

EMS Namboodiripad and the Communist Government of Kerala

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The formation of the Communist government in Kerala headed by EMS Namboodiripad on April 5, 1957 was hailed in India and across the world by the Left and progressive forces. The Communists had no previous experience of running a state government in India; neither were there any comparable precedence around the world where a Communist Party came to power by winning democratic elections. The state government was of course constrained to work within the framework of the Constitution of India and the policies pursued by an antagonistic Central government, coupled with strident opposition from the Congress Party allied with various vested interests and caste and religious organisations. Despite this, the Communist government under the leadership of EMS Namboodiripad took many pioneering steps to further people's interests through its policies in agriculture, industry, education, public health, public distribution system, social security measures, decentralisation of power, police policy, administrative reform etc. People's active participation in the evolution and execution of these policies became the role model for subsequent state governments led by the Left parties in West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura. The experience of this Communist government contributed greatly to the evolution of the understanding of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) about the Party's participation in state governments.

Demarcating from the approach of Congress governments of relying upon landlords and other richer sections, the Communist government tried to unleash the creative energies and productive capacities of the common people. The people were encouraged to intervene in the evolution of policies and their execution. While making attempts to improve the functioning of the bureaucracy for better administration, the Communist government's thrust was on people's participation, even in the field of administration. The Communist government was guided by the understanding that the correctness and efficacy of policies can only be ensured through people's active intervention in policy formulation and implementation. The policies of the Communist government combined with the intervention of the Communist party and mass organisations and the participation of the people, unleashed a process that brought about a shift in the balance of class forces in the state in favour of vast sections of the poor. It is this shift that has eventually enabled Kerala to achieve high levels of social development despite comparatively low levels of material production.

Agrarian Reforms

The most important contribution of the Communist government was in the sphere of agrarian reforms. The approach of the government was guided by the understanding of the Communist Party that the peasant question stood as a foremost national question. The government passed many legislations to help the peasantry solve their problems as well as redress different problems in agriculture, the Kerala Agrarian Relations Bill being the most decisive step.

The Statement of Policy announced by EMS Namboodiripad on April 5, 1957 after taking oath as Chief Minister of Kerala explained the immediate aims of the Communist government on the agrarian question:

It is acknowledged by all that the agrarian question in our State is rather complicated. This question will, therefore, require consultations with the various sections of the people concerned for working out the details of agrarian reforms. Certain broad lines of policy have already been worked out which can provide the basis for such discussion. These are the lines of policy laid down by the Land Reforms Panel of the Planning Commission. They have secured the support of such all-India parties as the Congress, the Communist Party and the PSP as well as of several organisations representing the peasantry. Therefore, the above mentioned consultations need not take a long time, but can be finished relatively quickly. Within a short and definitely-fixed time-limit, we expect to prepare one or more bills fixing fair rent, giving fixity of tenure to the tenant, fixing a ceiling on landholdings in keeping with the peculiar conditions of Kerala, distributing surplus land above the ceiling fixed, giving such safeguards as are legitimate for those small landholders who stand to lose by the above-mentioned reforms etc. Since the peasants require some immediate relief while the above mentioned reforms are being worked out, it will be necessary to bring in emergency legislation staying all evictions.

As promised in the Policy Statement, the government issued an ordinance on April 11 (just six days after forming the government) prohibiting all evictions of tenants, sub-tenants and occupants of homestead land on any ground including failure to pay rent. Furthermore, all court proceedings initiated by landlords against tenants, sub-tenants or occupants of homestead were stayed. The ordinance was issued as a prelude to the Agrarian Relations Bill that the government intended to pass. The ordinance was necessary in view of past experiences with the Congress government wherein the period between the announcement of agrarian legislation and the date of actual enactment of the law would be used by landlords and vested interests to evict tenants in large numbers and to execute transfer deeds to evade the provisions of the law. The

ordinance was promulgated to prevent landlords and vested interests from resorting to those illegal practices. The prohibition of evictions shook land relations in Kerala. The Kisan Sabha and Agricultural Workers Union came to the forefront and actively intervened to stop all evictions, and wherever these organisations were weak, they gained strength and came forward to stop evictions. The law passed by the government and the active intervention by mass organisations, together protected the interests of tenants and occupants of homesteads.

Contrary to the land reform measures undertaken by the Congress state governments, the Agrarian Relations Act passed by the Kerala Legislative Assembly contained many important provisions to protect the genuine interests of tenants and occupants of homesteads. Other legislations defined the term 'tenant' so narrowly that large numbers of intended beneficiaries were excluded. But the new legislation introduced by the Communist government defined 'tenant' to include not only tenants but sub-tenants and every authorised or unauthorised occupant of a piece of land or a small patch of land on which a hut had been built. All such tenants were given fixity of tenure and they were not liable to be evicted for any reason whatsoever. The land that was illegally evicted from certain tenants was also restored to them. The rent to be paid by the tenants was substantially reduced and they needed only to pay the fair rent fixed as per the provisions of the legislation. The tenant could purchase the proprietary rights of the land they cultivated by paying a comparatively lesser amount calculated on the basis of fair rent. Considering the density of population and the shortage of land, the Agrarian Relations Act provided for a low ceiling of land and made provisions for distribution of ceiling surplus land to the landless and poor peasants through the involvement of popular committees. The rights of the occupants of homesteads were protected. All transfers of land made to avoid the provisions of the law (after the publication of the Act on December 18, 1957) were made null and void. Protection was given to small owners and trusts without adversely affecting the genuine interest of tenants and agricultural workers. The other important provision of the law was that elected people's representatives would be involved in the proper implementation of the provisions of the law. Committees of the Communist Party, Kisan Sabha and Agricultural Workers Union at all levels from the state to the village level were engaged in the process of consultation, conflict resolution and reconciliation for framing the provisions of the law. It was the outcome of a genuinely collective and participative effort.

EMS explained this process in his book, *The Communist Party in Kerala – Six Decades of Struggle and Advance* as follows:

The process of land legislation was a complicated one because different kinds of tenures existed in each of the three regions of

Malabar, Cochin and Travancore. The minister who presided over the work of drafting the Bill spent sleepless nights and discussed the law with a very wide variety of persons who presented their points of view to the government for its consideration. The state committee of the Party, the Party legislature group and committees of the Kisan Sabha at all levels from state to the village were all engaged in the near interminable process of consultation, conflict and attempts at reconciliation. The process was so time consuming that it took place nearly two years between the introduction of the Bill and its final adoption in the Assembly.

The Ordinance, which prohibited evictions and the final Bill adopted in June 1959 marked a new stage in the economic and socio-cultural life of the people of Kerala. EMS Namboodiripad gave great importance to the Ordinance and the passing of Agrarian Relations Bill:

*It ended the economic oppression and the socio-cultural domination by a small minority of the upper castes on the mass of the rural poor. The socio-cultural movements of over half a century that were directed against caste domination, outmoded systems of family organisation and obscurantist beliefs and practices culminated in the release of the rural masses from every kind of exploitation and oppression. **Even if it had to its credit only the enactment of the Agrarian Relations Bill, the 28 month existence of the Communist government would find a place in the history of modern democratic Kerala.** (Emphasis added) (*The Communist Party in Kerala – Six Decades of Struggle and Advance*)*

The Agrarian Relations Bill was opposed by the landlords, Nair Service Society, certain Christian organisations, Indian National Congress, Praja Socialist Party and Indian Union Muslim League. Within hours of the closure of the Assembly session during which the Bill was passed, these sections unleashed what they called a "liberation struggle" to bring down the Communist government in Kerala. The government was dismissed by the Congress Central government on July 31, 1959. The President did not give assent to the Bill but it was returned with a directive to regularize all transfer of land made by landowners in between December 18, 1957 when the Bill was published and on July 27, 1960 when the Bill was returned by the President to the Kerala Legislative Assembly. The Congress-led state government was formed after the Communist government brought an amendment to that effect. It is to be noted here that the number of transfers executed during this period was more than one million. Many lakhs of landless people and agricultural workers lost many benefits including land they would have got had the original provisions remained. That was the price that vested interests extracted

for sabotaging the agrarian relations legislation and by dismissal of the Communist government.

The Congress-led government which came into power after the dismissal of the Communist government could not give up the agenda of land reforms altogether and was forced to pass a land reform legislation with dilutions in many provisions of the original Agrarian Relations Act. The people's upsurge unleashed by the introduction of Agrarian Relations Bill could not be ignored by the Congress-led government that came into office after the Communist government was dismissed.

The debt relief legislation passed by the Communist government also gave great relief to indebted peasants and agricultural workers. The government also passed a legislation to regulate private money lending. The maximum interest rate was fixed at 9 per cent. The passage of the Kerala Compensation for Tenants Improvement Act 1958 ensured adequate compensation for lessee, sub-lessee, mortgagee and sub-mortgagee of land. Government land was distributed to the landless and agricultural workers with the involvement of popular committees comprising of representatives from all political parties. This ensured transparency and equity in land distribution. Minimum wages were fixed for agricultural workers. The government also took certain steps to ensure fair prices for agricultural produces. A State Trading Corporation and many marketing societies were organised to help the peasantry.

New Orientation towards Development and Production of Material Values

The Communist government gave a new orientation to the concept of development by giving importance to the production of material goods while preserving and making efforts for expansion of areas such as education, public health, social security measures, communication etc. EMS had consistently stressed the importance of increasing the production of material values:

The idea was to be hammered home to our people that none of their problems for example, the food crisis or unemployment (in respect of both, all these problems Kerala was worse of than the rest of the country) could be solved unless there was an orientation towards the production of material values. (The Communist Party in Kerala – Six Decades of Struggle and Advance)

Major steps were taken in that direction. A vigorous drive was launched for increasing agricultural production. The drive to start a large number of small irrigation works with the cooperation of the people and the drive for large-scale use of green manure were very significant steps in that

direction. Various forms of cooperative societies were organised for strengthening small and cottage industries. Efforts were made to start large-scale industries in the private sector with or without State participation.

Industrialisation

The effort to develop industries in Kerala was a very difficult task due to various reasons. The Central government refused to locate any major public sector industries in Kerala. The state government did not have adequate financial resources to start public sector undertakings. The only alternative, therefore, was to encourage private industrialists to start new industries. There were difficulties in attracting entrepreneurs from outside the state, as there was incessant propaganda that with a Communist government in Kerala the employer-employee relations would not be congenial for establishing industries. The Communist government had to take determined steps to come out of these difficulties. It made public pronouncements that assistance would be provided for setting up new industries with healthy employer-employee relations. According to EMS, *"Settling disputes through negotiations, arriving at agreements and making sincere and serious efforts to implement agreements were the major planks of the government labour policy. The policies helped start several small and medium sized industrial units and two major ones."*

One of the large units to be started was under the ownership and management of G. D. Birla. The large-scale industrial unit of Gwalior Rayons was set-up on the basis of an agreement between the government and G. D. Birla after protracted negotiations. The unit provided employment to nearly 15,000 people together with trade and other subsidiary occupations. Though the Central Committee of the Party subsequently noted some defects in the terms of agreement with G. D. Birla, it approved of the agreement as a whole since it would help find a partial solution to an immediate problem of the people. Industrialisation through the private sector was one of the means by which the backward economy of a resource starved state could be taken forward. Some other private industries proposed that the government should purchase certain number of shares if they set-up industries in Kerala. The positive response from the government helped in setting up several enterprises. If the government had been able to continue its work of industrialisation and other policies for the economic development of the state unhindered, Kerala and the people would have made much progress in the production of material values.

New Police Policy

The Communist government adopted a new police policy and a new approach towards mass organisations and their activities. Even after

independence, the Congress government at the Centre and states were following the old colonial approach towards mass organisations and their agitations and struggles. The British colonial rulers considered awareness among the people about their rights and interests, and every effort to organise them as a threat and used police or military force against such efforts by the people. The British viewed all such moves as issues related to law and order and used brutal force to repress them. The bourgeois-landlord governments that came into power after independence faithfully continued the colonial practice and used police and military forces against agitations and struggles of the people. Even while dealing with cases of ordinary crime the police force was notorious for its highhandedness. The police resorted to third degree methods in the investigation of crimes, which became the normal style of the police. The police force was extensively used by the bourgeois-landlord classes to suppress the legitimate struggles of the working people.

The new "police policy" made two important departures from the existing practice. First, it strictly prohibited third degree methods and torture of persons in custody. The police were directed to make investigations strictly in accordance with the provisions of the law. Second, with regard to mass struggles and activities of mass organisations, the police were not allowed to be used in landlord and bourgeois interest to suppress strikes, struggles and agitations of workers, peasants, agricultural workers and other sections of people. Additionally, it was declared that all industrial disputes would be settled through the method of negotiations between employers and employees. The earlier practice was that all industrial disputes were settled by the police and such issues were treated as law and order problems. The Communist government directed that the Labour Department alone should deal with all such matters.

The intervention of the police was deemed necessary only when there was a violation of law or a crime was committed. The Communist government declared that the struggles of peasants, students, youth, women and others would be dealt with by the civil administration and not by the police. The government gave directives to all its departments to respect civil liberties and democratic rights of all sections of the people. Detention without trial was prohibited against individuals and organisations.

Police Verification in Jobs Stopped

Another important step by the government was stopping the longstanding undemocratic practice of verification of political antecedents of job applicants. Only when the police certified the "good conduct" of an applicant, he or she would be given a job. This practice was used to prevent any member/sympathiser of the Communist Party from getting any job in the government. The Central government had issued a circular that instructed that job applicants who had been associated with the

activities of the Communist party or any of its mass organisations should be certified as “persons of bad antecedents” and that their job applications should be automatically rejected. Within weeks after assumption of office, the Communist government declared that the instructions issued by the Central government would be ignored in Kerala and that there would be no police verification of the character and antecedents of job applicants.

Public-Government Relations

The government gave utmost importance to strengthening and expanding relations between the government and the people. Though the Party had formulated its programme for the development of Kerala, the government made efforts to implement those programmes in consultation with the concerned people. The Communist government considered the policy declarations made in the Election Manifesto of the Communist Party as the basis for such consultations. The government gave encouragement to all mass organisations and involved their view on all policy matters.

The Communist government gave great importance to associating people and their representatives in the day-to-day functioning of the administration. The government constituted people’s committees to supervise, advise and assess the work of permanent officials in various departments such as food, land revenue, health, education etc. Political parties – ruling and opposition – as well as mass organisations and interested individuals were included in such committees. It is to be noted here that in many district and local bodies, the Communist Party was a minority, as the representation of the political parties at every level was decided on the basis of the comparative strength of the Party in that region. However, there was no attempt on part of the government to pack these committees with representatives from the Communist party. This was another departure made by the Communist government from the practices of Congress governments. The Congress governments left the day-to-day administration work only to the permanent officials or if at all they associated some people’s representatives, they discriminated against the opposition and particularly the Left.

The new policy initiatives of the Communist government were hailed by the common people and naturally opposed by vested interests. These policies highlighted fundamental differences between previous Congress governments that represented the bourgeois-landlord classes and the Communist government that worked for the workers, peasants and common people. This encouraged more people to join mass organisations and to raise their voices. This growing awareness of the common people and their involvement in public life strengthened the democratic polity in Kerala.

Workers' Rights

The Communist government took new initiatives in protecting the rights of the workers. The government found that the main obstacle in the way of a cordial employer-employee atmosphere in industry was that the employers were reluctant to recognise the rights of employees and even if they did recognise, they reduced this recognition to a mere formality. They were reluctant to concede the legitimate demands of the employees with regard to wage and salary scales as well as conditions of work. The government tried to bring a change in the attitude of employers. The change in the attitude of the employers could facilitate the employees and their organisations taking a position conducive for maintenance of peace in industry. In order to maintain healthy relations between employers and employees and peace in industry, the government introduced the system of tripartite conference comprising of the representatives of trade unions of the employers and of the government at the state level. The government also constituted individual industry level tripartite conference for maintaining healthy relations between employers and employees for the first time in India. While taking steps to see that the legitimate demands of the employees of both public as well as private sectors were realised, the government also took measures to make the employees realise their vital role in bringing about efficiency in production and management. The government was conscious that it was necessary to create prerequisites for enabling the employees and their organisations to fulfill their responsibilities. To achieve this, the government tried to implement the following measures:

1. The employers and the government should recognise all existing unions.
2. The government should offer its good offices in bringing about the unity of different unions in those industries where there are more than one union on the principle of "one union in one industry".
3. In those industries where such unification of unions is not thought possible, the framework should be laid on the basis of which industrial disputes can be handled. The tripartite conferences should discuss and devise methods to tackle this issue.
4. "Works committees" should be organised in every industrial enterprises and they should have wide powers in regulating and controlling the conditions of work in respective industries.
5. Management councils should be organised in enterprises in order to help managements in bringing about legitimacy in the enterprises as well as to familiarize the employees with the financial and other problems facing the enterprises. Representatives of employees should be adequately represented in such councils.

The government also took steps to regulate wage and salary scales as well as the working conditions of agricultural labourers, middle class

employees including the non-gazetted officers etc. These measures, to a great extent, improved the employer-employee relations in Kerala.

The government also took initiatives to organize cooperative societies of workers in many areas. Coir, handloom and toddy shops cooperative societies were formed to ensure job security, better wages and service condition for the employees. This was also a new initiative from the state government to protect the interest of the employees.

Major Initiatives in Social Sectors

The Communist government, alongwith the efforts for increasing production of material goods, took many new initiatives in social sectors. The government gave more attention for democratization of education and public health systems. The doctors-people ratio was increased under the Communist government. The government took many steps towards improving and expanding public health facilities so that the poorer sections could get a better and free medical care in government-run hospitals.

Another important step was the introduction and adoption of a legislation on education in the Assembly in order to take certain steps for democratising the education system of Kerala. The objective of the Bill was to provide direct payment of salaries to teachers in private education institutions without any deduction by private manager of schools; to curb the power of managers to suspend or dismiss teachers from employment; to fix criteria for the appointment of teachers and other related matters. Therefore, teachers in private educational institutions could receive the same emoluments as their counterparts in government schools. It was proposed that the right of private managers to own and manage educational institutions would be controlled rather than abolished.

The managers of private educational institutions projected the entire Bill as an attack on their ownership rights. The Christian Church, the Nair Service Society and many other caste and communal organisations unleashed a false propaganda that the Bill was an attack on the right to property, minority rights and a measure to nationalise educational institutions. The propaganda of the Christian church was that if the Bill were adopted, the institutions would be used for Communist propoganda rather than preaching religion. As in the case of Agrarian Relations Bill, the debate on the Education Bill became prolonged and bitter.

Public Distribution System

Kerala was a deficit state in foodgrains production. The creation of a South Food Zone comprising of southern states of Kerala, Tamilnadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh formed immediately after the formation of the Communist government brought additional problems in procuring rice

for distribution in Kerala. The Kerala government asked the Central government either to supply rice from the Central stocks or to enforce control on prices in Andhra Pradesh, so that Kerala could buy rice at controlled rates. The Central government did not do either and washed its hands off all responsibilities for ensuring rice supplies to Kerala.

In order to meet this difficulty created by the Central government, Kerala government took many steps. It tried to procure rice from within and outside the state for distribution. A system of "fair price shops" was introduced for the supply of rice at cheap rates to the needy sections. The number of fair price shops increased to 6,000. In order to select families to whom supplies were to be made, where shops were to be started and to weed out "ghost" ration cards, the government constituted people's food committees comprising of representatives from all major political parties. Such committees were constituted at the taluk, panchayat and other local levels. The task of the state level 'State Food Advisory Committee' was to oversee the working of the whole system. The "fair price shops" system ensured the supply of foodgrains to the needy sections in Kerala and was a great help to the common people. Eventually the activities of the "fair price shops" was extended to other commodities also.

Democratic Decentralisation

The Communist government appointed an Administrative Reforms Committee with the Chief Minister EMS Namboodiripad as Chairman to examine the issue of administrative reforms of which democratic decentralisation was an important element. The Communist government approached the issue of "democratic de-centralisation" as democratization and decentralisation at all levels from the Centre to states and from the states to lower levels of administration down to the panchayats.

On the question of decentralisation of power, the committee considered the issue of whether there should be a two tier or three tier system of panchayati raj in Kerala. This meant whether there should be panchayats below and district council above or should there be an intermediate layer in between. The committee recommended that in the specific situation of Kerala where panchayats are bigger in size with larger populations than elsewhere, there was no need for an intermediate tier and panchayat below and district councils above was suitable for Kerala.

Implementing these recommendations, the government prepared two new Bills for introduction in the Assembly. The first Bill vested in elected panchayats all the functions discharged by revenue and other department officials at the village level. The second Bill proposed to transfer many functions discharged by district officials to an elected district council with an elected President and assisted by a permanent official of the status of

a Deputy Collector. These two bills were introduced in the Legislative Assembly but they could not be passed as the Communist government was dismissed by the Central government.

Democratization of Administration

Another important aspect examined by the Administrative Reforms Committee related to democratization of administration, which addressed the relation between the permanent officials, the political leadership of the government, i.e., the ministry and the public. The Administrative Reforms Committee rejected the view that the political leadership of the government should leave the task of day-to-day administration to the permanent officials. As people's representatives, the political leadership should, through the legislature and the ministry, lay down policies while permanent officials had to implement the policy laid down by the political leadership. The report of the *Administrative Reforms Committee* opined that it was difficult to draw a clear cut line between policy formulation and implementation:

It is generally said that Ministers are responsible only for framing the policies, and that once the decisions on policies are taken, their implementation should be left to the Civil Servants. This is a 'conventional half-truth', because in Government, ends cannot always be separated from means. 'What should be done' is, of course, policy-making, but how to do it, when to do it and where to do it, are all as much part of policy as of implementation. It is, therefore, difficult to draw a line between policy and implementation and say where one ends and the other begins. Moreover, it is proper implementation that makes policy significant. The Minister, who is constitutionally responsible for all the executive action of his department, has to ensure that the Policy laid down by him is properly implemented.

According to EMS, the task of integrating people's control over the administration in the context of day-to-day administration by permanent officials is not easy and it is the responsibility of the political leadership to effectively ensure that. He writes in *The Communist Party in Kerala – Six Decades of Struggle and Advance*:

This does not mean that ministers and the legislators should interfere in the day-to-day administration which should of course be left to permanent officials who after all have been trained to do the job. The best of the people's representatives cannot be expected to have the training and experience to carry on day-to-day administration. The fact, however, remains that the essence of democracy is the continuing control exercised by the people through their elected representatives on the permanent officials who run the administration. The task is by no means easy to

integrate people's control over the administration with day-to-day administration by permanent officials but that is the crux of the democratic political set-up.

EMS was of the firm opinion that in the background of continuing role of the general administrators and the increasing role of specialists, the political leadership of the administration should play a leading role. The general as well as the specialist cadres are expected to serve the people and the people cannot act except through their elected representative. When the political leadership committed any mistake or violated the norms of democracy and decency, there is a safeguard that they have to go to the people every five years. Incompetent or corrupt persons or persons misusing their authority will be punished by the people in elections. This democratic safeguard is not there in the case of either the general or the specialized administrator and, hence, they should be strictly subordinated to the political leadership of the government.

The Issue of Reservation

The *Administrative Reforms Committee* considered the question whether reservation in educational institutions and government jobs for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and backward communities should continue or be modified or given up. In Kerala, nearly 50 per cent of the jobs were reserved for those sections and the rest of the jobs were thrown open for competition among all sections of the people. After examining the question from all angles, the committee made the following recommendations: first, the existing system of reservation should continue unchanged for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes; second, with regard to the backward communities, reservation based on caste or community should be supplemented by an economic criteria and the applicants from families whose annual income was higher than a prescribed level should not be allowed to enjoy the benefits of reservation; and third, surveys should be undertaken after every ten years to find out whether socio-economic, cultural, political conditions of any of the backward communities has sufficiently improved so that they can be taken out of the list of backward communities.

It was the *Administrative Reforms Committee* headed by EMS Namboodiripad which proposed for the first time in India, the exclusion of a well-to-do section from the backward communities from enjoying the benefits of reservation. The present practice of exclusion of "creamy layer" actually originated from this recommendation. Both the "forward" and the "backward" communities came against the recommendations of the committee and particularly against EMS Namboodiripad. The "forward" communities attacked the report as it recommended the continuation of the reservation system. The "backward" communities attacked the report for introducing an economic criteria for exclusion.

Equal Rights to Muslim Minorities

The British colonial rulers considered the Muslims in Malabar (northern part of Kerala) as criminal tribes and used all kinds of repressive methods against them. They were discriminated against in appointments to government jobs. Muslims were not allowed to repair or do maintenance work in mosques or to construct new ones. They had to obtain special permission from the District Collectors for this purpose. But in the case of other religious believers, they could repair, do maintenance work or construct new places of worship as they like. The discrimination continued even after independence and under Congress governments. The Communist government ended all discriminative practices against the Muslim minorities and provided equal rights with all other religious believers.

Fight against Corruption and New Guidelines for Ministers

The government took effective steps against corruption, nepotism and inefficiency in the administration with the involvement of people and their organisations. The approach of the government was guided by the understanding that it was the task of every organisation and every individual who was interested in justice being done to raise their voice against every single act of bribery, nepotism and other evils. The government gave directions to higher authorities to make prompt enquiries and to take appropriate steps against whom such complaints were made. The government also stressed the role of the organisations of government employees to create consciousness among the people and to bring about a corresponding change in the attitude of the government officials.

The government gave strict instructions about the method of functioning and life style of the ministers. The statement of policy announced by EMS Namboodiripad on April 5, 1957 after taking oath as Chief Minister contained the following instructions to the ministers:

It is necessary to bring about an order and system in the personal life and official activities of the ministers themselves. It will prove a big obstacle in the way of a good and decent administration if the impression is created that their relatives, friends, colleagues in public work etc. of the ministers can exert a good deal of pressure on them. Each of us will do our best to see that such an impression is not created. This, however, is inadequate. It is equally necessary to evolve certain rules of conduct which are clear and capable of strict enforcement in order to get the activities of the ministers. Whatever discussions

we hold among ourselves on this question will be made known to the people. At the same time, I request the people to give their advise and suggestions on how this is to be actually implemented.

Conclusion

The performance of the Communist government and its new approach helped to rally newer sections in support of the government and the Communist party. It is a fact that the Communist party was not able to get majority in Kerala Legislative Assembly in the 1960 elections after the dismissal of the Communist government. But the election, in another sense, represented a victory for the Communist party and a defeat for the Congress. While the Communist party fought the elections alone, the Congress was supported by all caste, communal and other reactionary forces and parties like the PSP and the Muslim League. The votes of the Communist party increased from 23 lakhs in 1957 elections to 35 lakhs in 1960 elections. While the Party along with independents supported by it polled 40 per cent of votes in 1957 elections, it polled 44 per cent votes in 1960 elections. The election results showed that the balance of political forces had shifted in favour of the Communist party and against the Congress. In Kerala, since independence, Congress was the biggest political party in terms of mass support but the election results showed that the Communist party had emerged as the single biggest party in popular vote within a short period. B. T. Ranadive, writing in the *New Age* monthly, March 1960 described this as follows:

It convincingly showed that notwithstanding the combination of all parties against it, notwithstanding the malicious and slanderous propaganda carried day in and day out by more than thirty daily papers against the Party, the Communist Party emerged stronger – much stronger than before in popular estimation.

The formation of the Communist government and its performance strengthened the Communist party and its mass base in Kerala. As Chief Minister of the first Communist government and as leader of the Communist party, the contributions of EMS Namboodiripad both at the theoretical and practical level, will always be cherished.