

Chapter I

INTRODUCTORY—DESCRIPTIVE

(1)

The Madrasi, or the South Indian, is, in the eyes of an ordinary North Indian, one type of Indian just like the Bengali, the Punjabi etc. The entire people of Madras or South India are to them the same. It is only recently, and that too among the politically-conscious sections of the North Indians, that the fact has become known that what are called the Madrasis or the South Indians are composed mainly of 4 nationalities—Andhra, Karnatak, Tamil and Malayalee—each of whom is as different from the other as the Bengali is from the Hindusthani or the Oriya or the Assamese, and as the Punjabi is from the Hindusthani, or the Sindhi, or the Gujerati.

It is therefore natural that the leaders of the Working Class and Democratic Movements in Northern India are not aware of the specific problems that their comrades in South India have to face. They are, for example, surprised to hear stories about the anti-Northern movement of the Dravida Kazhagam in Tamilnad, the tremendous mass response to the anti-Hindi slogans of the Kazhagam etc. Nor are they able correctly to assess the strength of feeling for an Andhra Province and its significance in the politics of Madras State. These and other problems of the mutual relations of the four major nationalities of Madras, among themselves as well as with the northern nationalities, have acquired such a vital importance in the national politics of India that it is idle to talk of building a National Democratic Front if the entire Indian Working Class and Democratic Movement does not pay close attention to them and help in their solution. To neglect them is to allow the reactionaries to fan national hatred and disrupt the unity of the common democratic movement of the Indian people.

It is as an effort to interpret the people and problems of one of these four major nationalities that I am giving in the following pages a brief description of the Malayalee people—their origin in the years of antiquity as far as can be ascertained, the development of their social order as far as can be traced and their present position and problems. It is hoped that comrades of the other three nationalities of Madras, as well as of all nationalities in India will interpret their own people and their problems, so that democrats and progressives all over India can better understand each other and, on the basis of this understanding, lay the necessary basis of “the unity of the peoples of the various nationalities of India not by force but by their voluntary consent to the creation of a common State”. (*Programme of the Communist Party of India.*)

(2)

Kerala, as was mentioned earlier, is one of the four nationalities of South India.

It lies on the southwestern extremity of the Indian sub-continent and is the neighbour of Ceylon.

To its west lies the Arabian Sea and to the east, the Western Ghats. On its immediate south lie parts of Tamilnad and on its north live the Tulu, Coorg and other peoples who are generally considered to be part of Karnatak but who are really not entirely Kannadiga in national characteristics.

Kerala is politically divided into the Malabar District, parts of South Kanara and Nilgiri Districts (all, parts of Madras State) and the major part of the Travancore-Cochin State. The southern taluks of the latter State as well as Coorg and the whole of South Kanara and Nilgiri Districts are claimed to be part of Kerala by reactionaries in Kerala but this is a chauvinistic claim since South Travancore is certainly part of Tamilnad and since Tulu, Coorg and other peoples should be considered sub-nationalities closer to Karnatak than to Kerala.

The population of Kerala as defined above is 11,066,439 composed of 3,929,425 in Malabar, 342,301 in the Kerala part of South Kanara District, 34,246 in the Kerala part of Nilgiri District, and 6,760,467 in the Kerala part of the Travancore-Cochin State. It should however be made clear that the exact

boundary between Kerala on the one hand and Tamilnad, Tulu Nad, Coorg, etc., on the other are difficult to determine on the basis of census figures, as these figures are likely to err one way or another. (All figures are taken from the 1941 Census.)

The language of this area is *Malayalam*; in fact, it is on the basis of an exact definition of Kerala as “the contiguous part of Madras and Travancore-Cochin States where the mother tongue of the majority of the people is Malayalam” that the above boundaries and population of Kerala have been defined. This language is of Dravidian stock and closer to Tamil than the two other Dravidian languages (Telugu and Kanarese). It however has a greater admixture of Sanskrit than Tamil.

The people are called Malayalees; their culture is called Malayalee culture. Unlike most other nationalities in India, the land on the one hand and the people and their language on the other are known by different names—the land by the name of Kerala, the people by the name of Malayalee, and the language by that of Malayalam.

The land is divided in its physical features into three distinct regions: (1) The highlands touching the Western Ghats; (2) The plains which lie in between the highlands and the sea-coast; (3) The coastal belt. The first region abounds in vast forests and in tea, rubber, coffee and other plantations. In the middle region are grown paddy, tapioca, pepper, ginger and other crops. The coastal belt contains big coconut plantations, provides a big volume of fish, etc.

The staple food of the people is rice supplemented by tapioca, fish, etc. Rice however is not produced in sufficient quantity to serve the needs of the entire people, the difference between requirement and production being as high as about 50 per cent.

The people are divided in their social relationships into various castes, the caste system and inequality being far more acute than anywhere else in India. These castes may broadly be divided into (1) Caste Hindu, (2) non-Caste Hindu, (3) Scheduled Caste, (4) Muslim and (5) Christian. The populations of these respective castes are: Caste Hindu and non-Caste Hindu together 5,799,015; Scheduled Caste, 903,548; Muslim, 2,281,239 and Christian, 2,196,001. (It is not possible to give separate figures for Caste Hindus and non-Caste Hindus.)

The land is administratively divided into taluks of which there are 10 in Malabar and 38 in Travancore-Cochin State. The parts of South Kanara and Nilgiri Districts that form part of Kerala do not form one whole Taluk, only about half the Kasargod Taluk in South Kanara and part of Gudalur Taluk in Nilgiri District being part of Kerala.

There are 2 towns with a population of over 1 lakh, 5 with between 50,000 and 1,00,000, 8 with between 20,000 and 50,000. Most of these lie on the sea coast and 3 of these together constitute the area of the Cochin Harbour. Being one of the biggest harbours in India, this harbour and the adjoining area have got all the possibilities of becoming the nerve centre of an economically-developed Kerala. It also lies more or less in a geographically central position. It may therefore be considered to be the future capital of the National State of Kerala.

Though the economic condition of the people is miserable (the standard of living of the average Malayalee is one of the lowest in India), Kerala has big natural resources—forests, fishing, minerals, various valuable crops, etc. So also has it a skilful and industrious people many of whom, lacking profitable employment at home, go outside and earn the respect and admiration of those with whom they have come into contact. Hence, once the socio-economic barriers that today obstruct the harnessing of the labours of an industrious people to the rich resources are removed, there is every possibility of Kerala developing into an advanced industrial nation.