

## CREST National Lecture in Memory of Shri. K.R.Narayanan, former President of India

### Kerala & Nehru – A Continuing Dialogue

- Gopal Krishna Gandhi <sup>1</sup>

Why ‘Kerala and Nehru’ ? Was there a special bond between them ? Not really. Did Kerala hold him nearer and dearer than other national leaders ? Or place him at a level of special elevation ? It did not. Did he spend a notably long or momentous period of time in Kerala during the freedom struggle , as a satyagrahi or as a prisoner of the Raj in Malabar or of the States of Travancore or Cochin ? No.

Did he, as Prime Minister, visit Kerala noticeably often, spending large chunks time among its great people ? He did not. In fact, he came fewer times to Kerala than one would imagine a Prime Minister with a sixteen year tenure would.

Did he do some hugely beneficial, definitional turn to the people of Kerala, something he would be remembered by ? Yes, he did. Kerala as a State came into being during his Prime Ministership, as a result of his setting up the States Reorganization Commission. Pandit Nehru is also associated with another act, held by many at the time as having been beneficial but by many , in retrospect as not so, namely, the Central Government’s decision , in 1959, to dismiss the Namboodiripad Government and impose President’s rule in the State. Did any figure from Kerala’s history or its cultural and intellectual traditions exercise a determining influence on Nehru’s thinking ? Not quite.

We have to note an early interaction he had with a distinguished son of Kerala , George Joseph. The Syrian Christian barrister had thrown his lot with Indian nationalism and courted arrest in the non-cooperation movement. In his first imprisonment in the Naini Jail at Lucknow, Nehru had Joseph among companions in his civil ward. Nehru writes with feeling about a conversation with Joseph in which the grim conclusion was arrived at that they will have to spend a great part of their lives in prison. Clearly, Joseph’s powers of reasoning had left an impress on Nehru. But it must nevertheless be stated that no contemporary Kerala exercised what may be called a definitive influence on Nehru.

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Having started with a catechistic string of whys and no-s, I should , in a response to the question ‘Why Kerala and Nehru?’, advert to a name from Kerala’s antiquity and see that person through Nehru’s eyes.

T J S George tells us that when Nehru met Andre Malraux in a Chinese restaurant in Paris in 1936, Malraux told Nehru “ Europe is a cemetery of ideas. We cannot go beyond good and evil. We can never go, as India can, beyond duality. India had Shankara...”

As an enquiring intellectual and an informal historian trying to understand the currents of his time, Jawaharlal Nehru was drawn rather powerfully, almost uniquely, to Adi Sankara. Nehru writes in *Glimpses of World History*: “It is an unusual thing for a man to become a great leader chiefly because of his powerful intellect... emotions have been appealed to and touched. It is difficult for an appeal to the mind and to the intellect to go far.” Then, with typical impatience , Nehru says : “Most people unfortunately do not think : they feel and act according to their feelings.” And as if finding an archetype in Sankara, he says “ Yet Sankara’s appeal was to the mind and to the intellect and to reason”. Turning, a little surprisingly, to the present tense he says “The whole country is stirred up intellectually by Sankara’s books and commentaries and arguments”. In his later work *The Discovery of India*, Nehru speaks of Sankara’s “subtle and intricate theory of knowledge... proceeding from certain assumptions, step by step, by logical argument, leads up to the complete system (of advaitism)”. He says of Sankara himself “Born in Malabar...he strove hard to synthesize the diverse currents that were troubling the mind of India of his day...”.

The phrase Nehru uses there – ‘The mind of India’ is important. It gives a glimpse into Nehru’s own intellectual priorities and predispositions. He seems to find in Kerala’s intellectual traditions exactly what he needed in order to understand the troubled mind of the India he was giving leadership to.

The key words in Nehru’s Sankara references are “knowledge”, “intellect”, “reason” and “mind”. And a procedure which he clearly admires , namely, “logical argument”, proceeding “step by step” to a theory. And, to extend the analogy of “key”, one word or attitude he clearly would like to be put under “lock and key” is “emotion”.

Nehru saw in others belonging to Kerala, representatives of the same intellectual tradition of reasoning and analysis, argument and intellection. And he turned with an interest so lively as to border on alacrity to their mind’s potential and their intellectual possibilities, if not to their specific intellectual positions.

Among them was Kocheril Raman Narayanan.

Reporters present here today would be interested to know that when he was 25, Narayanan was a reporter with *The Times of India* in Bombay. He was, as a reporter, awarded a Tata scholarship to study in London. Just then, Mahatma Gandhi happened to be visiting Bombay. Young Narayanan sought to meet him to get his advice before embarking on the journey. It was not easy to get that appointment, not with the alert and protective Pyarelal as Gandhiji’s secretary. But Narayanan persevered.

When he did get that appointment, Narayanan said to Gandhiji (I am not quoting the exact words, but the essence) : “You have simplified for us the choice between truth and untruth, violence and non-violence. It is not difficult to choose between those. But what would you advise when the choice is not between truth and untruth but it is between two truths , that are equally compelling?” The question was sharp, it was phrased step-by-step, it was as intellectual as anything can be. And it stands, in my humble opinion,

above the answer that he got. The second question was no less daunting. I am again quoting from memory. Narayanan put it like this: “And, when in England I am asked about the untouchability issue in India, should I reply as a harijan or as an Indian ?” To this, Narayanan got a masterly answer from Gandhiji, one that could serve as a model for our Ministry of External Affairs in the art of answering difficult questions. “When abroad”, Gandhiji answered, “you will say that this is an internal matter for us to solve once the British leave India”. Fortunately for historiography, the answers form part of The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi.

The phrase “When abroad” used by Gandhiji turned out to be prophetic, Gandhiji did not know then that a galaxy of Malayalis, including his querist Narayanan, would be serving India’s interests from abroad, from outside India, fielding tricky questions, decade after decade. And that ‘river’ would proceed from a catchment called Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru.

KRN’s term at the London School of Economics is deservedly celebrated for the equation he enjoyed with the cerebral but morally intense Harold Laski. Less known is the fact that his studentship at LSE included attending lectures by Karl Popper, Professor of Logic and Scientific Method. KRN related to me this classroom story: Popper was once discussing the value in an ‘open’ society of checks and balances and (as Popper put it) of one ‘sphere’ arriving at an equilibrium with another ‘sphere’ without direct State intervention. And to give his argument a visual correlative, Popper pointed to an empty chair and said ‘if you let that chair be, you will be able to sit in it at some point’. KRN, who was twenty-six or twenty-seven then, broke in and said to Popper ‘Letting the chair be is all right, but if you or someone were to pick up the chair and hit it on my head, I think I would be entitled to catch it and throw it out of the window’. To KRN’s embarrassment this intervention was greeted by a small applause from others in the class.

When Narayanan finished his course of study in London with a First Division, he once narrated, the Kerala people there threw a party in his honour. And Krishna Menon was invited to be the chief guest. Leaning on his walking stick at the doorway Menon said to him ‘So, Narayanan, I hear you have got a First. You know, some people get it by a fluke’. If Narayanan was staggered it was only for moment. He responded with ‘Is that how you got your’s ?’. Once, while returning from Parliament House with President Narayanan to Rashtrapati Bhavan, I was privileged to hear from him this account: “ When I finished with LSE, Laski ,of his own, gave me a letter of introduction for Panditji. So on reaching Delhi I sought an appointment with the PM. I suppose, because I was an Indian student returning home from London, I was given a time-slot . It was here in Parliament House that he met me. We talked for a few minutes about London and things like that and I could soon see that it was time for me to leave. So I said goodbye and as I left the room I handed over the letter from Laski, and stepped out into the great circular corridor outside.

When I was half way round , I heard the sound of someone clapping from the direction I had just come. I turned to see Panditji beckoning me to come back. He had opened the letter as I left his room and read it. ‘Why didn’t you give this to me earlier?’ ‘Well, sir, I am sorry. I thought it would be enough if I just handed it over while leaving’. After a few more questions, he asked me to see him again and very soon I found myself entering the Indian Foreign Service.”

The diplomatic career, taking him through the diplomatic missions of India in Bangkok, Ankara, Beijing and Washington was to bring him to his natural bent for political work, to Parliament ,to ministerships,

and to the Vice Presidency and Presidency. This is not to say that this was a seamless procession on a velvet corridor. KRN's stints in South Block in the Ministry of External Affairs were not an unmixed affair. Posted once as Deputy Secretary in charge of Administration, he was so unhappy that he put in his papers only to be persuaded at Panditji's behest to remain. I narrate all this to show not just that Narayanan was an outstanding example of what may be called the Kerala kind of intellect but also that it could hold its own with Gandhi, Nehru, Laski, Popper and his own fellow-Malayali, Krishna Menon with ease and, what is more, with effect.

In 1961, the apogee of Nehru's Prime Ministership, Narayanan was relatively unknown to the world outside of India's diplomatic community and LSE's alumni. And so, if a person in London or New York or Moscow, knowledgeable of India, was asked to name three contemporary Indians from Kerala, he would not have mentioned Narayanan. He would most likely have identified:

1. E.M.S.Namboodiripad, to Nehru's thoughtful acceptance of the choice.
2. V.K.Krishna Menon, to his enthusiastic approval.
3. K.M.Panikkar, to his reflective concurrence.

The first was a mass leader of national stature and international renown, the second a politician on the world stage, and the third a historian of international repute. All three of them were leading intellectuals of their time, and recognized to be so, not just in India but across the globe. Their intellect was recognized, besides, as being of the finest Kerala-type – sharp, analytical and hugely persuasive.

Fifty years on, today, if such a person were asked to name three contemporary Indians from Kerala, we are very likely to be asked 'Why three? There are so many in Kerala who are so distinguished'. Several distinguished diplomats, academics, editors, columnists hailing from Kerala and hailed within India and beyond as leading intellectuals would come to be mentioned not necessarily out of a convergence of views but certainly with admiration.

This is no accident. Kerala is and means many things. But above all those, it is seen as a place where the human mind has been engaged with the issues of our times, national and international, in an intellectual or ideational manner.

Even where it is activating its cultural and aesthetic resources, Kerala seems to do so via the circuitry of the brain. Kathakali, probably the most visually arresting among our dance forms, is yet intensely cerebral, conveying intricate themes not through a profusion of emotional or lyrical exposition but by an intensification of mental expressions issued in calibrated escalation. Kerala's ayurvedic traditions, likewise, are not just a compassionate form of ministrations but have a basis in a rather elaborate theory, the understanding of which is crucial to the availing of its benefits. So much so that the celebrated Vaidyasalas of Kerala are used by distinguished thinkers for an invigoration of the mind no less than of their work-wearied limbs. Even Kerala's specializations in the mystifying worlds of astrology seem to come from the analyzing, questioning, exploring mind rather than from a predisposition towards fatalism. I was intrigued when I first heard of Kerala astrology's expertise in what are called 'prasnam' or 'riddles', as distinct from conventional horoscope-based predictions. More recently, I have come across the allied word 'Devaprasnam', and that from the wording of a Supreme Court observation. As all of you know, there is an Upanishad called 'Prasnopanishad'. No one knows who exactly its author was, but I

would not be surprised if he or she hailed from Kerala. Only a mind as searingly sharp as Sankara's could deal with a prasna like 'What is life?' without lapsing into silence.

Likewise, when Svati Tirunal uses more than one instrument and composes songs in more than language and Ravi Varma paints in more than one style, they use an idiom and a vocabulary that are as mental as aesthetic. And even when Thakali writes Chemmeen, regarded by some as 'mushily sentimental' and describes with tender sympathy the belief-systems of a fishing community that could be called superstitious, he places the issue literally on the tip of a sea-wave that could crash either way. Katalamma of belief and Karuthamma of reality are both accessible, heaving with primeval energy, and both in different ways, reachable only to the chosen.

When Palani on his tiny boat is struggling against a roaring sea, he sees something fearsome. 'Was it the crest of some spectacular high wave, or was it some sea monster raring its head...?' Thakali asks, leaving the interpretation equally open to both credulousness and to reasoning. And then, when all is over, after the sea has taken the boat and Palani, and all is eerily quiet, Thakali writes 'One single star came out and shone. It was the fisherman's Arundhati...'. And then, lest the reader fall completely for the power of benign and malign stars on human lives, he adds almost as an aside '...but that night the star seemed to lack lustre'. (in Malayalam...pakshe atinoru prakaashakkuravullatu poley tonni). Thakali takes the reader that close to the abandoning of reason, only to retrieve it by that subtle afterthought.

The Nehru who hearkened to Sankara knew and valued this intellectual legacy of Kerala. And it just so happens that the three persons I mentioned as likely to have been picked as Kerala's best known names in 1961 returned the compliment. In a candid portrait of Nehru drawn by EMS in 1959, in the very same year that he had been done out of his office by Nehru in a move that stays controversial to this day, said and asked: "The Prime Minister's emphasis on the secular character of the State and his forthright denunciation of obscurantism and superstition are...of great importance to a country which is intent on developing itself on modern, democratic lines. How is it possible for one to ignore all these positive aspects of Nehru's domestic policy when one sees them in contrast to the medievalism, obscurantism, and ideological backwardness shown by leaders of certain other newly independent...countries?"

Nehru's Glimpses of World History, having been first published in two volumes in 1934 by Lindsay Drummond, London, was revised in 1939 and re-issued as a single volume. Nehru could, in all logic and contextual salience, have asked Gandhiji to write a Foreword to it or, if he was thinking of an academic Foreword, turned to Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan or even a bibliophile Congressman like Azad or Rajagopalachari. If he wanted a non-Indian to do the honours for a book on world history, he could have thought of several British or European historians. But no, he asked Krishna Menon, seven years younger than him, no historian, no academic even, but a Kerala intellectual no doubt, and of the first water, to write the Foreword.

And so, the second Keralan on my imaginary 1961 list of three, Krishna Menon, writing that brief but most readable piece, commented on Nehru's mind thus: "Pandit Nehru is one of those rare personalities in public life who combines intense activity with vision and detachment." Menon then went on to say "Glimpses...is no mere narrative of events...but also a reflection of the author's personality. His outstanding intellect and sensitive mind make this history book a work unique in character".

The third person on the imaginary 1961 list, historian and diplomat K.M.Panikkar made the interesting point : “ ...as one directly engaged in shaping India’s destiny and as an individual endowed with a critical sense desiring to understand the background of his own activity, Nehru was forced by an intellectual curiosity to discover India.”

Few Indians can claim to have received the appreciation of so many remarkable sons of Kerala. But many sons and daughters of Kerala received Nehru’s unreserved admiration for their intellectual acumen, their articulations of that acumen, and even, I should think, their inter se disputations since those were conducted in an intellectually stimulating manner.

What were – are – the ingredients of the intellect Kerala showed to Nehru as he shaped India’s destiny and sought to understand the mind of India?

I can think of five :

1. An ability to go critically into the essence of things, the saram , beyond or within the externals of a proposition and then to examine it closely, with a view to critiquing it and thereby redeeming the core from its casement. Sankara himself is an example of this, in so far as he examined Mimamsa and posited a new Advaitism. Sree Narayana Guru’s position on varna, as distinct from that of Gandhi, is illustrative of the same method. Narayana Guru questioned the logic of Gandhi’s arguments on the subject, maintaining that caste in India was a socio-economic issue. Significantly, Narayana Guru did not object to those from Hindu society’s depressed classes who converted to other religions, with the argument that one should follow what one truly believes in. I would say EMS attempted the same procedure in his masterful analysis of Gandhi in *The Mahatma and the Ism*.

2. A gift for metamorphosing old and received wisdoms, traditional disciplines and doctrines, and re-configuring them for current contexts. I have not seen G.Aravindan’s *Uttarayanam* but have heard about the way he demystifies the freedom struggle against the British in the character of Gopalan Muthalaly, a hero of the Quit India movement but latterly a corrupt contractor. Adoor Gopalakrishnan’s *Mukhamukham* , which I have seen and admired, does something similar to the communist movement through the tragic character of Sridharan. The protagonist’s disappearance when full of vigour and re-appearance when unable even to stay awake make for a powerful allegory on the obsolescence of political energy.

The Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad is another remarkable articulation, this time institutional not individual, of Kerala’s gift for applying the laws of parallax to social thought – an ability to strike at the point next to the next, thereby anticipating both need and supply. In that the KSSP approaches science and technology in a manner that re-orientes their applications to contemporary needs and cautions society against monopoly in those citadels.

3. A genius for sarcasm which touches skepticism which, in turn, nudges cynicism enabling the skeptic and the cynic thereby to look authority – whether political, religious, ideological or social – straight in the eye. Cartoonists are not ordinarily regarded as intellectuals, but I think if they are not, no one is, for they use a rare segment of the brain, the segment of inaudible laughter, to make a point which a speaker may take thirty minutes and a writer thirty pages to attempt. From Shankar Pillay through to G.Aravindan, from Abu Abraham to Vijayan, from KV Kerala Varma to Kutty , Kerala has been the

natural home of high political satire and caricature. Few States can boast of a Cartoon Academy or so many cartoonists thriving on sheer cockiness and good humour. When Nehru told Shankar ‘Don’t spare me!’ he was speaking for the saving grace of humour in times of sanctimony. Kerala is also known for what may be called the verbal co-efficient of a cartoon, namely, the barb directed by one at another employing the adroitness and marksmanship of an archer, with the most devastating consequences. Krishna Menon demonstrated that art when he spoke of a political concept as being ‘like the proverbial mule, without either pride of ancestry, nor hope of progeny’.

4. The knack for a dissent that does not degenerate into dissention, a reserve that does not break into rebellion, an unorthodoxy that stops short of heterodoxy. The Kerala intellect does not see merit in a mindless genuflection before an idea or a proposition merely because of its aeges. This is a great good fortune for India where mindless obedience has routinely bred intellectual cronyism. The well-regarded economist John Mathai, the second Finance Minister of India, preferred to quietly submit his resignation to Prime Minister Nehru rather than accept the increased role of the Union Planning Commission under Professor P.C.Mahalanobis. Nehru’s bringing the brilliant PCM into the centre of national planning was good and necessary, but the implications of that on the principles of Parliamentary accountability and Cabinet responsibility had not been taken adequately into account by him. John Mathai’s action, though that of an individual, cannot be divorced from the traditions of cerebral autonomy originating in his intellectual hinterland. A Kerala presence in a cosmopolitan group will merge but not submerge, will affiliate but not ally unthinkingly. It may or may not direct attention upon itself but it will certainly not allow itself to be taken for granted. And as to being taken for a ride, we can forget it. How truly wonderful!

5. A mastery over word-coinage ,which is only a corollary of unorthodox thinking and which has been best seen in recent years in the cataract of neologisms emanating from the phenomenal mind of Justice Sri V.R.Krishna Iyer, and the supple writings of Shashi Tharoor. This lexical craft is invaluable for expressing ideas that do not borrow or raid the used vaults of ideation, but venture into new territories opened by unprecedented experiences. Here I would like to stress that what is important is not the coining of an unfamiliar word – e.g. Krishna Iyer’s processual or Krishna Menon’s non-alignment, but the conveying of a new thought.

We need not doubt Jawaharlal Nehru found these five traits as placed at his disposal to be an asset, no less. Particularly so, I would suggest, in three areas:

- a. In the run-up to the independence of India, and the consolidation of the Princely States.
- b. In the reorganization of the States of the Indian Union.
- c. In the framing of the Socialistic Pattern of Society as he called it or, what may be re-considered as ‘radical moderation’.

A lecture such as this does not permit an elaborate treatment of subjects as wide as these three. And so I will but ‘feather-touch’ them.

- a) The Run-Up to The Independence of India

Vappala Pangunni Menon better known as V. P. Menon, is recognised as a valuable counsellor to the Viceroys of the time and then to India's first Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for the States, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. And of course he was quite precisely that. What is not appreciated is that this son of a school headmaster in Kerala who had worked as a railway stoker, coal miner and a clerk in a Bangalore tobacco company before attaining a moderate position in the subordinate service had a sense of what Nehru has called 'the mind of India'. When Lord Mountbatten appointed him as his Constitutional Adviser, over the heads of several senior ICS officers, he knew what he was doing. But even he may not have anticipated the role V.P. Menon played in the May of 1947. The Viceroys principal advisers Ismay and Abell had prepared with what might have been Mountbatten's thoughtless acquiescence a plan for the partitioning of Bengal and Panjab and the giving of powers to states to decide whether to form one or more groups or join a new Indian Union.

Professor Sarvepalli Gopal in his irreplaceable biography of Jawaharlal Nehru calls it the 'Plan Balkan' and that is precisely what it was. It would have cut India up. Nehru and Krishna Menon were Mountbatten's guests in Simla on the late night of 10 May when the Viceroy showed it to Nehru. He was flabbergasted and burst into Krishna Menon's room, indignant. S.Gopal describes this scene vividly and goes on to describe how, after Nehru's indignant dismissal of this plan, another one posited on Dominion Status for the two units, was worked out and accepted. He does not however – and I find this intriguing – mention the presence at Simla's Viceregal Lodge at the same time of the other Menon, V.P.Menon. In fact V.P.Menon does not figure in the first volume (the relevant volume) of Professor Gopal's biography at all except in the Bibliography which includes V.P. Menon's germinal work *The Transfer of Power*. V.P.Menon spoke to Sardar Patel who was in Delhi, over the phone. The Sardar is reported to have said V.P.Menon's alternative plan was the only one that could be acted upon. "There is no alternative", he told V.P.Menon, "Under it we lose only a fraction of India. Under the other plan we risk losing all of it." After getting Patel's approval for it, V.P.Menon explained its features to Mountbatten, Nehru and Mountbatten's Private secretary, Mieville. Nehru's response was one of relief and he asked the Sardar to obtain Gandhi's approval for it. The rest is history, but I have cited this vignette to show how V.P.Menon's intellectual resources came in handy at a critical moment to Nehru. Rajmohan Gandhi in his definitive biography of Patel says : " Learning of Nehru's and Patel's response to (V.P.) Menon's scheme...Mountbatten abandoned the Plan Balkan and sponsored in its place the Plan Menon or, as we may call it, the Partition plan".

#### b) The Reorganisation of the Indian States

Although the States Reorganisation Commission was headed by Justice Fazal Ali, celebrated for his remarkable dissenting opinion in *A.K.Gopalan v/s Madras* (1950) and had a person of the eminence of Pandit Hriday Nath Kunzru on it as well, it was understood then and has been recognised since to have been an exercise that was powered by its third member, Sardar K.M.Panikkar.

That Nehru should have thought of a distinguished jurist to head it was logical since the work called for a judicious weighing of claims, counter-claims, of the merits and demerits of a particular tract falling within or outside a particular State or on the borders of two States with more than one language spoken by its inhabitants. But more reflective of his own perspectival thinking was Nehru's selection of a historian with practical knowledge of princely India, the Part B States as they were called after independence, and of the dynamics of south Indian geopolitical aspirations on it. The only other person with a knowledge of the



ground realities of India's chequer-board, who could have taken Panikkar's place on the SRC would, I think, have been V.P.Menon. But then India's political gradient had changed after Sardar Patel's death and by the time the SRC went into action, V.P.Menon was a 'has-been'.

Panikkar, in a step in propriety, distanced himself from the Commission's study of the Kerala segment. But that did not prevent his being linked to the Kerala-specific recommendations which were that Malabar should come to the new Kerala state from the old Madras which, in its new all-Tamil avatar, was to get Kanyakumari. Krishna Menon opposed the creation of a new Kerala and a new Madras (later Tamil Nadu) State. In a note to Nehru on September 28, 1955, included in his Selected Works (Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru, Second Series, Vol. 30 (1 September -- 17 November, 1955) edited by H. Y. Sharada Prasad and A. K. Damodaran, Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, distributed by Oxford University Press; pp. 249-250, 263-264), Menon suggested that the agitation for a Malayalam-speaking State was politically motivated and intended to benefit forces outside the Congress. This was clearly an over-interpretation of a point of view which has been best described by Prakash Karat (The Marxist Volume: 14, No. 01-02 Jan-June 1998, EMS: The Marxist Pathfinder, by Prakash Karat). The General Secretary of the CPI-M has said: "In contrast to the one nation single culture model put out by the dominant bourgeois leadership of the national movement, it is the communists who pioneered studies on the linguistic-nationality question in India. EMS undertook the job of tracing the development of the linguistic-nationality of the Malayalam-speaking people and provided the theoretical basis for the creation of a unified state of Kerala. His publication in Malayalam titled "One and a Quarter crore Malayalees" in 1945 was subsequently revised and developed into a full-fledged study published in English in 1952 as "The National Question in Kerala. This was the first concrete application of the Marxist-Leninist approach to the nationality question to a specific nationality in India. His advocacy of "Aikya Kerala" was similar to the works which appeared on the formation of Vishalandhra by P. Sundarayya and Natun Bangla by Bhowani Sen, but the significance of EMS's work lay in the deep historical insight into how the socio-economic formation in Kerala developed at different stages upto colonialism. This provided the basis both for championing the formation of Kerala as a linguistic state merging Travancore, Cochin and Malabar, and also getting rid of antiquated socio-economic relations and fetters on production necessary for the emancipation of the people from feudalism and imperialism".

One cannot entirely fault Krishna Menon for taking the SRC's proposed recommendation having been influenced by non-Congress elements in Kerala.

More significantly, Menon said that the allied recommendation for a separate Tamil state was also inadvisable "for economic, political, administrative, strategic, and national security reasons". In a statement reminiscent of the May 1947 discussions in Simla, he said: 'We will Balkanise India if we further dismember the (Indian) State instead of creating larger units'.

Menon suggested the creation of what he described as a 'a Southern State, a Dakshin Pradesh, on the lines of Uttar Pradesh, which could include the present Tamil Nadu, Travancore-Cochin, Malabar and possibly Kanara up to Kasaragode'. He argued that a large southern state would strengthen 'the base of India' which, he argued, 'should be heavy enough to prevent national disruption and also enable sound administration and industrial development'.

So we have here some of the highest minds from Kerala representing opposed perspectives, two of them – EMS and, by inference, K.M.Panikkar, stressing smaller units based on linguistic boundaries and another, Krishna Menon, proposing the opposite. Nehru did not disagree with Krishna Menon's reasoning but he expressed helplessness. The editors of the Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru tell us that the Prime Minister circulated Menon's note among selected Cabinet members describing it as 'rather emotionally worded'. To Menon he wrote on 9 November: 'I circulated your note to a number of my colleagues in the Cabinet. Many of them agreed with you. But I am afraid you do not quite appreciate the kind of forces we have to contend against in India at the present moment. When you suggest that States should become merely administrative divisions and far greater power should be concentrated in the Centre, you say something which is utterly beyond anyone's capacity to do at the present moment... It is almost impossible to have a Southern Province, much as we would like it. We have tried our best and failed'.

The point I would like to draw attention to is not so much that Panikkar was for smaller, linguistically delineated states and Krishna Menon for large ones that consolidated the Centre's own strength, but that Menon brought into the discourse for internal reorganization, larger considerations of national security and related strategies. In other words, his mind was working on macro arguments, rather than micro ones. Larger States were clearly not the solution to the problem but the problem itself, as mentioned by Krishna Menon, was real and remains so, today. Not only the States that adjoin or are situated close to Pakistan, China, Nepal, Bangladesh or Myanmar but our coastal States and Union Territories are all vulnerable to security breaches. In the perspective of time one could say that Menon and Panikkar have both been proved right, each in his own way.

Kerala and Tamil Nadu as separate states have been decidedly good for their people and, by the fact of being individual States, smaller than a Dakshin Pradesh would have been, have not compromised national security in any way. But there is such a thing as the short term, the mid-term and the long-term. In the sense of the long term it would be fair, I think, to say that the buttressing of all-India concerns as regards national security by our several States is an ideal we are yet to reach. The in-putting of national security perspectives and perceptions into State apparatuses, including public opinion, is not as strong as it should be, nor is the ingraining at the national level of the security-related perceptions of what Emperor Asoka called 'the borderers'. Our experience in Mumbai on 26.11.2008 bears this out most dramatically. To that extent, Krishna Menon's anxieties were wholly justified and need to be addressed urgently.

#### c) The Socialistic Pattern of Society or Radical Moderation

No audience in Kerala needs to be reminded about the Avadi session of the Indian National Congress in 1955 and its famous resolution. Nehru had been drawn to socialism from the 1930s and when in 1937 he set up a Planning Cell in the Congress with Jayaprakash Narayan helping him, socialism was inherent in his make up. But there is such a thing as political atmosphere. With the emergence in 1952 of the Praja Socialist Party led by Acharya Kripalani and with stalwarts like Acharya Narendra Deva, JP, Asoka Mehta and Pattom Thanu Pillai at its podium, and with the growing influence of the CPI in this part of the country as also in the Tamil and Andhra countryside, socialism was no longer just ideologically

compelling but politically ineluctable as well. The catalyzing role of the Indian Left, the CPI, and in particular that of its Kerala wing, in the unfolding of the Congress' socialist programme is not to be underestimated. Nor is the impact of Nehru's domestic and foreign policies on the Left, the CPI in particular to be understated. Weakening the country's Left, the Socialist Party or the CPI, not to mention splitting them, was not Nehru's aim. But his re-orientations could not but have an impact on them. Avadi must have seemed to the PSP as being a spoiler. And as for the CPI, it was perhaps beginning to feel, so to say, Nehruvian tremors on its seismogram.

In a tribute to EMS after his death published in *Frontline*, Harkishen Singh Surjeet said of the period 1954-1955: "India, which had been submitting to U.S. imperialism, had started taking a stand against imperialism in support of national liberation movements. The Bandung Conference marked a significant turning point in India-China relations. With this started a debate inside the Communist Party. This debate, which began in 1954-55, led ultimately to a split in the Communist Party in 1964".

Shriyans Prasad Jain, the industrialist and briefly, a parliamentarian as well, wrote rather colourfully in 1959: "A friend of mine once told me that Nehru overtook the Praja Socialist Party at Avadi in 1955 and is certain that he would outbid next year the Communist Party at Bangalore".

EMS had been elected to the Polit Bureau in 1953-54 at the third Congress of the CPI and shortly thereafter became editor of *New Age*. In the article cited, Prakash Karat tells us of how EMS began working on kisan and women's issues in the Party Centre in New Delhi in 1953, energizing its programmes in those two areas exponentially. All this could not have been unknown to the Government of India and to the Prime Minister who, even more than otherwise, might have been encouraged and strengthened to place the country firmly on the socialist path.

Today, some sixty years later, socialism is hardly spoken of and the Indian Left, in electoral terms, is out on a low tide. But who can deny the need for democratic socialism in a country with our disparities? If the Congress has traditionally been regarded by the CPI and CPI-M as being far to its right, there are several political organizations in the country which see themselves far to the left of the two Communist Parties. To them the CPI-M would appear to be an impossibly moderate party. A large number of CPI-M workers have fallen to the bullets of Left Extremism. And an even larger number live under the threat of the same 'retributive treatment'.

A position of great importance is occupied here by Professor K.N.Raj, a contemporary of K.R.Narayanan at the London School of Economics. Professor. Raj obtained his Ph.D. degree in Economics from the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) and returning to India in July 1947 at the age of 23 after completing his Ph.D was soon to draw the attention of the Prime Minister. If K.R.Narayanan carried a letter from Laski, K.N.Raj brought Laski's aura with him as well. He was chosen, it is believed, at Laski's instance, by Prime Minister Nehru at the age of 26 to draft the introductory chapter for the country's first Five-Year Plan. He became part of the first Planning Commission in 1950. As Professor A Vaidyanathan writing in *Economic and Political Weekly* on March 13, 2010 has observed, K.N.Raj's point of departure in his ideological approach to development issues was both Keynesian and Marxist, it was 'tempered by a deep commitment to the Nehruvian vision of socio-economic transformation in a democratic framework'

A Nehruvian model of radical moderation must emerge to answer India's political and economic needs within the idiom of parliamentary democracy and the rule of law. Elliott Richardson, a former US Attorney General and US Ambassador to the UK, calls himself a 'radical moderate'. In a festschrift tribute to Nani Palkhivala, he said " (Radical Moderation) cannot be characterized – all right, caricatured ...as a self-sufficient philosophy (it) does not yet have the kind of track-record that lends itself to caricature..." A good Kerala cartoonist, I might add, could do a withering caricature of a radical moderate.

K R Narayanan's teacher, Professor Harold Laski has said memorably in his classical work *Authority in the Modern State* : " There is probably no epoch in social history where organized resistance to state-decision has not its root in some deep grievance honestly conceived...'Reform that you may preserve' is, as Macaulay said, 'the voice of great events'. The State has barely needed that constant warning; and the beatification of the status quo is ever its main source danger..." in the name of economic reforms through the instruments of liberalization and globalization, the status quo of disparity and deprivations is likely to be beatified if not canonized. The joys of political freedom, especially in its electoral aspect, cannot hold out for ever against the sorrows of an unjust social order. If extreme answers to deep grievances are not to become the 'voice of great events', and are not to challenge the State and society, there is, in my view, no way out other than a Nehruvian radical moderation fast-tracked now to address issues of governance, corruption, environmental degradation, exploitation and the policy on land-use. I believe in all these areas Kerala has something to tell the whole of India. "Anyone who studies his work as the Prime Minister of India", wrote Panikkar of Nehru, "can easily see that not only in his internal politics but in the formulation of his external policy he is dominated by a sense of history". I will not detain you on a treatment of that subject except to say that the world of Indian diplomacy was where Kerala and Nehru came most creatively together.

Krishna Menon was of course the star on this firmament. "What he accomplished on the international scene, as India's spokesman and envoy, and indeed as the voice of the nations emerging from colonial rule into independence", writes Enuga S.Reddy, " is not fully understood and recognised even in India". Explaining how Menon was called "Mouthpiece Extraordinary and Troublemaker Plenipotentiary" (*Life*, October 25, 1954) he tells us how Menon "never bothered to defend himself against such attacks and even seemed to relish the attention he received".

Menon's most abiding image in diplomatic lore is of an anti-West figure. Menon's assaults on the US's and NATO's Cold War excesses were memorable. But they obscure his germinal role in promoting a conclusion to the hostilities in Korea, Vietnam and the Suez, in securing the release - a now almost forgotten episode – of American airmen captured in China, in resolving the East-West deadlock which blocked admission of many small countries to the United Nations, in arguing for a nuclear test ban, in proposing the Antarctic Treaty to prohibit militarization of that region and in striving for the representation of China by the People's Republic in the United Nations.

His "irascibility" is his signature, and with good reason. But, to quote Enuga Reddy again, "He hit back with passion when India was slighted". India was at that time being treated by many in the United States as a third rate power whose destiny could be no more than that of a satellite of the United States. Nehru and Krishna Menon, with a sense of history, did not think of India's role perpetually as being that of a poor country lacking any influence. In fact Nehru had already great influence on public opinion in many

countries. They resented any slights by the United States. The fact is Nehru was no less angry if not angrier than Krishna Menon, but was careful in the way he expressed it. Krishna Menon was sharp in his language.

We should also remember that Krishna Menon could disagree with Soviet positions as well in the United Nations. He fought against the prevalent mindset that treated issues of peace and disarmament as issues to be sorted out by major powers bargaining with each other, the rest of the nations applauding or lamenting the consequences. Relevantly to our times, he resisted moves by technologically advanced countries to monopolise nuclear technology and, knowing the energy requirements and security vulnerabilities of developing nations, to inaugurate a new colonialism. Goodness knows we need to be mindful of those concerns today as well.

Krishna Menon's achievements were his personal achievements, but they were also the expressions of the tradition of logical, step-by-step reasoning that Nehru so admired and which are, beyond doubt, attributes of the Kerala mind. He found and utilized those attributes in a host of Kerala-origin diplomats, apart from the well-known Krishna Menon and K.M.Panikkar. Kerala-born career diplomats like the very cerebral and conscientious K.P.S.Menon and N.R.Pillai performed difficult Foreign Office tasks for him in the formative years, as did personalities from outside the Foreign Service to whom he entrusted diplomatic responsibilities like A.C.N Nambiar, N.Raghavan, M.K.Vellodi. A large number of (then) young diplomats from Kerala were spotted and positioned by him – not because they were from Kerala but because they were just so very good and bright – on strategic points, like A K Damodaran, K.R.Narayanan, Thomas Abraham, Rukmini Menon. He took a lively personal interest in each induction, interviewing the entrants after their appointments had been recommended by the UPSC and before their appointments. Thomas Abraham, for instance recalls how in 1952 he and his peers in that year's 'batch' met the Prime Minister individually even if for no more than ten to fifteen minutes. 'You must be a Syrian Christian', Nehru said to Abraham as soon as the young man sat down. And then he asked him what he had been doing with himself. Abraham said he had been a journalist. Nehru then asked if he knew any Hindi. 'I picked up some in Bombay when I was working there', Abraham said. 'Then you must un-pick it ,for Bombay Hindi is terrible...' They then discussed Korea, the hot topic of the time, with Nehru trying to see the American perspective and Abraham offering the opposite viewpoint.

Though exceptionally bright persons from Kerala were entering the Nehruvian method in international affairs at that time, the External Affairs stage belonged to Krishna Menon. Whatever be his views on the man, I do not think Krishna Menon would have quite had the conceit to ask Kumara Padmanabha Sivasankara Menon, better known as K. P. S. Menon if he had got his First Rank by fluke. But that alumnus of the CMS School, Kottayam, the Madras Christian College and Oxford University where he was president of the Oxford Majlis secured just that – the first rank in the Civil Services examination, joining the ICS in 1922 and going on to become the jewel in the crown of the I C S's presence in the Indian Foreign Service. His having been our first Foreign Secretary and our Ambassador in Moscow for a whole decade are important, but KPS is best remembered for his having opened our Mission in Beijing, and for having applied his formidable mind to India-China relations pragmatically, patiently and productively, even after he had ceased to be our Ambassador in Beijing.

His distinguished son and successor, both in our embassy in Beijing and in South Block, KPS Menon 'Jr.' writes: "Father's direct association with China was split into two periods, very different in content.

During the first period, from 1943 to 1948, when he was Agent-general and then Ambassador to China, China was in the throes of war and civil war. She was suffering the most terrible deprivations, but there was nothing to cloud the sun of India-China friendship. He found nothing but friendship... From 1948 to 1953, father was Foreign Secretary in Delhi and so also had to deal with China. Soon after the first clouds began to appear... Despite the vicissitudes through which India-China relations passed in his lifetime, father always held dear the warm Chinese friendships he had. One of his most cherished memories was of the great Madame Sun Yat-sen coming to the airport to see him off when he was leaving China, and taking the trouble to return to the airport all over again six hours later when the flight was delayed. Several years later, in 1973, he sent her, at the suggestion of a common friend, a copy of his book, *Twilight in China*. He hardly expected a reply and was deeply touched when she sent him a most gracious letter”.

In his excellent book *War and Peace in Modern India, A Strategic History of the Nehru Years*, that appeared last year Srinath Raghavan has described in engaging detail the responses in India to China's fast-evolving presence in Tibet and the repercussions of that on our long border with that country. KPS's advice to Prime Minister Nehru on China, contrasted with that of Panikkar's and Krishna Menon's should form the subject of a separate work not just for historical appraisal but for clarity on current policy.

Raghavan says “ KPS Menon thought that China's recognition of the frontier should form part of an overall settlement on Tibet : India should not withdraw its armed parties from Tibet without securing this. In January 1952, instructions on these lines were issued to Ambassador Panikkar.” Raghavan adds that when Panikkar met Zhou in the subsequent weeks and months, the Chinese Premier spoke only of trade and cultural issues. The sequel does not need recounting. I agree with Raghavan when he says that KPS's advice which tallied with Nehru's thinking but not his action, was ignored to the detriment of a timely settlement of the boundary issue which stays frozen to this day.

Of the Keralan trimurti associated with Nehru's China policy, namely, Krishna Menon, K.M.Panikkar and KPS Menon, the first two have been mauled by analysts. They have not done that to the only true Mandarin among them, namely, KPS. This has nothing to do with the Mandarinate, only with the way events have unfolded and been interpreted. I believe even Krishna Menon and Panikkar have been unfairly criticized. I believe as Ambassador, K.M. Panikkar did not go wrong in his assessment of our national interest. His prescriptions, as Ambassador, for the handling and safeguarding of India's border interests vis-à-vis China are unfairly judged against the events of a decade later. They should be tested against the Sino-Soviet, Sino-Indian, Indo-Soviet and Indo-US dynamics of the time he made those prescriptions in. The dividends in terms of international credibility and our effectiveness in the UNO, during the decade 1950 to 1960 owes not a little to the fact that there was, despite known differences over the border, substantial goodwill between the two great Asian powers. Bandung, Brioni and the great efflorescence of the non-aligned movement during that first 'clear' decade of the Cold War, would have been impossible if India and China had been pitted against each other, and the Soviet union forced to take one or the other side, to the glee of John Foster Dulles.

Today, when our Raksha Mantralaya is headed by one as clear-thinking and wise as Sri A.K.Antony, when KPS' grandson Ambassador Shivshankar Menon is our National Security Adviser, Nirupama Rao nee Menon is our Ambassador in Washington and Ambassador Ranjan Mathai is Foreign Secretary , we can expect the same 'broad-band' of Kerala's perspicacity to inform the calibrated formulations of our

foreign policy, especially in relation to our neighbours. That we continue to hear the experienced voice on strategic issues of the former NSA, Shri M.K.Narayanan, the present Governor of West Bengal, as we did of the late J.N.Dixit until not long ago, is to our great good.

As I bring this circle of thoughts to a close, I can get a whiff of a question, a half-question, a thought, a half-thought in some minds, unspoken but not unfelt. And that is : ‘Why has the gentleman left out of his narrative one person from Kerala who was closely associated with Pandit Nehru – M.O.Mathai ?Someone who joined him as India was becoming free and worked with him, almost like a shadow, for nearly fifteen years, cannot be left out. Before I say something by way of an attempted analysis of the person, I may be allowed an anecdote. Like most urban children , I went through a phase when stamp-collecting was my hobby, my passion. My father used to get a modest number of letters everyday and they used to be brought home where they were opened and kept ready for him to read. The envelopes used to become my property, along with the stamps on them, coming in rich and colourful variety from different nations. When my father died suddenly – I was about twelve then – my stamp collection came to an abrupt halt. I took recourse to the very pitiable and philatelically low-grade method of buying stamps from vendors, to augment my drastically reduced collection.

One day someone said to me, perhaps mischievously : “Why don’t you ask Panditji to send to you a small number of stamps each month?” . I was a little abashed by the thought . Panditji ? Oh no...how can I ask him...he should not be troubled...But then a kid is a kid and a passion is a passion. And this particular kid, a future bureaucrat, was sufficiently clerical of mentality even then. I figured that my writing to the PM with such a request being out of the question, I should try a less absurd proposition and must go to the proper channel. So, getting the contact details for his private secretary who, I gathered, was a certain Mr M.O.Mathai, I sent to that , to me, unknown functionary my hand-written rather plaintive request. The very next day, I got a fat bundle of stamps drawn from the envelopes of the Prime Minister’s daily dak, hand-delivered to my house. I was, to say the least, overwhelmed. My mother believed that M.O.Mathai must have checked with Panditji and that it was Panditji himself who had ordered the thing to be sent to the stamp-collecting son of his late friend, Devadas Gandhi. But I was sufficiently babu-minded even then to realize that Mr Mathai would have acted on his own, that Panditji handled the letters inside the envelopes that came to him, his staff could do what it liked with the envelopes. I was struck by three things : First, by the sheer bounty of the generous favour. Second, by the kind-heartedness of the private secretary. Third and most importantly, by the thought : What an extraordinarily powerful man this PS must be in that he has either persuaded the PM to oblige this random kid or has the autonomy to act thus, on his own. Two other thoughts also occurred to me. Children think more complex thoughts than we imagine. First : Mr Mathai is obviously as privy to all the PM’s dak, as we were in our family, to my father’s. Second, that perhaps the PM’s grandsons are not into philately, else Mr Mathai would have sent this bundle of stamps to them, not to me. Be all that as it may, I was so overwhelmed that I wrote back a letter of thanks to Mr Mathai in which, at my mother’s suggestion, I also said the stock of stamps was such as to make up for a whole year’s collection and that he need not take the trouble of sending me any more. But , if I remember aright, he did send two or three more bundles.

I never ever saw Mr Mathai and very soon forgot all about stamp-collecting. But looking back, I find that episode very revealing. Here was a man who meant something to his boss. He must have had something in him, at the very least, a sharp brain, to make him so valuable to the PM, so essential to his office. I therefore hold it to be a pity beyond words that circumstances led to M.O.Mathai’s turning into a sour

individual whose reminiscences, perhaps teased out of him by Nehru-baiters, ended up as little more than potsherds of a tragic life. M.O.Mathai like Malvolio in Nehru's Twelfth Night, was trusted and distrusted, liked and disliked, self-raised and ultimately, self-dismantled. He could have become an editor and commentator, giving invaluable analyses, documentations, supported by sources both published and unpublished, of the Nehru years, that would have paralleled the Transfer of Power papers. He will remain the star that glows but dimly on the Kerala-Nehru firmament... pakshe atinoru prakaashakkuravullatu poley tonni.

Friends, I must clarify that I do not wish to romanticize a place, that is Kerala, nor an equation, that is Kerala's, with Jawaharlal Nehru. As a site of social and political action, Kerala, and as a person treading the political road, Nehru, have had their drawbacks, their failings, their moments of gloom, their hours of error. Their equation cannot, therefore, be unflawed.

Nor, I must clarify too, do I believe that Kerala is somehow special and elevated above other provinces in India; it is not. Other provinces too have produced outstanding human beings, some who stand as tall if not taller than some of the persons I have mentioned earlier in the course of this talk.

What I have wanted to show is that nation-building, political organization, policy formulation and the uses of concepts and methods in a nation state need its leader to spot his people's strengths, and Nehru, as our first Prime Minister, lost no time to recognize that Kerala had an intellectual fibre that could weave into new India's tapestry a unique strength and a resilience it needed.

I also believe that just as there is such a thing as a strong point, a personality trait, an essential nature, in an individual, there is such a thing as a marked characteristic among a regional collectivity of people. There being sub-regions within regions, there are sub-regional collectivities as well. And within countries such as India that have several regional and sub-regional characteristics of people, there is to be seen yet another phenomenon. And that is that as a mega collectivity of people, India in its conscious and sub-conscious aggregations of characteristics, borrows and lends its intellectual and cultural chromosomes, so as to create a larger equilibrium. It does not do this either systematically or successfully, but it does so all the time. Being a democracy this has led to some interesting political patterns, of which the SRC's role, was one.

In the people of Kerala, speaking one language, Malayalam, but professing at least three major faith traditions, with a history of maritime interaction with other continents and climes, exposed by their natural bent for intellectual curiosity to reading, analysis and comment, have shored up a body of intellectual powers and energies that India is in dire need of.

The political discourse that began in the Nehru years, with the Gandhi influence over it exercising an indirect effect, continues in many forms today, both within its domestic engagements and in its dealings with the outside world.

Dogmas and doctrines change; they do not go away. Dogmatism remains, doctrinaire ways of thinking do not let go of their stranglehold over the processes of thought. Kerala, which has produced some very doctrinaire people is, in its essential being, anti-dogmatism. It is non-doctrinaire. The people of Kerala are too conscious, too aware, too proud of their right to original thinking, to fresh thinking, to the privilege of critical enquiry and re-investigation, to become hidebound. Their ability to question, to probe,



to not accept blindly any convention, any tradition, howsoever high its auspices, is nothing short of a colossal strength for India. Religions, philosophies, doctrines, ideologies have yielded before Kerala's questionings of them.

Today, when new dogmas and doctrines, of native and foreign origin, want to dominate our ways of life and action, Kerala, one trusts, will continue to subject them to independent analysis and examination. And when it does that, it would be continuing the dialogue which a universe of Kerala's minds had with a man who valued that interaction inestimably and applied, to the Nation's benefit, definitionally.

- Gopalkrishna Gandhi

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