelligentsia in Kerala during this time. In his *History and Class Consciousness* Lukacs had gone to the extent of reducing Marxism to Marxist methodology.⁸³ And thus, for him, even if one did not accept some of Marx's basic assumptions, he can still claim to be a Marxist, provided he went by the dialectical method. Subramanyadas, a young ML/PCF activist in several articles questioned the party's position with regard to the formation and polarisation of classes in Kerala society.⁸⁴ The result, K.Venu is supposed to have told him "there is no medicine for baldness,

81 Wilhelm Riech, *Mass Psychology of Fascism*, New York, 1946.

82 Chittaranjan, "Nayaprakyapanarekha: Oru Viyojanakurippu", *Prerana*, nos.54, 55, July-August 1982, p.10.

83 Georg Luckacs, *History and Class Consciousness*, Trans. Rodney Livingstone, London, 1971.

84 For example, Subramanyadas, "Naam Oru Nashtapatta Janatha", *Prerana*, no.50, April 1984, pp.47-51.

nor revisionism".⁸⁵ Subramanyadas committed suicide and the Revolution had once again devoured one of its own children. At 24, Subramanyadas had been one of the most brilliant individuals in a movement, which had attracted the cream of Kerala intelligentsia. The tragic irony was that a bit earlier, he had been fighting on the side of the party against the 'bourgeois liberal trends' within the PCF. From there, he did not take too long jury jump to the other extreme.

There were some PCF activists who, in the wake of the confusion which prevailed following the Keninchira annihilation, took refuge in the Althusserian concept of 'theoretical practise', ignoring for the moment, political struggles. The 'Gramscian Institute' begun by Satchidanandan and others has been located in this context.⁸⁶ On the concept of 'theoretical practise', Norman Geras has commented,

To reduce the whole process by which Marxist theory was produced to a theoretical activity autonomous of the political practice of the working class and political conditions which were its indispensable, if not sufficient conditions of production, is to perpetrate a reduction as grave as any of those castigated by Althusser himself. Its final effect is to make the relation between Marxist theory and the working class a unilateral and purely pedagogic one: the intellectuals "give" the class the knowledge it needs. This is only the final consequence of every idealism: elitism. When knowledge celebrates its autonomy, the philosophers celebrate their dominance.⁸⁷

85 Interview with Civic Chandran, *Sukrutham*, vol.2, no.3, June 1995, p.9.

86 Interview with B. Jayakumar, Calicut, 2.1.1996.

87 Norman Geras, "Althusser's Marxism: An Account and Assessment", *New Left Review*, 71, January-February 1972, pp.83-84.

At any rate, theoretical exercises, which might have appeared meaningful in the west, looked totally out of place in India where the revolutionary situation appeared to be far greater.

The ideological/political differences between the party and in the PCF can be seen in the way the two viewed their activities. For instance, the latter saw in the doctor's trial only the reflection of 'a new sense of justice' emerging amongst the people, refusing to acknowledge its importance as the implementation of 'people's political power'.⁸⁸ They were also criticised by the party for giving undue importance to the propaganda value gained during the doctor's trial and the exploits of some PCF activists inside the Legislative Assembly, protesting against the killing of their comrade in Canannore. The Party leadership went to the other extreme by denying totally any significance in these actions, and instead upheld the 'Keninchira action' vigorously.⁸⁹

As we saw earlier, the Naxalite movement in the state peaked in popularity during the PCF phase, when the party's approach was marked by "a strong fight against terrorism and utmost confidence in the masses".⁹⁰ And during this period, for the common people and for most of the activists, there was not much difference between the party and the PCF. The PCF took over the activities which normally the party would have done, where the latter did not have a base. But contradictions within did not allow this state of affairs to

88 "Entukondu Janakeeya Vicharana", unsigned article, *Prerana*, vol.3, no.7, April 1-15, 1981, p.4.

89 'Gopan' [K. Venu], "Ningal Arude Pakshathanu", *Comrade*, vol.7, nos.36-37, July 19-26, 1981, p.4.

90 K. Venu, quoted in Mukundan C. Menon, *op.cit.*, p.8.

continue for long. Though PCF as a whole was opposed to the bourgeois system per se, there were sections within it who were not 'Marxist' in the true sense of the term. Rather, by their own admission, they had come to the movement carrying the burden of an existentialist and anarchist past.⁹¹ When the schism between the two widened, and by 1982, the PCF became inactive, their acrimony became public, a section within the PCF accusing the party of trying to capture the organisation through a faction, and the latter blaming the former for going public with these differences, violating all organisational principles, and thereby exhibiting 'anarchist' tendencies. Amidst all this confusion the PCF held its second State convention at Atholi in Kozhikode district in May 1982 with Civic Chandran as its State Secretary. Before long, Civic Chandran too broke away from the party citing irreconcilable differences, to take up social activism of a new kind. The era of New Social Movements had begun in Kerala. As for the PCF, though officially not disbanded, it never became active again. An experiment, in spite of its initial success, had failed.

91 For instance A. Soman in a letter to a friend wrote of his anarchist past before joining the PCF. A. Soman, letter to Yakub, February 8, year not mentioned, Private Records of Mandakini Narayanan (not classified), CUA. Similarly, Civic Chandran in an interview in Sukruthan also says how he and others in the PCF were more inspired by existentialism and anarchism rather than Marx and Mao before joining the movement. *Sukruthan*, vol.2, no.3, June 1995, p.6. In an earlier article, he had written: "The Second Phase of the Naxalite Movement in Kerala was anything but political... their thoughts were determined by existentialism and modern literature... spiritual discontent led them to the streets.... Not having gone through the test of class struggles and mass movements, these middle class intellectuals might have been against the system, against power, but were not Marxists, not revolutionaries." 'Special Political Observer', (Civic Chandran.) "Naxalituka Thirichuvarumo", *Vaakku*, vol.1, no.1, August 1984.

CONCLUSION

In the above pages we saw how a cultural organisation led by the politics of Naxalbari, in its attempts to create a counter-hegemonic culture, came into conflict with the party which upheld the political legacy of that uprising, but, unlike the former, believed in the primacy of an armed struggle to bring about a New Democratic India. It would be wrong to view both the PCF and the Party as homogenous units, with no varied opinions within them. For, as was discussed in the last chapter, there was a small but vociferous section within the party who opposed the 'annihilations', indicating a vigorous two-line struggle on this issue. Similarly, inside the PCF, there were some people who toed the official party line. Thus when we talk of a PCF or a party line, it relates to the 'dominant line' or the line that 'prevailed'.

The failure of the PCF can be located partly in the inability of the Naxalite Movement in the country to make a decisive breakthrough. For, however much the PCF leadership may have professed autonomy for the organisation, the very fact that it upheld the politics of Naxalbari, and therefore, armed struggle - not necessarily annihilations - ensured that its ultimate success was inextricably linked with the progress of the political movement.

Gramsci, as we saw in the beginning of this work, did not totally deny the need for an armed struggle to bring about a radical change in the capitalist system, but was only stressing the importance of carrying out a struggle for ideological hegemony to make the forcible capture of state power more meaningful. But 'annihilations' certainly do not constitute the armed struggle for all times and all places. The early leadership of the Naxalite Movement clearly made a mistake in characterising the whole of India as semi-feudal,

semi-colonial, a la pre-revolution China. For, though post-independent India had some similarities with pre-revolution China, the dissimilarities far outnumbered them - relative growth of capitalism, presence of a sizeable number of working class, different nationalities, absence of Warlordism, and a more powerful and centralised State being the glaring ones. At any rate, annihilations, which Charu Mazumdar advocated as a means to release the class hatred and initiative of landless peasants, looked out of place, for instance, in Kerala where land reforms had drastically altered the agrarian structure, or for that matter, in Punjab, where following the 'Green Revolution', capitalism had emerged in agriculture as well.

The 'annihilation line' had been questioned within the party itself from the early seventies onwards leading to most of the Marxist-Leninist groups giving it up in the course of time. In Kerala, the party in the post-emergency period, went for a 'massline' in contrast to its early phase, with a student organisation, among other factors, to show up for its new approach. The activities of the PCF also marked this phase. It was not merely a cultural organisation in the narrow sense. Certainly, through their poems and plays, the PCF activists created a new aesthetic experience in the Malayalam language. But more than that, it represented a social movement, one which questioned all the evils in the superstructure like gambling and corruption, which had got institutionalised by a consumerist capitalist system.

At many places, the differences between the party and the PCF were negligible. Where the party did not have a mass base - the Trade Unions and the Kisan Sabhas were to come later - the PCF took up the role of a mass front, leading many a struggle, which normally a cultural organisation would not have

done. At the peak of its popularity, the PCF through its activities won recognition for the Naxalite movement in the State as well. However, the Naxalite leadership in the State, wary of the fact that the 'military line' of the party was being diluted at the expense of the 'mass line', decided to put the former to the forefront. And what better way for that than the 'tried and tested' method of annihilations! The result was, the PCF disintegrated, and the party, badly bruised by severe state repression, had to start once again from the scratch.

When we talk of the failure of PCF, it is only with regard to its inability to successfully carry forward what it termed a 'dialectical relationship' with the party. The period the organisation survived was also too brief for it to bring about a 'parallel culture' in the society. But the PCF was not devoid of success altogether, not without a legacy of its own. That its struggle against corruption had a desired effect in society, albeit temporarily, is proved by the fact that in the wake of the doctor's trial at Calicut, the DFYFI, the youth wing of the CPI(M) which had denounced the trial in no uncertain terms, filled the walls of the State with the graffiti - 'corrupt bureaucrats should be beaten up'. That apart, the trial brought the question of medical ethics to the forefront, to be taken up by other health and science organisations of the state in the coming years. The people's courts, a novel method of struggle introduced by the PCF, were also a means through which people could be made to exercise political power.

Similarities can be found in the aftermaths of the PCF and the students' uprising in the West in 1968, both of which were heavily influenced by the New Left ideology. Like in the West, where the feminist and environmental

movements made a breakthrough after the 1968 uprising, in Kerala too the new social movements emerged following the decline of the PCF. Wilhelm Riech's views on the 'Sexual Revolution' had been hotly debated by the PCF activists, and as a consequence, the question of female sexuality. The feminist movement in Kerala which became active in Kerala in the 1980s should be viewed in this context. Similarly, the origins of the by now vibrant environmental movement in the state can be traced to the last days of the PCF, when some of its activists had led agitation against the Naval Academy coming up in Ezhimala and the Silent Valley project. In the realm of arts, the 'odessa' film society best represents the spirit of PCF, pointing to what a people's film movement should be like.

A Section in the PCF, as we saw in the last chapter, were influenced by the New Left ideology, and at times, found it increasingly difficult to conform to the strict organisational discipline of a Bolshevik party. After the PCF disintegrated many amongst them became inactive, whereas others continue to be involved in social activism. Arguing that there can be more than one contradictions in a society, and that the exercise of power is shared at various levels, and not concentrated in the hands of an all-embracing state, they are busy engaged in struggles at the local level, ranging from environmental degradation to Dalit and Women's oppression. A revolutionary party should be able to give up its inherent hostility for such groups, and cooperate wherever possible, except with those already coopted by the State or run by external agencies for their own ends. The CPI(M-L) Red Flag, which seems to be the only potent Naxalite group in the state at present, seems to have given up its rigidities of the past. Its mass front 'Yuvajanavedi' was in the forefront in the

recent struggles against the construction of a nuclear plant at Peringom, and the hydroelectric project at Pooyamkutty, which, if built, could spell environmental disaster for the state. Unlike in the past, the party now has a trade union (TUCI) and a peasant union (KKTU) through which it carries out struggles on partial demands. It has also given up the semi-feudal semi-colonial characterisation of India, and instead characterises India as a neo-colony, with imperialism as the main target of struggle. Meanwhile in the state, the old 'Kerala model' which could not be sustained has been given up, and concerted efforts are now on to promote tourism on a large scale, the ecological and cultural dangers of which a Kovalam amply testifies. This is but one of the many challenges facing the people of Kerala. It remains to be seen how the revolutionary groups in the state respond to them.

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