

Kalpetta
March 31, 2010

Dear Comrade Karat,

I, as President of the Janata Dal (S) Kerala, write this letter to you in your capacity as General Secretary of the CPI (M) in the light of the edit-page article in *Deshabhimani*, on March 25, 2010. I never wanted to do this, but now feel that for historical reasons these observations should be part of public record.

I quote: "The Jain community of Wayanad could be considered to be Veeran's vote bank. Those from Wayanad themselves whisper that Veeran doesn't get the complete votes of the less than 250 families belonging to this community." Should a party that subscribes to Marx's theory of the "materialist conception of history" adopt such a reactionary and communal attitude? My father, the late Padmaprabha Gouder, my uncle, the late M K Jinachandran of Congress, my son, Shreyamskumar and myself have all been elected to various bodies of the legislature, both at the Central and State level. It is a tribute to the inclusive nature of our democracy that despite hailing from such a miniscule minority, the people of Wayanad and Malabar has found us worthy of their trust.

The insidious danger is that, having declared me as class enemy number one after kicking JD (S) out of the LDF on March 16, 2009, the families of my community in Wayanad also stand implicated by association. This subtle tainting of the tiniest of the minority communities in the state is a matter of serious concern. How can the left, which cries itself hoarse on its commitment to secularism from the tops of spires and minarets, lend such communal colouring to an exclusively political issue?

On February 6, 2010, your party's frontal organisation *Adivasi Kshema Samithi*, led by P Krishnaprasad, MLA, the CPI (M) District Secretary, C K Saseendran and others trespassed on the plantation property (14.05 acres) of M V Shreyamskumar, MLA of JD (S), with the police as onlookers. Two days later, your leaders and party workers also encroached the property of the Vice President of Wayanad Jilla Panchayath, George Pothan, also of J D (S). Later, estate lands belonging to Harrison Malayalam Plantations were also encroached by your party to create a smokescreen. Subsequently, when those belonging to the CPI (ML)'s *Bhu Samara Samithi* trespassed onto the same land of Harrison Malayalam, they were evicted within 24 hours by the police. Even today, the very same police are silent witnesses to the illegal occupation of Pothan's land and that of Harrison Malayalam. Most of the major newspapers had taken a very strong editorial stance against the unlawful and strong-arm methods adopted by your party. Moreover, your party stood isolated, since surprisingly all your major coalition partners also condemned this illegal act. Needless to say, the entire opposition was vociferous in their protest.

History

In this context, it would be relevant to trace some history. In the first general elections of 1952, Padmaprabha (Krishna Gouder, the Gandhian mentioned by AKG in *My life's story*: "After the 1931 Gandhi-Irwin pact, I worked for nearly six months in Wayanad. Krishna Gouder was an affluent nationalist and a Congress sympathiser," was his father) as a Socialist candidate with Communist support, defeated the Congress Minister in the then Madras Presidency government, Kozhipurathu Madahava Menon.



AKG himself canvassed for my father in the Wayanad General constituency. After the *Vimochana Samaram* -liberation struggle - of 1959, which my father opposed, he contested as a Communist-backed Independent from the Wayanad dual-member constituency, in 1960, two years prior to his death in 1962, and aged 47. This association between parties continued over generations, with me standing for the Kerala Legislative Assembly twice from Kalpetta, and running for Parliament from Kozhikode constituency four times. Shreyamskumar ran successfully for the Legislative Assembly from Kalpetta in 2006.

A three-day meet of the CPI (M) and the Socialists was held from September 18-20, 1973 in Delhi to search for a radical alternative. P Sundarayya (the then General Secretary), M Basavapunniah, Pramode Dasgupta (West Bengal State Secretary), EMS and P Ramamurti (all members of your first 9-member Politburo) and fellow-socialists Madhu Dandavate, Prem Bhasin, Madhu Limaye, Ramanand Tiwari, Surendra Mohan, George Fernandes, P Viswambharan, Peter Alvares and me were among those who attended this constructive dialogue (see *Socialist-Communist Interaction in India* by Limaye). One cardinal principle we discussed there was the right to dissent. This meeting of generations produced a document, testimony to the virtues of working together despite differing ideologies.

I have had the good fortune to have worked with AKG, EMS, C H Kanaran, Azheekodan Raghavan, Chadayan Govindan, E K Nayanar and others of that generation. I will recount one experience to illustrate the unstated mutual respect we shared. In the 1971 general elections I got a diktat from my party to campaign against AKG in Palakkad, since he was in the rival camp. I refused. When I, who had contested from Kozhikode and lost, later met the victorious AKG in Delhi, he also hinted as much. A peak in my political career was my being the convenor of the left front in Kerala, after Azheekodan's murder before the Emergency. It is a part of history that as convenor during the Emergency, I recorded the minutes of the meeting held on July 5, 1975 in Kidson Tourist Home, Kozhikode, in which AKG and EMS came together in the coordination committee for the last time. During the Emergency, Imbichi Bava, Syed Ummer Bafaki Thangal, M V Raghavan, K Chandrasekharan, Pinarayi Vijayan, Kodyeri Balakrishnan, to name a few and myself were all together in Kannur Central Jail as MISA detenus. After the Emergency too, I continued as convenor. Since my family and myself were in possession during this entire period of all the properties that we now stand accused of having encroached, would you demand a posthumous review of the actions of the departed and an explanation of your living comrades, on their association with a party led by a 'tainted' individual like myself?

It is a fact that all the alleged encroachments that my family and myself have been accused of had been in the possession of my father, Padmaprabha, decades prior to 1952. Since then, in none of the elections to local bodies neither the assembly nor the parliament was this ever made an issue, even by the Congress or any other party. The Socialist Party, to which I belong and CPI (M), were alliance partners since 1965, except for two brief interims in 1971 & 1980. Never forget that none of your present partners in Kerala were with you in 1965. Because of the Grand Alliance in the 1971 general elections, CPI (M) severed relations with our party. We fought against both the CPI (M) and Congress-led fronts. Then in 1980, the CPI (M) unilaterally expelled us from the left front on the charge of Janata Party harbouring RSS leaders like the late



K G Marar, Raman Pillai and O Rajagopal, among others. It is a delicious bit of irony that the CPI (M) allied with the *Janapaksham* of the very same Raman Pillai during the 2009 parliamentary elections and we were kicked out of the LDF. Where was your party's high moral ground, when this alleged encroacher, accused of various other sins too, was made a minister in the 1987 cabinet headed by the late comrade E K Nayanar? Similarly, I was a minister in the governments, propped up with the decisive support of your party, headed by Deve Gowda and I K Gujral at the Centre. Neither your party nor your leaders had brought up this matter of alleged encroachments then. All this while, would the communist party/parties, your leaders, and above all, your cadre have voted for our party and us, in case we were as now alleged, encroachers?

A related aspect is that there are thousands of acres of revenue lands in private possession, similar to mine and that of my family. Why is it then that only my family and me are targeted and isolated for attack? In this respect, this is from the order dated 11.3.2010, in O.S. 142/2007 before the Sub-Judge, Sulthan Bathery, in the matter of the 14.05-acre land in the possession of Shreyamskumar, trespassed on by your party: "So from the materials before court it cannot be accepted at this stage that the plaintiff, or his father or his grandfather trespassed into the plaint schedule property.... So it cannot be accepted at this stage that the plaintiff is in unauthorised possession."

Munnar

Your state secretary came to Wayand to hurl accusations against my party, family and myself and to express solidarity with the trespassers, despite judicial pronouncements, of private lands. Why doesn't he visit Munnar? We went there. Your party office itself is on encroached land. Rooms are rented out at fancy tariff rivaling that of resorts. You need not take my word for the situation prevailing there. But you would certainly have to come to know of the daily protests against encroachments by your party, led by your fellow-constituent - CPI. Thousands of acres of land, worth hundreds of crores have been encroached on by your party men and *benamis*, which have appeared in the media. All the names are mentioned in the report submitted to the High Court of Kerala by the district Collector. It has been revealed that property was encroached by Marxist leaders in Munnar and other areas, from which *adivasis* were earlier evicted. There are several such cases.

There is a general consensus among political parties in the state that all holdings prior to 1977 in Idukki be granted *pattayam* but what is happening now is illegal occupation of large tracts of land by CPI (M) leaders and regularisation thereafter. The interests of genuine small time landowners are being sacrificed at the altar of large encroachers with CPI (M) backing. When we were part of the LDF, a delegation headed by Vaikom Viswan, convenor of the LDF, had visited Munnar. K E Ismail, Assistant Secretary of CPI and our Secretary-General, K Krishnankutty were part of the delegation. They were embarrassed to learn that the greatest encroachers were your party men, and hence the report was buried. AKG had also encroached on land, that too when he was in the opposition and not with the trappings of office, declaring beforehand his selfless intention of assigning it to the landless. Now leaders shielded by the party itself have turned encroachers, to make the property their own.

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When the whole of Idukki district is rife with agitation and tumult on the land issue, and encroachments are taking place on an unprecedented scale in Munnar, why is your state secretary keeping mum while being simultaneously vociferous on Wayanad?

Judiciary & Media

The Wayanad district secretary of your party went to the extent of usurping the role of the judiciary and the administration by calling for documents to be produced before him to prove ownership of these lands trespassed by them. His threatening - later justified by your state secretary - over phone of the District Collector, who holds the powers of a Judicial Magistrate, has been witnessed by Malayalee society worldwide. These are prime examples of how an elected government has ceased to function, being replaced by the infamous rule of CPI (M) cells. Despite judicial strictures, encroachments are still taking place. Such disrespect towards the judiciary is not surprising, considering that your party had staged a 'mock banishment' of the former Hon'ble Chief Justice of the Kerala High Court, V K Bali.

Probably the reason why the attacks on the media have also escalated is because they expose these assaults on democracy. Journalists and crew of almost all reputed print and visual media have been subjected to physical violence by your party. The offices of *Mathrubhumi* have been ransacked and torched, newspaper bundles destroyed, and staff threatened. Others like *Malayala Manorama*, *Mangalam*, *MMtv & Indiavision* have suffered similar experiences. Such intolerance has encouraged the police also to browbeat the media. An instance is the police beating up Rahman Thayalangadi, a widely respected journalist and Kasargode bureau chief of *Chandrika* daily on the eve of Id-ul-Fitr on September 20, 2009. It should be remembered that he is a handicapped person incapable of inflicting harm on anyone. Despite wide-ranging protests by Kerala Union of Working Journalists (KUWJ), political parties, and various organisations, and the I G (Kannur range) Tomin J. Thachankari assuring that the guilty would be brought to book, there has been no appreciable progress in the matter.

Political Vendetta

The ongoing attacks on our party men, destruction of our party offices and properties and produce of our party members by your cadre, in an explosion of pre and post-parliamentary election vendetta have never been witnessed in Kerala. The last such one was the gutting to ashes of our party office in Chittoor on March 8, 2010. A complete list of past incidents, including a bomb explosion in the constituency office of our Chief Whip in the Kerala Assembly, is languishing with both the Chief Minister and the Home Minister. Fortunately M K Premnath, MLA, was not present when this bomb shattered his office. He had a providential escape in an earlier attempt. The targeting of reading rooms and memorials named after our revered leaders Arangil Sreedharan, P R Kurup and M N Balakrishnan Nair can only qualify as vandalism. Ironically but not surprisingly for your party contemptuous of democratic norms, our party men, the victims have been charge-sheeted and made to do the rounds of police stations and courts, making for a double harassment! And this is being done to a party, which except for short periods, has been your partner since 1965 and contributed to organically building the LDF in Kerala. Despite being bitter political adversaries till the recent past, the Congress, Muslim League or other UDF constituents have never resorted to physical violence against us. Not even the RSS

and BJP, whom my party and I myself have consistently fought, more so post-Babri Masjid demolition, have confronted us with violence. On the contrary, all of them have always shown us the respect accorded a democratic opponent.

Though now we are the targets of frequent attacks by your party, we are proud that our political dignity is intact. For quite some time now, the mutual respect that parties owe each other as part of coalition dharma has been rudely missing from the left front. In coordination committee meetings, discussions and evolving a consensus have been given the go-by. All crucial 'decisions' taken by the big brother would be 'reported.' Such were those relating to the alliance with *Janapaksham* and PDP during the last general elections. The constituent parties merely had to concur in that decision, as in most others. Little wonder then that the RSP general secretary T J Chandrachoodan has now castigated the CPI (M) leadership accusing them of attempting to turn his party into a bonsai that would adorn the drawing room of the LDF. Such a prospect of stunted growth should be giving political nightmares to the rest of your allies!

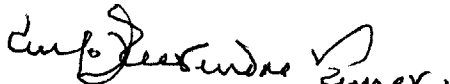
Vilification

In my five decade long experience of public life, I have never faced such vindictive allegations and ridicule even from the parties whom my party fought bitterly over political issues, as has been subjected to of late by your leaders and party organs. Casting to the winds all canons of political propriety and journalistic ethics, vile aspersions have been cast against my family and self, to the extent of labeling me a 'pickpocket'. Such a 'culprit' was elected to the assembly in 1987 from Kalpetta with the second highest margin of 17,958 votes from the left front. What ideology can explain the invective heaped on my forebears and family members? For instance, after the Padmaprabha memorial literary award (instituted in memory of my father in 1996) function this year, a vituperative report appeared in *Deshabhimani* dated December 14, 2009 in which the derogatory colloquial term for 'father' (*thantha*, an approximation in Hindi would be *tera baap*) was used for Padmaprabha, a one-time Communist-backed Independent! In all the earlier years, it was your party men who contributed towards making the function a cultural celebration in Wayanad.

In fact, the nine-part vilificatory campaign from July 11-19, 2007 in *Deshabhimani* maligning my family, including my ancestors, was published even when we were a coalition partner. It had to be hurriedly withdrawn after misreporting the 'death' of my sister -Susheela Devi- who was very much alive. The malaise has afflicted your channels too, which also devote a considerable part of airtime to this calumny. Would it be wrong to conclude that these symbolise the degeneration of your party in Kerala, under the present leadership? Unfortunately, the rot has set in at the level of your state secretary. His brazen linking of a notorious gang leader with former Speaker V M Sudheeran, with an unblemished record in public life, on the suspect testimony of the said criminal was met with universal surprise. All the more so, when the same testimony had named the sons of CPI (M) ministers. Why didn't your state secretary mention these sons, notorious for their escapades and shady links? In today's infinite landscape of media witnesses, the people will judge obnoxious and arrogant behaviour with the contempt it deserves. That is exactly how voters respond to such fabrications, proven by the fact that in the 15th Lok Sabha elections, the Congress candidate from Wayanad trounced his Left rival by the highest-ever margin in Kerala's electoral history.

Conclusion

Increasingly, your party has been assuming the role of the State. I would like to cite from my article ('Party over Principle') in the *Indian Express* of July 28, 2009, an observation on corruption: "Can a political party assume the role of a state, suborning the system of justice that is applicable to all others? For this is what the CC in effect has ruled. The CPM resolve to arrogate to themselves judicial power raises fundamental questions as to the very nature of democratic practice. By this contention, any leader arraigned on charges of corruption need be probed only by that party's committee and needs no judicial scrutiny." How can a party that claims to be in the vanguard of battling corruption transmogrify into one of encroachers? The association of your apparatchiks with land sharks, shady characters and dubious elements is an open secret. The sad fact of life in Kerala today is that a peaceful existence is only possible for those who pay obeisance to your arrogant commissars.


M P Veerendra Kumar

Comrade Prakash Karat
General Secretary
Communist Party of India (Marxist)
Central Committee,
A.K. Gopalan Bhawan,
27-29, Bhai Vir Singh Marg,
New Delhi 110 001