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When EMS listened to Masani

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There was a time when the Marxist leader, Mr E. M. S. Namboodiripad, paid more heed to his present-day political antagonist Mr M. R. Masani, than to his Politburo colleague, Mr Basavapunniah.

It was in the Congress-Socialist Party (CSP) days in the early forties when both Mr Masani and Mr Namboodiripad as party Joint Secretaries, turned the country from one end to the other.

Writing in chapter two of Masani and Basavapunniah, of part two of his autobiography, Mr Namboodiripad narrates how at the Guntur (Andhra) session of the CSP, a group of youngsters under Mr Basavapunniah, who propagated socialist thought but remained outside the CSP, appeared on the scene and sprang a plethora of questions at Mr Masani.

Andhra Pradesh then had given birth to a Communist group even before the CSP was born. A north Indian revolutionary, Mr Amir Hyder Khan, was instrumental in spreading thoughts of Marxism-Leninism in the then composite Madras Presidency. Mr Basavapunniah appeared at the Guntur session as spokesman of this group.

Mr Basavapunniah sought clarifications on many a topic, including the role of the working class in a bourgeois national movement.

"To me, who had not as yet conformed myself to the fundamentals of Marxism-Leninism, Masani's replies appealed more than Punniah's questions, though the basic approach embodied in his questions was unassailable," Mr Namboodiripad says.

Mr Namboodiripad spent most of the two days he was in Guntur with Mr Masani, Mr Tenneti Viswanathan and Mr Narasimha Rao, but not with Mr Basavapunniah and his comrades.

The Masani-Basavapunniah dialogue had not, in any way, influenced his political line then, but it was the beginning of a bitter inter-party ideological struggle within the CSP culminating in the transformation of many Congress-Socialists "including myself and the Kerala CSP en bloc" into Communists, Mr Namboodiripad wrote.

Personal