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## **REMEMBERING EMS NAMBOODIRIPAD**

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Many commentaries have been published on the life and work of EMS Namboodiripad after his death on March 19, 1998. The more one reads about his multi-faceted contributions, the more one's respect and admiration grows. He was an outstanding Marxist, who dedicated his whole life to the Communist movement. All his life and energies were spent in the cause of national independence and socialism. This issue of The Marxist is dedicated to his memory.

EMS penned thousands of pages on a host of subjects. They dealt mainly with the rise and the development of the national movement, the impact of socialist ideas in our country and on various aspects of Marxist philosophy, political economy and the social sciences. All these were intended to help and guide the revolutionary movement of the working class; to enable it to make a concrete analysis and chart out the correct course.

EMS Namboodiripad was born into an upper-caste, landlord family of Namboodiri brahmins. At a very young age he began reacting to the environment in which he lived -- the caste-ridden Kerala society and began advocating social reforms. Very soon he was drawn into the national liberation struggle as a young student. He was able to see that the oppressive social order was being protected by the British imperialists and their stooges the local princes. This was the period when Gandhi had already emerged on the national scene. A big upsurge had begun after the adoption of the Lahore resolution in 1930 calling for complete independence. This slogan was able to draw the peasants, workers, students and youth into the national movement. EMS also plunged into the movement.

It was a time when Shaheed Bhagat Singh and his colleagues were on their way to martyrdom in 1931. In his final testament, Bhagat

Singh renounced terrorism and expressed the belief that the socialist revolution was the only path for the liberation of mankind. This announcement had a big impact all over the country. Two years later, the withdrawal of the civil disobedience movement caused great disillusionment among the people, particularly the young. Congressmen who were influenced by socialist ideas decided to form the Congress Socialist Party in 1934. EMS was one of the organisers at that time alongwith Jayprakash Narain, Acharya Narendra Dev and others. EMS headed the Kerala unit. The Meerut prisoners were released by that time and the Central Committee of the Communist Party had started functioning openly. EMS came in contact with the Communists working in the Congress Socialist Party and began studying Marxist classics. By this time the All India Kisan Sabha was also set up. In this move too, EMS was one of the initiators.

The Seventh Congress of the Communist International made corrections to the approach to be adopted by the Communist Parties towards the bourgeois-led national liberation movements. The Sixth Congress had taken a sectarian approach and the Communists as an organised force remained outside the national liberation movements led by the bourgeoisie and was critical of them. In India, however, in the absence of an organised Communist centre, at many places, communists were active inside the Congress. In 1935 there was a total change in the orientation of the Communists. They started working inside the Congress Party, while side by side developing mass and class organisations of workers, peasants, students, youth etc. Though Nehru had agreed for the direct affiliation of these organisations to the Congress, Vallabhai Patel and others seriously objected and finally this could not come about.

Madras was a composite state at that time and comprised the bulk of the present Tamilnadu, parts of the present Andhra Pradesh and the Malabar area of Kerala. Units of the Communist Party had been formed in some places in Madras province at the initiative of P. Sundarayya. Amir Haider, a dock worker from Western Punjab (who died a few years ago in Pakistan) took the initiative to develop contacts with Communist workers. He was in touch with Ghate and P. Sundarayya. Com. EMS working alongwith the Communists inside the Congress and the All India Kisan Sabha became one of the organisers of the Communist Party in Kerala. In the beginning four comrades joined the illegal party in 1937. They were P. Krishna Pillai, N.C. Shekar, K. Damodaran and EMS.

This was a turning point in the life of EMS. He had by his own experience and study come to be influenced by the October Revolution and had begun to study Marxist books, which were not readily available in those days. His study of historical materialism inspired him to undertake an in-depth study of the history of Kerala society. This study further convinced him of the necessity for a socialist revolution. It is this deep conviction which helped him to take the whole Kerala unit of the CSP alongwith him to join the illegal Communist Party. When the ban on the Communist Party was withdrawn in 1942 and the first Congress of the CPI held in 1943, Com. EMS was elected to its Central Committee. He made a big contribution during this period, paying particular attention to the study of the agrarian question and formulating the policies of the Party in this respect.

The post-war period, was a bad time for the Party, due to certain political mistakes committed by it. However, in Kerala, the Party was able to win over more and more sections of the people and emerge as a political force. The Left-sectarian approach damaged the Party a lot. The functioning of the mass organisations also became difficult in this period.

The Kerala unit of the Party led by EMS constantly emphasised on the need to build the unity of the working class and the peasantry to carry forward the agrarian revolution to success. During the anti-imperialist struggle, this linkage was never overlooked. As a result, the Kerala Communists concentrated on developing the peasant movement and later in post-independent India on organising the agricultural labour. The agricultural workers movement is the strongest in Kerala today.

Comrade EMS was one of the pioneers who launched the struggle for the reorganisation on linguistic basis. The Aikya Kerala movement led by him was successful in uniting the Travancore-Cochin princely states into one whole, Kerala. The Congress party, which had during the course of the freedom struggle promised organisation of states on a linguistic basis and had even formed its provincial committees on this basis, went back on its commitment. The Left took the lead in developing a powerful movement for the linguistic reorganisation of states. This forced the Central Government to set up the States Reorganisation Commission.

It was this tireless work by EMS and his comrades in Kerala that saw the Party emerging victorious in the first ever elections held to the Kerala Legislative Assembly in 1957, soon after the Kerala State was constituted. When EMS became the Chief Minister, he proved himself to be an able administrator. Many measures particularly the land reforms legislation and education bill became a source of inspiration all over the country. The impact that this government had on the people of Kerala and in the rest of the country can be gauged from the fact that the Congress ruling at the Centre undemocratically dismissed his government. When EMS toured the whole country after the dismissal, the mass response was immense with the democratic-minded people in the whole country condemning this action of the Centre.

Comrade EMS was elected to the Polit Bureau in 1953-54 at the third Congress of the CPI. Subsequently, he became editor of the CPI organ New Age and also became General Secretary of the Party after the death of Ajoy Ghosh. In the struggle against revisionism within the CPI which began in 1954 and which culminated in the formation of the CPI(M), EMS while disassociating from the revisionist position, was apprehensive whether the fight against revisionism would take the party on to the sectarian path. Thorough discussions with comrades convinced him that in the interests of the Indian communist movement the split had become inevitable and he decided to take up the fight against the class collaborationist line. After that he played an important role in building and developing the CPI(M) in the country. History has confirmed the line pursued by the CPI(M) to be by and large correct. Today it is the biggest force amongst the Left in the country. EMS was the General Secretary of the Party from 1977 to an important phase in the 34 year old history of the Party.

He was an excellent campaigner and agitator. In 1965, during the Indo-Pakistan war, when most of us were in jail, and the Party advanced the slogan of peaceful solution of the problem, it was EMS who conducted the campaign throughout the country.

When the agitation against the Mandal Commission recommendations was going on, he wrote a booklet on the need for reservations. It dealt in depth about the need for reservations in a caste-ridden society. At the same time he opposed the concept of providing reservations to the "creamy layer" among the backward castes. There was no subject which he did not deal with, whether it

be Marxist philosophy, political economy, Indian philosophy, literature or culture. He never underestimated the importance of culture in developing the democratic movement in the country. He was always emphasising on the study of concrete conditions prevailing in each state and formulating policies and slogans on that basis. As General Secretary of the Party he used to pay special emphasis on developing the mass and class organisations and stressed on their democratic functioning and independent role by making them more broad based.

Throughout his life, particularly after he joined the Communist Party, EMS wrote innumerable articles and books on a variety of subjects. Notable among his works are Kerala Society and Politics, The Mahatma and The Ism, History of the Indian Freedom Struggle, Indian Planning in Crisis and Nehru, Ideology and Practice. His selected writings printed in English in two volumes covers the whole gamut of his ideas in the sphere of culture, philosophy, economy and politics. He also wrote an outline history of the Communist Party in Malayalam.

Even during his last days, despite his failing health, he used to contribute regularly to the party dailies, weeklies, theoretical organs and ofcourse to the Polit Bureau and the Central Committee. It was an exceptional capacity that very few possess. His work was ceaseless and he kept a strict schedule.

His simple style of living was a source of inspiration for everyone. His whole life was a life of selfless sacrifice in the cause of the Party and the working class. He gave the entire money from the sale of his ancestral property to the Party. When he was arrested in 1963, his wife had no house to go to. Their residence used to be in the Party headquarters in those days. His life was a model to be emulated by other revolutionaries. All those committed to the cause of the working people, who wish to advance the socialist ideas, will learn and draw sustenance from his life and work. Hopefully, this issue of The Marxist will contribute to that effort.