

Minority Politics in Kerala—
The Christian Community, 1978—85.

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' MINORITY POLITICS IN KERALA - THE CHRISTIAN
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AIADMK	- All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam
AIMUL	- All India Muslim Union League
BLD	- Bharatiya Lok Dal
Congress(I)	- Congress (Indira)
Congress(U)	- Congress (Urs)
CPI	- Communist Party of India
CPI(M)	- Communist Party of India (Marxist)
FBL	- Forward Bloc
ICS	- Indian Congress Socialist
INC	- Indian National Congress
IUML	- Indian Union Muslim League
JNP	- Janata Party
KC	- Kerala Congress
KC(J)	- Kerala Congress (Joseph)
KC(M)	- Kerala Congress (Mani)
KC(P)	- Kerala Congress (Pillai)
KSMTF	- Kerala Swatantra Matsya Thozilali Federation
ML	- Muslim League
NSS	- Nair Service Society
NDP	- National Democratic Party
PSP	- Praja Socialist Party
RSS	- Rashtriya Swayam Sewak Sangh
RSP	- Revolutionary Socialist Party
SRP	- Socialist Revolutionary Party

PREFACE

Indian society is a plural society, not only in terms of its ethnic, cultural and linguistic minorities, but even in terms of its diverse religious minorities. It was in this background that we adopted a democratic political framework and gave to ourselves a secular constitution, which would protect and enhance the rights and position of the various minorities in India.

In this study, we have taken the case of the religious minorities in Kerala, specifically the case of the Christians. Almost all the major world religions find their adherents in Kerala, Christianity having its share of followers who constitute a significant minority.

The period chosen for this study is 1978-85. In this period, we note the strengthening of the role and position of the Kerala Congress - a party that is associated with the Christians. Any study of the political life of the Christians in Kerala, would be incomplete without studying the Kerala Congress. As important as the study of the Kerala Congress is also the study of the role of the Church vis-a-vis the Christian minority politics in Kerala. This study seeks to examine the involvement of the Church in the political affairs, the kind of issues that the Church supports or takes up.

Kerala has traditionally been known for its communal amity and lack of communal problems. However over the years, this situation seems to be changing. A certain section of the Church has been behind a move to communalize any and every issue. Interestingly enough, there is yet another section which realizes the futility of such an endeavour and takes up issues on behalf of the exploited poor.

Thus, on the basis of this study, it will be seen that religious minorities are a very important factor in the electoral, political and administrative set-up of Kerala. Since the Christians are a substantial and powerful minority with an organized Church and leadership and even a political party, they are obviously a subject of great interest for any study that proposes to understand the dynamics of minority politics in Kerala.

This dissertation is the result of the help and guidance given by my teachers and friends. This would have been impossible to complete without the support of my parents, Ravi Chettan and Geeta.

Here, I would like to thank Professor V.K.Sukumaran Nair, ex-Vice-Chancellor, Kerala University, for his willingness to help me, inspite of a busy schedule.

(iii)

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INTRODUCTION

Plural societies in all parts of the world are characterized by the existence of several minorities. These minorities can be linguistic, ethnic, racial, cultural, tribal and of course religious. Most plural societies have to therefore, adopt a constitution and political framework that will uphold, enhance and preserve the status, importance, identity and last but not the least the rights of the minorities. Very often, we notice that inspite of these elaborate provisions and safeguards the minorities feel threatened; hence they organize politically in order to put pressure on the government. Sometimes this imagined or real feeling of neglect and discrimination explodes into violent movements, often incorporating a demand for a separate state;

Indian society is thus an interesting illustration of a plural society, where diverse minorities have been living since centuries of recorded history. India has various minorities - some very small, and yet others that can be called substantial. Much of Indian politics - present and past has been linked to the considerations and demands of these varied minorities. Thus the minorities are a very important and interesting dimension to Indian politics at the national level.

India being a federation has multiple levels of government - very often the political scenario in the states is totally different from that at the centre; specially in the context of the minorities. This difference emerges from the existence of different demographic compositions in the various units of the federation. Here, we could consider the example of Kerala, in the South of India, which has many religious minorities that are substantial and are in fact so important that much of the political upheavels in Kerala, can in a certain sense be attributed to the constant pressure exerted by these minority groups. It is inevitable that these groups should be organized and have their political units which take part in elections and seek to influence government decisions.

One such important and crucial minority group is the Christians in Kerala. We shall be looking at the nature & form of minority politics in Kerala - in the specific case of the Christians. This study limits itself to the years 1978-85. In the first chapter there is a brief discussion on the minorities in India generally and in Kerala specifically. This chapter deals with the constitutional provisions and safeguards for the

minorities - specially the religious minorities - in the context of the nature of secularism in India. In the second chapter, we take a look at the significant developments in Kerala politics vis-a-vis the Christians in the years 1957-75. The third chapter is a continuation of the same theme in the years 1978-85. The last chapter tries to identify the varying trends that are emerging in the context of the Christian minority group and its role in Kerala politics.

This study has made use of many well-known books on Indian and Kerala politics, besides articles and reports from leading journals and newspapers. Certain government documents, pamphlets published by voluntary groups, unpublished thesis and dissertations, and private circulation documents have also been consulted.

The purpose of this study is to examine the nature and extent of influence that any religious minority can exert in a political set up such as India's. It also looks at the role that religion plays for mobilizing purposes.

CHAPTER I

RELIGIOUS MINORITIES IN KERALA - CONSTITUTIONAL AND SYSTEMIC DIMENSIONS

Indian society can be described as a "compartmental" society in which many groups maintain their distinct and diverse styles of life.¹ Society in India is divided into a multitude of religions, quite obviously each religion has its "own orders, denominations, sects and movements."² Almost all the major world religions find their adherents in India. According to the latest census reports³ the percentages of people following any one of the major world religions in India is as follows : Hindus 83%, Muslims 11.2%, Christians, 2.6%.

Thus, it is quite evident that India has many religious minorities. This fact, coupled with the historical experience of partition and the violent communal riots made it imperative that the constitution makers pay a great deal of attention to the role and involvement of religion in the Indian polity after 1947, the year India became independent.

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1. Galanter (Marc) - Competing Equalities - ^{Delhi} Oxford University Press, 1984, p.7.
 2. Ibid, p.16.
 3. India (Govt.) ^SCensus of India - 1981.

During the anti-imperialist struggle, it is noted that the struggle itself became a "powerful force for national unity",⁴ The nationalist anti-imperialist struggle was strong enough to keep in check most of the disruptive forces. This tradition has definitely influenced the acceptance of a secular state in India after 1947:

In fact the Preamble of the Indian Constitution says "We, the People of India, having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a Sovereign, Socialist secular Democratic Republic..."⁵ Thus the Indian Constitution states that India shall be a secular state. Thus the unity and fraternity of the people of India, professing numerous faiths, has been sought to be achieved by enshrining the ideal of a "secular state", which means that the state does not itself uphold any religion as the state religion. The secular objective of the state has now been specifically expressed by inserting the word 'secular' in the Preamble by the Constitution 42nd Amendment Act, 1976. There is therefore no provision in the Constitution making any religion the "established church."⁶

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4. Chandra (Bipan) - Communalism in Modern India - Vani Educational Books, 1984, p.316.
 5. The Constitution of India, Swamy Publishers, Madras, P.1.
 6. Basu (Durga Das) - Introduction to the Constitution of India, Prentice-Hall of India, 1980, p.26.

The democratic values of the national movement and its leadership influenced this decision greatly.⁶ As early as 1931 at the Karachi session, the Congress had clearly stated its preference for a secular state - the resolution said "the state shall observe neutrality in regard to all religions." It also spoke of granting special rights and safeguards to the minorities. The poison spread by communal ideology had to be countered at the highest levels of the constitution. There was a conscious desire to combat communalism and safeguard the rights and position of the religious minorities.

It was felt that minorities can "live and prosper with full dignity and security and without fear only in a social system in which they would not be permanent potential scapegoats for its failures."⁷ A secular democratic framework was in such circumstances, the best guarantee for maintaining an order of things, where religious minorities (in fact all minorities) did not feel discriminated against at all.⁸

However, in all this the major influencing factor was the violent incidents before and after the partition. The Indian political elite had resolved about making India

7. Chandra (Bipan) - op.cit., p.315.

a secular state. Today in India, one of the major issues of concern is the increasing communal influences leading to a possible communalization of the Indian state itself.

This would be a serious threat to the very concept of a secular Indian state. Here, it would be worthwhile to examine what exactly is meant by secularism. Like many such terms, secularism is also a subject of much debate and discussion.

I

The concept of a secular state assumed great importance in India immediately after the country achieved independence in 1947. There was a fear in some quarters that the dominant religion might monopolize the privileges to the disadvantage of the minorities. It is specially in this context that any threat to the secular content of Indian polity has to be noted with concern and alarm.

The word secular is used to mean things which are not connected with religion. Thus a secular state is one which is "separated from, unconnected with and not devoted to religion."⁸ The origin of a secular conception of state can be traced to developments in Europe, where for a

8: Luthera (V.P.) - The concept of the secular state and India, Oxford University Press, 1964, p.15.

long time the Church and the state remained intertwined. After the Reformation the tide turned in favour of separation of state from religion. It came to be believed that the state should not enforce any religion. Thus new patterns of church-state relation had to be evolved - two such broad trends emerged in Europe.

Of these, the first was a system of establishment of a particular church which was recognised as the religion of the state and the other churches were granted freedom, the degree of which differed from country to country. It followed that the established church enjoyed certain benefits which were denied to other churches. The state would subsidize it and control its affairs. This is best illustrated by the situation in England.

A second pattern was what Luther describes as jurisdictional, wherein all religions would have an equal status but the state would not be separated from religion. Holland would be an ideal example of such an arrangement. However under both the systems, significantly enough state was not separate from religion, such a strict separation is noticed in the constitution of the USA.⁹

9: Ibid., p:23.

Judging by this yardstick, Luthera is of the opinion that India is not a secular state because the Indian Constitution does not separate the Church from the state. On the contrary, the state in India has immense powers over the affairs of the Church - religious bodies in India have to do their work in accordance to laws passed by the state, the state has power to embark upon social reforms and "need not stop at non-religious reforms but extends to religious spheres"¹⁰ as well.

Besides this, the state can regulate the relations between religious bodies, it can throw open Hindu religious institutions to people who are not allowed in. The Indian state gives direct or indirect financial aid to religious institutions. It can enact communal legislations applicable differently to different communities. It has even made a provision in the Indian Constitution which is against cow slaughter.

Luthera is of the opinion that in fact a secular state is not possible in India, because the religion of the majority i.e. Hinduism is not organized and has no institution

10: Ibid., p.147.

or organization which can be separated from the state. Thus, the Indian situation approximates a jurisdictionalist pattern - where many churches exist and are placed equally. This is a form of Erastianism which stands for the supremacy of the state in matters pertaining to the church.

The founding fathers of the Indian constitution made it clear that the parliament would be supreme in religious affairs. This however is contrary to the basic tenet of a secular state where religion as a relation between the church and it's members is strictly outside the purview of the state. Thus, the Indian constitution wanted to create a state where the citizens were free to profess any religion. However, according to Luthera the constitution makers wrongly equated religious impartiality with separation of church and state or a secular state.

Dr. Donald Eugene Smith has studied the Indian state and it's claims to being a secular state, in a well known book "India as a secular state". He believes that India is basically a secular state but has certain problem areas.

Dr. Smith would not agree with too narrow a definition

11. Smith (Donald Eugene) - India As a Secular State, USA
Princeton University Press, 1963.

of the term secular state whereby it is equated with separation of state from religion. Besides, Dr. Smith believes that Hinduism is capable of organizing itself and therefore it would not be impossible to separate state from an organized church.

P.C.Chatterji points out that secularism is the credo of a democratic state where there should be complete freedom of conscience, and dogmas or metaphysical beliefs, which are only one small section of what should be included within the concept of freedom of conscience - without which a secular state cannot be complete.¹²

The rise of Christianity produced a new set of relationship unknown to the ancient world and led to the problem of church and state. Christianity recognized and taught a basic duality - spiritual and temporal. The philosophical foundations were laid in a sermon of Christ, recorded in St. Marks Gospel (xiii.7), 'Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are Gods.'

'This novel Christian position implied many new things. It implied a doctrine of two ends of human life,

12. Luthera (V.P.) - op.cit., p*16.

the secular end which belonged to Caesar and the religious or eternal end which belonged to God. It further implied a corresponding doctrine of 'two powers', pursuing their respective ends. It meant that the two institutions (state and Church) were to remain distinct and their respective jurisdiction inviolate."¹³

This distinction between Church and state has no "clear parallel in Hinduism and certainly not in Islam." We find an interesting description of the scenario in the Christian world in Smith's book; He writes that it was quite inevitable that the Christian loyalty to the state should have come into conflict with their loyalty to God.¹⁴

With the conversion of Constantine and subsequent Christian rulers Christianity became established as the state religion and began to persecute its rivals. Often the partnership between Pope and the Emperor-Church and state was a mutually advantageous one. But this did not rule out conflict.

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13. Ibid,
14. Smith (D.E.) - op.cit, p.9.

At the end of the 13th Century the struggle between the spiritual and temporal rulers took a somewhat new turn because of the rise of independent sovereign states - which produced a politically fragmented Europe which successfully challenged the Papacy's temporal claims. The reformation was later to intensify this fragmentation by the introduction of religious diversity. One of the most influential thinkers to contribute to the idea of the secular state was Marsiglio of Padua. He envisaged a state that could control and regulate the Church just as it does trade or agriculture.

The concept and principles of a secular state developed over a long period of time in USA and Europe. In the western political experience the concept has emerged as an important aspect of the liberal democratic tradition. This leads Smith to comment that the secular state is western and not Asian in origin. Of course, Smith does not deny the existence of certain principles of a secular state in Asia, where however the traditional pattern of relationship between religion and society was one of interdependence.

However, after independence India did not build a new nation on the foundations of ancient Hindu thought.¹⁵

15. Ibid., p.57.

The traumatic experience of partition of the country compelled the Indian leaders to give special attention to the minority question. It was a baffling task for the founding fathers as the British had formulated a colonial strategy of satisfying the ambitions of the minority groups. The Indian leadership inherited the legacy of the British policy of non-interference in religious matters, giving religious freedom to all and providing special representation in the legislative bodies and administration. The ruling elite faithfully followed the British approach to minorities except for the abolition of separate electorates.¹⁶

Panikkar believes that the roots of India's democracy, egalitarian and secular state were in the west and not in ancient Hindu thought. The valid experience of any one country becomes the common inheritances of civilized humanity. The characteristic emphasis of secularism is that religion is purely a matter of the individual conscience - civil authority based on coercive powers has no rightful jurisdiction over it.

Many leading Indian intellectuals have been greatly

16. Shakir (Moin) - Politics of Minorities, Ajanta Publications, Delhi, 1980, p.34.

influenced by the western concept of secularism. They believe that scientific, economic and social progress of the country will vary inversely with the prevalence of the religious outlook. Some intellectuals take a more kindly view of religion - see in it certain great values but want to bring it in line with modern life, yet another group is indifferent to religion. All of them however, see the secular state as west's contribution to India - it is part of a liberal democratic framework which they believe is the only fair and democratic solution to the problem of religious minorities.¹⁷

Pandit Nehru was one of foremost champions of a secular state in India. For him the secular state is the sine-qua non of a modern democracy. Under him, a secular state developed as that which protects all religions but does not favour one at the expense of others and does not establish any religion as the official creed. However, contrary to this, was another opinion that a secular state cannot function in a religious society, because secularism is based on a broad based philosophy of rationalism and materialism. They believed that the idea that the Gandhian concept of equality of all

17. Smith (D.E.) - op.cit., pp.152-153.

religions might lead to a non-communal state but never to really secular one.

It was their contention that a constitutional set up which excludes religion from the function is necessary this would however be only the fringe, something more fundamental would be the secularization of both individual and social life - true spiritual freedom, which would mean not only the freedom to choose from various religious doctrines but also the freedom of the human spirit from tyranny of all of them.¹⁸

It is interesting to note the obvious differences between the Hindu and Christian approaches to the theoretical basis of the secular state. The development of the secular state in the western Christian tradition never proceeded on the assumption that all religions were equally true and valid and ultimately one and the same. It was in fact the frank recognition of the religious differences which led to the conclusion that the state, which governs and protects all people must therefore be divorced from religion and such matters should be left strictly to the individual citizen.

Many Indian leaders, particularly Hindus objected to the western concept of a secular state because the

18. Ibid., p. 155.

secular state in the west was a result of the failure to solve the religious question. They felt that since the problem had been solved in India the western concept of secularism had no real relevance to India's needs.

In the light of these conflicting opinions and understanding of the term secularism and secular, it is quite obvious that there cannot be any one or definitive view on the Indian state's claims to being a secular. However, Smith points out that secularism is not just separation of church and state but involves three basic relations that of (a) religion and individual (b) state and individual (c) state and religion.¹⁹ If we look at the constitutional provisions regarding these three aspects in the Indian Constitution, then it would be quite evident that the constitution provides for a secular polity.

The three points put forth by Smith would suggest that in a secular state the individual and corporate freedom of religion would be guaranteed, the state would deal with individuals as citizens irrespective of their religion and lastly that the secular state would not be constitutionally connected to any particular religion, neither promotes any or interferes with any religion.

19. Ibid. Preface, p.ii.

As has been mentioned earlier, the Indian constitution in its preamble incorporates the term secular to define the Indian state. Besides, the Part III of the constitution in dealing with Fundamental Rights specifies Right to Freedom of Religion as one of the rights (Articles 25, 26, 27 & 28).²⁰

However, being a multi-religious state, with many significant religious minorities it was not enough to create a secular state. The constitution makers felt that it was also necessary to incorporate some special provisions to safeguard the rights of the minorities - religious, cultural and linguistic.

Thus minority rights assume a place of very great importance. The constituent assembly adopted these rights (Articles 29, 30) on the basis of a consensus.²¹ The constituent assembly was enthusiastic about these rights and included measures to ensure that the safeguards should not remain mere paper safeguards. The minorities were divided according to their strength and population.

However the founding fathers did not clearly define as to who would be the minorities.²² This was decided

20. The Constitution of India, op.cit, pp.10-11.

21. Constituent Assembly Debates - Vol.5, Govt.of India Press, Faridabad, p.198.

22. Beg (Justice N.) -Rights of Minorities under The Indian Constitution, Jawahar Bhavan, 1976, P.3.

subsequently in the course of a decision on the Kerala Education Bill by the Supreme Court. It was decided that a minority would be a community which is numerically less than fifty per cent of the population of a state.²³

In the context of present day India, the question of satisfying the aspirations of minorities is of crucial importance. This is in Moin Shakir's opinion the criterion of success or failure of the democratic experiment in this country.²⁴ In any case he believes that 'minority' is a national concept, a minority is such because they perceive themselves as such.

Justice Beg has studied the Indian Constitution very closely and has concluded that there are many articles which provide for minority rights. He makes a long list of such rights - Articles 14, 15 (3) & (4), 16, 120, 210, 29(1), 30(1), 30(2), 350(A) & (B), 347, 350, 330, 332, 164, 335, 331, 337, 333, 338, 17, 35 and 336.²⁵

Of these it is articles 29 and 30 that deal specifically and directly with minorities and their rights, besides the freedom of religion granted by articles 25, 26,

23. Ibid., p.3.

24. Shakir (Moin) - op.cit. p.32.

25. Beg (Justice N.) - op.cit. pp.5-81.

27 and 28. Article 29 gives all the minorities the right to preserve and conserve their distinct identity and heritage. Article 30 gives the religion & linguistic minorities the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice. However the minorities will not be discriminated against in matters of admissions to state aided or state run educational institutions.

Thus the Indian state declares itself to be secular and grants freedom of religion and special rights and safeguards to minorities - religions as well as linguistic. The Indian state is however not anti-religious. In fact many scholars like Luthera challenge India's secular status itself, because the Indian state actively involves itself in religious matters as is evident from example given by Luthera where he demonstrates quite clearly that the Indian parliament considers itself supreme as far religious affairs are concerned - it does not stop short of enacting legislations that might affect the religious lives of the people. Further, the Indian state is actively involved in the administration of many religious institutions, gives aid to some and has taken a constitutional step in the direction of banning cow slaughter.

Thus, some instances of state interference in religious affairs is permitted by the constitution itself

(1) financial administration of temples (2) practice of ex-communication from religious communities; (3) admission of Harijans into Hindu Temples (4) the modification of religious personal laws, to give but a few examples. The chief reason for such interference is that Hinduism lacks the kind of ecclesiastical organization necessary to set its own house in order - thus the urge for reform can only be satisfied by state action.²⁶

However, one must add to the credit of the Indian state that it has no state religion, nor does it give any constitutional recognition to Hinduism as the religion of the majority of citizens, neither does it have an ecclesiastical department in the Central government.

The Indian state thus has been caught in a cruel dilemma. By the strict principles of secularism it cannot interfere with any social custom (except) on the grounds of "public order, morality and health"²⁷ as stated in the constitution. On the other hand, modern conception of social justice demands radical changes in the Indian social structure, which would imply interference in the religious affairs.²⁸

26. Smith (D.E.) - op.cit., p.126.

27. The Constitution of India - op.cit., p.8.

28. Sinha (V.K.) ed. - Secularism and Indian Democracy - in Secularism in India, Lal Vani Publishing House, , 1968, p.35.

has a role vis-a-vis religion, it can interfere very often in favour of religious minorities.

We have noted that secularism in its modern form emerged in Western Europe and meant a separation of state from Church and the Church from the school. However we do not have the same experiences as the west.

To begin with all the major world religions are represented in India. The religion of the majority is Hinduism which does not have a Church, is not semitic or ordained, nor does it even have a Caliphate. In the absence of a dominant religious Church what has to be separated from state is the belief patterns that permeate all aspects of life-the dogmas, caste and religious prejudices. In fact there has to be clear acceptance and understanding of the fact that all state laws are superior to all religious laws and the latter should be sub-ordinated to political authority.

However, there are many also believe that what is suitable for India is not the above mentioned application of the term secular, but a variation of this, embodied in the oft quoted 'Sarva Dharma Sama Bhava' or an equal respect or maintenance of an equidistance towards all religions as far as the state is concerned.

Professor Rasheedudin Khan however points out that the word Dharma cannot be translated as religion alone, in fact it lends itself to at least fifteen different meanings and is often used in a contextual sense. This simplistic rendering of word dharma as religion is criticized.

Besides, Prof. Khan believes that such an interpretation of the concept of secularism leads to what he describes as cheerful multiple communalism, because operationally such an understanding of the term secularism would mean bifurcation of all personal laws leading to communal tensions. The logic somehow seems to be perverted where single communalism is apparently set aside in favour of multiple communalism.

Such a situation is obviously not very favourable to the Indian situation - a country where there are many religious minorities. In fact the religious conceptions in this country are so vast that they cover every aspect of life from birth to death. There is in fact very little that is not religion. If so, then there should be extra care taken to ensure a total and complete elimination of all religious or dogmatic elements from the state and its practices.

To a great extent the Indian polity is troubled by the communal problems because of a misinterpretation of

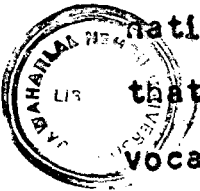
the term secular and secularism as also the existence of communal parties which claim to represent religious minorities or even the dominant groups.

II

A very good and interesting illustration of this phenomenon in India is the case of the state of Kerala, for Kerala has many significant religious minorities and politics in that state has to take into account the fact of their existence. Of course, the govt. of India has an overarc^hing policy towards these minorities?

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The minorities commission for instance was set up on Jan. 12th 1978 to safeguard the interests of the religious, and linguistic minorities as a step forward to preserve secular traditions, promote national integration and remove a feeling of inequality and discrimination among the minorities. Thus, it is quite clear that the protection of the rights is definitely and irrevocably linked with the desire to strengthen the secular image and content of the nation.²⁹



29: "Minorities in India" - UNI Backgrounder, New Delhi Vol. V, no.35, Aug. 28th 1980, p.13.

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Thus, it is easily established that a study of the minorities, (religious in this instance) is of great relevance and of course considerable interest. Kerala is chosen because it is a vivid example of the religious minorities and their involvement in politics.

Here, the attempt is to examine one particular minority of Kerala - the Christians, who are a significant and very important minority. This minority has had a very far reaching impact on the policies of the state and determines the rapid twists and turns of Kerala politics to a great extent. It was decided to study the case of the Christians in Kerala, also because, this is a religious group that is not very well represented in the rest of the country.

Kerala lies on the southwestern extremity of the Indian sub-continent and was inaugurated on 1.11.1956 as a result of the re-organization of the states on a linguistic basis. To the west of Kerala "lies the Arabian sea and to the east, the Western ghats. The land is divided in its physical features into three distinct regions (1) the highland touching the western ghats (2) the plains which lie in between the highlands and the sea coast (3) the coastal belt."³⁰

30. India (Govt.) - Census of India, 1981.

Spread over an area of 38863 sq.km, Kerala has a population of 25.4 millions³⁰ and a high literacy rate of 70.45%.³¹ Legend has it that, Kerala was reclaimed from the sea and given to the Brahmins from the north, as their new homeland by Lord Parasurama.

In the opinion of the renowned British anthropologist Arthur Keith, Kerala is a paradise for any student of anthropology in the sense that it's intermingling civilization of diverse races, religions, castes and customs present an interesting challenge to social scientists.³²

Kerala is veritabily a crucible for all faiths with all the major world religious finding a substantial representation - Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Jews, Jains, Buddhists, Parsis and Sikhs.³³ The latest census figures can be cited in this context:

30. India (Govt.) - Census of India, 1981

31. Ibid

32. Cited in FIC (Victor M.) - Kerala : Yenan of India, Nachiketa, Bombay, 1970- p:1.

33. Hariharan (A) - "The Kerala Crucible" - The Hindustan Times - Delhi, 7 Jan.'83.

Table 1.1 Population of six Major Religious Communities
Kerala - 1981³⁴

Religious Communities	Persons (belonging to)
1. Buddhists	223
2. Christians	5233865
3. Hindus	14801347
4. Jains	3605
5. Muslims	5409687
6. Sikhs	1295

Source : Census of India, 1981

It is very interesting to observe that, while the all India percentage of each religious community is as follows - Hindus (83%), Muslims (11.2%) and Christians (2.6%), the percentage for Kerala is Hindus (60.8%), Muslims (18%) and Christians (21.2%): Thus it is clearly demonstrated that the Christians in Kerala are a substantial and an important minority: In fact some of the districts in Kerala are such that they are often referred to as Christian districts.

34. India (govt.) - Census of India, 1981.

Table 1.2 : The District wise break up of the Christians
in Kerala ³⁵

S.No.	Districts	Christians (% of total population)
1.	Cannanore	9.55
2.	Wayanad	24.46
3.	Kozhikode	4.80
4.	Malappuram	2.30
5.	Palghat	3.75
6.	Trichur	25.10
7.	Ernakulam	40.20
8.	Idukki	43.15
9.	Kottayam	47.48
10.	Alleppey	27.30
11.	Quilon	22.66
12.	Trivandrum	17.70

Source : Hariharan (A) in The Hindustan Time

Three centuries before Christianity gained official recognition in Europe, making it the established religion of Rome, it was already present in Kerala. In fact few people seem to realize that Christianity came to India

35. Hariharan (A) - op.cit.

as early as the first century after Christ, long before Europe turned to it, and established a firm hold in South India.

Though there is no debate about the antiquity of christianity in Kerala, there are certainly different versions of how christianity reached the Indian shores. A popular and widely accepted tradition attributes Christian proselytization to St. Thomas the Apostle,³⁶ "who landed at Malankara near Cranganore, converted some Brahmins and others and founded seven Churches - six in Travancore and Cochin and one at Palayur in Malabar."³⁷

There are some scholars who believe that Christianity was introduced into Kerala from West Asia in 4th century by Thomas of Cana.³⁸ Yet others believe that Christianity in Kerala can be attributed to the Nestorian missionaries who arrived there from Persia in the 5th century.

Whatever the origin, it is fairly clear that by the 8th or 9th century A.D. the Church in Kerala was in direct "communion with the Nestorian Patriarch of Babylon from whom it received bishops from time to time."³⁹ These

36. Nossiter(T.J.)- Communism in Kerala,Oxford University Press, 1982, p.21.

37: Mammen (P.M.) - Communalism vs. Communism - Minerva Associates, 1981, pp:7-9:

38: Fic (Victor M.) - op.cit., p.1:

39. Mammen (P.M.) - op.cit. - pp: 7-9:

earliest Christians of Kerala are known as Syrian Christians however, "the members of the Church of Malabar are called Syrians not because they have Syrian liturgy? They are not of the Syrian nation but of the Syrian rites.⁴⁰ The name in this case is thus not an ethnological or geographical designation, but is purely ecclesiastical?"

The Syrian Christians occupied the hinterland of the coast from Calicut to Quilon and were traditionally the subjects of the ruling rajas of Kerala. Living amongst a largely non-Christian population they gradually became "Hinduized" Christians. Their Churches often looked like Hindu temples and there is a charming tale of Vasco da gama who mistook a Hindu temple of Kali to be a Christian Church and worshipped there with all solemnity, mistaking the idol of Kali for a representation of Virgin Mary.

Gradually, these groups of Syrian Christians adopted caste restrictions and did not allow the untouchable Harijans and the neo-Christians to enter their houses. The latter were new converts from the lower castes and were

40: "The term rite primarily means the words to be said and action to be done in carrying out a given act of religion, e.g. the rite of Baptism. By extension it means a complete system of ritual and prayers to be used in the worship of God and the ministration of Sacraments" - Antony (E.P.) - Origin and Growth of Latin Catholics of Kerala, Unpublished thesis submitted to the University of Kerala, 1981, p.1.

contemptuously referred to as Puthu Christians (new Christians).⁴¹

With the advent of Christianity in Rome, a psychological conflict precipitated. Zealots wanted to deny the prior heritage and therefore undertook a movement to ~~rewrite~~ books on language, grammar and rhetoric without any allusion to pagan legend and tradition. Thus, when the Portuguese landed in Kerala in the 16th century they adopted a similar attitude.⁴²

The initial evangelical drive by the Portuguese was crude and ruthless. Their assumption that the entire Apostolic Christian community came automatically under their fold and their drive to Latinise the rites created widespread resentment, and the Portuguese had to face stiff resistance, as was witnessed in the memorable incident known as Koonan Kurisu Satyam (Pledge taken at the cross of Koonan Hill).⁴³

This incident divided the old community into two sections - Roman Syrians who accepted the Roman Catholic faith

41. Mammen (P.M.) - Op.cit., pp.7-9?

42. Chaitanya (Krishna) - India - The Land The People, Kerala NBT, 1972.

43. Ibid.

and the Jacobite Syrians who chose to maintain their loyalty to their traditional patriarch. The influence of the Church missionary society in 19th century created a reform movement within the Jacobite Syrian Church that resulted in the formation of a reformed Marthoma Syrian Church. There is also a sizeable non-Syrian Christian population consisting of Latin Catholic rites and other Protestant Churches of European origin. Thus we see that Christians in Kerala are Syrians and non-Syrians who are found in Catholic and non-Catholic communities.

Land, in Kerala was traditionally believed to be of divine origin and ownership was with the higher castes - Brahmins and Nairs and their temples. The tenants and sub tenants mostly belonged to the lower castes Hindus or the Christian and Muslims. Christians therefore had no privileged positions in the Kerala society and very often took to trade and did well.

The British brought with them, secular education and plantation cultivation which led to changes in this above mentioned scenario. The Christian community took to both the activities in a big way. However, in the caste ridden society of Kerala which Swami Vivekananda described as a "mad house of caste" there was a great scope, and need felt for social and economic reforms - because those

who did not find themselves on the top of the Hindu caste hierarchy were discriminated against in all sphere of life. Of the exploited communities, the "Ezhavas were the first to organize into a solidarity group and revolt for social and economic reforms in Travancore. The Christians, who were advanced economically joined the Ezhavas to fight for political reforms."⁴⁴

In fact, alongwith the muslims they had formed a "triple alliance" as early as 1882 against the Raja of Travancore and submitted a memorandum which among other things demanded admission of Ezhavas in government jobs. This emorandum has been subsequently termed the Malayalee Memorial. The formation of Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (SNDP) in 1903 by the Ezhava leader Sree Narayana Guru became a fore runner of other religious associations, that participate in Kerala politics through these "solidarity groups."

Some of the Neo-Christians organized the Prathyaksha Raksha Daiva Sabha (God's Church of Visible Salvstion), 'a few others organized the Backward classes Christian Federation. It is thus quite obvious that the Christians in Kerala politics had rallied together fairly early

44. Mammen (P.M.) - op.cit, p.52.

and were trying to assert themselves as they came to be aware of their minority status.

Here it would be worthwhile to look at the most widely accepted definition of the term minority that has been provided by the report of the United Nations sub-commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, it says: "the term minority includes only those non-dominant groups in population which possess and wish to preserve stable ethnic, religious or linguistic traditions or characteristics markedly different from those of the rest of the population."⁴⁵

If so, then the Christian community did constitute a clear and significant minority in Kerala, which not only wished to preserve its identity but also wanted to ameliorate its conditions and opportunities. Thus in Kerala the various communal solidarity groups that came up in response to the socio-economic conditions actively mobilized their respective communities, and provided "communal solidarity" for political action.

45: Cited in "Minorities in India" - UNI Backgrounder, New Delhi Vol. III, No. 24, June 15th, 78, p. 5.

In Travancore, the voting and membership of the council was restricted to the traditional landlords, i.e. Brahmins & Nairs and the other groups were kept out. The ruler of Travancore state, Sree Chitra Thirunal introduced some legislative reforms in 1932; whereby a bi-cameral legislature was inaugurated without either changing the franchise or making the administration responsible to the legislature.

It was in this context that the Janmi (Landlord), Kudyan (tenant) struggle took a new turn and the Ezhaveas, Christians and Muslims came together and formed a political organization called Samyukta Rashtriya Samithi (SRS). Their main demand was for an immediate dissolution of both the houses, amendment of the provisions dealing with representation and proportional communal representation in civil services. Their movement came to be known as the Nivarthana Prasthanam - or the Abstention Movement as they successfully boycotted the elections to the new legislature.⁴⁶

Many leading members of the three communities came forward and aroused the masses, George Joseph, a Christian leader presided over the meeting at Kozhencherry on May 11th, 1935 which was the climax of the agitation.⁴⁷

46. Kusuman (K.K.) - The Abstention Movement, Kerala Kerala Historical Society, 1976.

47. Mammen (P.M.) - op.cit, p.52.

The Temple Entry Proclamation in 1936 weaned away a considerable section of the Ezhavas from the agitation. Muslims in Travancore, much like their brethren elsewhere in India were disenenchanted and withdrawn from politics after the failure of the Khilafat movement in the 1920s. Thus, the leaderships of the agitation was virtually in the hands of the Christian leaders.

The Nivarthana Prasthanam launched by the Samyukta Rashtriya Samithi succeeded in winning a majority of seats in both houses of the legislature in Travancore T.M.Verghis a prominent Christian leader was elected the deputy President of the assembly. The SRS which was now effectively a Christian outfit was surprisingly joined by Nairs over the issue of the prosecution of a person for publishing anti-govt. articles. They formed a new political party called the Travancore State Congress.

These attempts to come together politically elicited a tough reaction from the govt. for instance the govt. came down heavily upon some banks run by prominent Christians, in another case they banned the

publication of newspapers published by a Christian group.⁴⁸
This was the politics in Travancore vis-a-vis the
christians. In Cochin state the year 1936 marked a
turning point as far as the Christians and their attitude
towards politics was concerned.

In Cochin the possible denial of an important
lucrative electricity contract to the local Christian
contractors in favour of people from Madras, in a certain
sense marks the entry of the Christians in Cochin into
active politics.⁴⁹

Thus it can be noted that to begin with it was
the generally prosperous and educated sections of the
Kerala Christians who took an active part in the politics
of Travancore, when their interests were being directly
affected and also when they started perceiving a need
for a greater say in the political affairs of the state.

48. The Govt. liquidated the National and Quilon
Bank and arrested it's directors K.C.Mammen
Mappillah who was also the editor of the Malayala
Manorama. Prominent Christian bankers C.P.Mathew
and K.C.Eapen were also arrested. Malayala
Manorama published by a Syrian Christian group
was banned - Mammen (P.M.) - op.cit., p.61.

49. This incident was popularly known as the
electricity agitation.

III

On the eve of Independence, what we find is that the so-called Christian leaders were seen as the spokespersons of the entire community and in almost all instances belonged to the upper crust of the Christian population. The laity followed the directives of the Church and as early as 1947 the Church had opposed the Praja Mandalam Party which stood for elections in Cochin because of its advocacy of socialist ideology.

This was to set the pace & style for much of the later developments in Kerala as far Christians as a minority group in Kerala's politics were concerned. Over the years many new aspects and dimensions have been added to the dynamics of Christian groups and their involvement in Kerala politics. It is these developments in the post-independence period that will be looked at and studied. The years immediately after the creation of a new state of Kerala were of much excitement-politically. The setting up of an elected communist party govt. being one of the reasons. The ouster of this govt. and the subsequent coalition govts. which mark a period of instability in Kerala politics are all vital links in the chain.

This study however aims to examine specifically the developments in Kerala politics in the context of the Christian community in the period 1978-87. It has already been established earlier as to why the Christian community of Kerala has been chosen in particular. The years 1978-87 besides being what we may call contemporary, provided an ideal year to begin with - 1978 being the year which was a watershed as far as Indian Politics is concerned, when much of that familiar in Indian politics changed dramatically after the emergency and the 1977-78 elections.

Besides, this period between 1978-87 has been an eventful period for the Kerala Congress - the party that is popularly associated with Christian interests in Kerala. There were occasions for the Church in Kerala also to get involved in political questions and in scenes reminiscent of the 1950s the clergy once again took to the streets but this time for very different purposes and in a largely changed context. It is in this period that we also note the increasing mutual suspicions between the Hindus and the Christians in Kerala which has even led to communal riots. Towards the latter half of the period under study, we note a greater degree of intolerance and a streak of what we may call 'fundamentalism' in the form of the hostile reactions to certain supreme

court judgements which were seen as anti-Christian and the more loud furore that was caused by a Malayalam translation of a play; once again because it was seen as hurting the sentiments of the minorities.

These incidents and the development that led to it will obviously form an integral aspect of the proposed study. The electoral performance of the Kerala Congress—an analysis of the election results in terms of electoral support, will also be examined. The important issues and concerns that the Kerala Congress stood for or opposed while in the govt. and when out of it will also be studied.

The Christian minority in Kerala is a definite pressure and influences on Kerala politics, specially since it has organized itself into a political party - the Kerala congress - which is not a conventional communal party but often functions like a political group on behalf of the Christians.

In Kerala, the religious pressure groups apart from their efforts for the realisation of religious objectives, act also as pressure groups that often enable members of their communities to secure social mobility, political power and economic advantage working through existing parties or forming their own, they attempt to

have their members nominated for elective offices. They try to maximize their representation and influence in state cabinet through legislative and administrative channels. The religious pressure groups press for actions for the welfare of their members nominated in the educational and economic spheres.⁵⁰

It is observed that in Kerala, Christian groups have tended to shape party strategy and political behaviour. Even in the pre-independence period this was a phenomenon that couldn't go unnoticed.

Thus, in the course of this study it is proposed to examine all these aspects of the Christian minority group of Kerala vis-a-vis politics and political developments in that state in the period 1978-87.

This study is based on various books that have been written on the different aspects of Kerala and its politics in general and minority politics in particular. Articles in newspapers and journals and pamphlets

50. John (P. John) - "Challenge of Religious pressure groups to the Indian political system :- A Study with reference to Kerala" - Indian Journal of Political Science, India, Jan-March '77, p.54.

and studies conducted by Christian groups have also been used. Besides these, theoretical accounts on religion and its role in politics, secularism and the nature of secular Indian state have also been referred to. Various Ph.D. thesis is, M.A. dissertations, that have been written on related aspects of this topic have also been referred.

The section that is coming to a close has dealt with the themes of the Indian secular state, religious minorities in India and the constitutional provisions for them and the minorities in Kerala - specifically the Christian minority. This section has dealt with a very general and brief overview of the Christians and their involvement in Kerala politics prior to independence.

From here, the next move is to see the political developments in Kerala vis-a-vis the Christians in the post-independence period upto the year 1977. After having an idea of the political forces in these years, we will be better equipped to study the problem in the years 1978-85 along the lines mentioned earlier.

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CHAPTER II

CHRISTIAN MINORITY POLITICS AND THE RISE OF KERALA CONGRESS (1957-77)

The political scene in Kerala, has always been marked by instability and one of the causes for this political instability in Kerala has been the activity of religious pressure groups. In Kerala, the religious groups have tended to shape party strategy and political behaviour. Even in pre-independence period the social structure paved the way for religious pressure groups to come to the forefront of state politics. Religion and politics were thus intertwined.

Religious pressure groups function as a challenge in the formation of governments in Kerala. At present there are organizations for almost all communities and caste groups in Kerala. The influence of the various groups - SNDP, NSS (Nair Service Society), NDP (National Democratic Party), Muslim League, Kerala Congress and the Church as such varies according to their wealth and numerical strength. In the political field their influence is enhanced by separate political parties sponsored by

51. John (P. John) - op.cit. pp.58-61.

the most powerful of such organizations. Some of these are of course full fledged political parties.

These religious groups are such a forceful presence in Kerala that the government often finds that it can move only through the channels prescribed by the religious groups. It is not rare to see the constituencies being arranged strictly on communal lines, seats are often allotted on similar grounds. Politicians are forced to meet the religious heads and they take part in religious activities from time to time so that their political base is strengthened.

I

It is this intermingling of both the party and religious interests which leads to contradictions, as a result of which governments fall. Cohesion becomes difficult to maintain because, in every government at least some ministers are under the control of the religious groups, they do not want to lose their political base. As far as influence of Christian groups in Kerala politics is concerned - it has been mainly exerted through the Church and after the emergence of the Kerala congress, the latter has also played a vital role.

The first general elections were approaching in 1951-52 and the Christians, specially the Catholics, following the

specific directives of their clerical hierarchy

stood behind the Indian National Congress.⁵³

As mentioned earlier, Kerala as we know it today was the result of linguistic re-organization of states and came into being in November 1956. General elections to the new state Legislature assembly were to be held in 1957. The election results caused a sensation in that it was the first time that a Communist party was coming to power through the means of election in a parliamentary system.

The Communist Party of India came to power and constituted a government under the Chief Ministership of E.M.S. Namboodiripad. In spite of the antipathy of the upper classes of Kerala towards the communists, this period is significant for the tremendous popularity and identification of the masses with the CPI. There was a heady enthusiasm and a lot of romantic expectations from the government. On the other side, the opponents of the government, were deeply suspicious and were waiting to catch it off guard.

53. Mammen (P.M.) - op.cit., p.75.

The suspicions were often based on a vulgar and crude understanding of Communism, and the Communist party members were sought to be presented as 'devils' who had no respect for civilized behaviour, or law and order and were generally uncouth. Thus, it was against such a background that the Namboodiripad Ministry came to power and initiated the two most controversial legislations to-date in Kerala - the Agrarian Relations Bill and the Education Reform Bill. These two legislations soon turned the tide in favour of the opposition, and the ministry was ousted not only on the strength of a 'popular' movement against the government, but also on the basis of some clever political manouvers on the part of the opposition with the blessings of New Delhi.

The Christians guided by the clergy had a prominent role to play in the entire sordid episode whereby a popularly elected government was toppled within two years of it's installation. Namboodiripad's controversial legislations would have adversely affected the landed interests, and the vested interests in the sphere of education - represented by the Church and upper class Nairs and Christians.

Thus, the opposition to this bill came from the

Congress, Nair service Society and the Church on behalf of the Christians. However, the bulk of the population could not be mobilized on the issue of this bill, because it did undoubtedly bring a much needed relief to the masses.

We can now move towards an examination of the bills and see as to why and how it excited the passions of the Christians, who threw their lot behind the bid to oust the government. The land reform bill aimed at a more radical redistribution of land and an improvement in the position of the downtrodden tenants and peasants. This would obviously have been an unwelcome piece of legislation as far the landed interests were concerned - who were both Nairs and Christians. In the sphere of education the bill was seen to have a direct and adverse impact on the Christian run and administered educational institutions.

There is no debate about the fact that the high literacy rate that Kerala boasts of and the general awareness and political consciousness of its people is to a great extent due to the work of Christian missions and organizations, sufficiently assisted by the state.

George Woodcock comments that "the role of Christianity in shaping the special character of Kerala has gone far behind its success in making converts. It was mainly

by the efforts and influence of the 19th century Protestant Christians that modern, western-style education was introduced in Kerala. It is largely owing to the efforts of Victorian missionaries that Kerala has a literacy rate twice that of India as a whole, and a passion for education which seems unbounded."⁵⁴

By the year 1970-71, there were 10,813 schools in the state, of these the number of private schools under private managements was 6,764 (i.e. 62.55%) thanks to the contribution of the various communal associations which joined the lead given by the Christian community. Modern secular education which replaced the traditional centres of education was one important landmark in the process of change in Kerala. Traditionally, educational opportunities in Kerala were available only to the upper castes and denied to the lower.⁵⁵

In such a situation the work of European missionaries in the sphere of education is indeed praise worthy. The Syrian Christians soon joined the band wagon. The London Missionary Society opened an English school at Nagerkovil in Travancore during the reign of Rani Parvati Bai (1814-29):

54. Woodcock (George) - Kerala - A portrait of the Malabar Coast, Faber and Faber, London, 1967, pp. 34-35.

55. Mammen (P.M.) - op.cit., pp.5-6.

Secular subjects were introduced and several schools were thrown open to all sections of the population. The members of the Church - bishops and others took an active interest in writing and publishing and in educating the masses - which was often rewarded by the local Rajas.

The most outstanding work was that of Rev. Herman Gundert of the Basel Mission in Malabar, who published his Malayalam grammar in 1856 and Malayalam - English Dictionary in 1872. In 1921 the Rev. Benjamin Bailey established the first Malayalam newspaper launched by the Rev. Gundert. Later he started publishing a missionary magazine called Rajyasamacharam and a literary magazine called Paschimodayam. In 1848, the C.M.S. Missionaries at Kottayam started a journal called Jnanikshepam.

Thus, we see that the Christian missionaries played a stellar role in the remarkable progress made in the sphere of literacy and its propagation in Kerala.

II

However, over the years many changes took place and on all sides it was "conceded that reform was necessary to eradicate corruption, communal bias, mal-administration and malpractice, to confer on the government (which subsidized much of the private sector) a measure of control

commensurate with its financial commitments."⁵⁶ when the E.M.S. ministry came to power, education in Kerala was in a disgraceful situation.⁵⁷ Thus when the CPI came to power it became essential to focus attention on the sphere of education.

However, one might add here that this was not the first or by any means the last instance of the state intervening in the sphere of education. Thus, the "Kerala Education Bill of 1957 was not a product of the so-called Communist strategy of subversion and regimentation which was ascribed to it, but was merely a re-edition of previous attempts in Kerala."⁵⁸

In fact as early as 1817, Her Highness Parvati Bai of Travancore had issued rescripts directing that the state should defray the entire cost of education of its people and that the schools and management should be conducted under the supervision of the state.

Later in 1945, when the Diwan of Travancore decided to nationalize primary education in the state there was a

56. Nossiter (T.J.), Communism in Kerala, Oxford University Press, 1982, p.154.

57. Lietaen (G.K.), The First Communist Ministry in Kerala, K.P. Bagchi and Company, Calcutta, 1982, p.33.

58. Ibid. pp.36-38.

sudden and threatening reaction from the Christian education interests articulated by the Church which claimed "if the primary rights of individuals are affected to the slightest extent as a result of the socialist policy of the government, nature will grow angry with the government, rouse up all the forces under the sun and wipe out from the face of the earth, the unjust authors of nationalization."⁵⁹

This was a pastoral letter directed against the Dewan and this was to be a fair indication of the manner in which the clerical hierarchy 'on behalf of the laity' was going to repeatedly take stands on political issues - especially in sensitive areas like education, which were important not only for ideological but also for purely commercial reasons.

Once again in 1955 the efforts of Parampilly Govinda Menon to reform the private secondary schools was frustrated by the Christian managers. The Kerala Education Bill was introduced on July 7th, 1957 by the Education minister Joseph Mundassery. The bill aimed at bringing about uniformity of education and a system of admission and recruitment of teachers on the basis of merits. Such reforms were much needed because recruitment and admission to private management schools and colleges

59. Ibid., p.36-38.

was not on the basis of merit i.e. the Syrian Christians managed schools appointed Syrian Christians only.

For all its bitter reception by the Christian interests and others, the bill was a modest enough set of proposals. The government simply sought to have a greater say in the appointments and conditions of teachers, ensure proper records, establish local education authorities with officials, and state take over of managements which failed to comply with the act where it became necessary in the public interest to do so and in exchange for compensation.⁶⁰ A further clash in the education sphere was provoked by the ministry's decision to take over the preparation and also the publication of text books. This would have adversely affected the private publishers.

The kind of reaction that followed soon proved the tremendous strength and reach of religious ideology and the call of 'religion in danger' that cut across all other considerations of economic status or differences in denominations among the Christians. This period of Kerala politics coincided with the papacy of Pius XII who was known for his conservative attitude and a totally

60: Nossiter (T.J.) - op.cit. p.154.

uncompromising stand towards communism. In such a situation the complete control over education was seen as very crucial. "The Kerala Church, itself highly traditionalist, faithfully reflected this outlook."⁶¹

One actually suspects that had these very reforms be initiated by a non-Communist govt., perhaps the Christians could not have been mobilized to the same extent as against the Namboodiripad ministry - here they found a whole armoury of religious and theological arguments to be directed against the Communists, which effectively coated the basic fact - a set back to their commercial interest.

Within weeks of the introduction of the bill, 'Deepika' the main Catholic daily warned the ministry against interfering with education. Even before the bill was introduced, on May 28, 1957 Catholic Bishops met at Ernakulam to resolve to resist "tooth and nail" any infringement of the rights of private schools and any bid to nationalize education.

The Vicar general of the Archdiocese of Changanacherry Mgr. Chittoor, went further to compare the sanctity of educational institutions with Churches and, therefore, any attack on the former would mean that the Christians would have to be ready to lay down their lives. The Christian

61: Ibid.

groups, through articles and visits to Delhi impressed upon the leadership the fact that but for the support extended by the Church the Christian votes would not have gone the Congress way.

The Malabar Catholic Association and the Protestant Christian Association in their resolution against the reform proposals stated that the government wanted to effect a change in the educational system, with the ulterior aim of injecting into the children atheism and other aspects of Communism.

It should be noted that even before the debates about the bill could begin in the assembly Father Vadakkam had in a circular to the religious heads, called for a crusade against the Communist regime, proposing to the parish priests to form 2000 small units of youths, well informed and active against the communists. This proves the extent of vehemence felt by the Christians against the bill, that a member of the clergy was heard giving a call to organize a militia (later he denied it). It was claimed that the "bill made it impossible for Christian schools to carry on as such and strive to realise their distinctive moral and spiritual ideals."⁶²

62. Church, Society and state in Kerala, Bangalore, CISRS, 1960, p.30.

We can easily understand as to why the call for an agitation against the government was responded to so enthusiastically when we look at the kind of objections that were raised. "It (bill) is a comonflaged attempt to introduce a complete course of Marxian education to the people as also to oust the Christians from the education field."⁶³

The clerics addressed seminar and conferences, the Bishop of Kottar who inaugurated one such Congress asked the believers in Christ "to cast their petty difference and try to stand united dedicating their lives to the cause of their religion against the various opposing forces such as Communists."⁶⁴

A.K.Gopalan recounts that "the Christian Fathers called all the Christian votes, especially the women, to the Churches and told them that those who voted for the communists would go to hell- those who voted for Congress to heaven. They were asked to swear, touching the Cross of the Christ, that they would not vote for the Communist candidates." The argument that was advanced by the clergy was that "the devil can offer much that is attractive, nevertheless, the wages of his service is ultimately death, the death of the soul."⁶⁵ The devil in this case took the shape of the Namboodiripad ministry!

65. Lietau (G.K.) - op.cit., p.49.

In March 1959 a Kerala Catholic Bishop's conference at Ernakulam charted out a programme of action against the government, in which the local Christian leaders, advocated the use of force and organization of volunteers in every locality. Money flowed from the big plantation owners, (who were mostly Christians), local and foreign collection. Many dramatic moves were also made for fund collections, for instance the pastoral letters appealing for funds went on to even the P.M. Jawaharlal Nehru.

In circulars and pastoral letters the laity was asked to recruit at least one young man from every family to be sacrificed in the struggle. The argument was that since their opponents were communists who were undemocratic and understood only the language of violence and terror, force had to be used. The Sunday preaching was that, to kill a communist would mean an entry to heaven and if he was a minister then, canonization was certain.

Meanwhile, the Christian education committee took the firm step that they would not, at any cost, re-open their schools, after the summer recess until the amendment of the Kerala Education Act took place. By June 1959, near civil war situation prevailed in Kerala. The enthusiasm of the masses can be judged by the fact over

two and half lakhs of volunteers had been organized in Quilon district itself.⁶⁶

Even the Bishops were ready to court arrest and in fact it was Grace Metropolitan Mar Dinyssins who characterized the agitation against the Communist govt. as 'Vimochana Samaram' - Liberation Struggle. By June the movement reached its climax and even school children joined the protest marches. Thus the Vimochana Samaram witnessed a large scale mobilization of the masses in Kerala - the call going out from the Church premises.

In fact the Church's hostility to the educational reforms was so intense that it turned for support to its traditional rivals the Nair Service Society. Monster demonstrations and public rallies were held, there was an organized campaign against the government and finally, Pandit Nehru who was the Prime Minister then, was convinced that the government was no longer popular and was forced to step down.

What was heard very commonly was that the government was anti-Christian and therefore all Christians had to

66. Francis (K.), Educational Reforms under a communist government of Kerala - 1957-59 unpublished thesis submitted to JNU, New Delhi, March 1975, pp.109-114.

unite against the government. The leading business community as well as the leading farming community, the Christians had a special interest in tea and coffee plantations as also educational establishments and was extremely alarmed by the action and intentions of the Communist government.

It is not as if the entire Christian community benefitted from the plantations and running of educational institutions. However, the Church played a very crucial role in getting the bulk of the Christian population to support the move against the government purely on the basis 'religion in danger'. As Engels would have commented this was "nothing but the fantastic reflections in men's mind of those external forces which control their daily life, a reflection in which the terrestrial forces assume the form of supernatural forces."⁶⁷

Traditionally the Christian community has always supported the Congress, and the support is strengthened by the fact that the Church came out openly in support of the Congress. It is interesting to see that the Communist party, even as early as 1957 elections did not fare well in the Christian dominated areas.

67. Engels (F.) - Anti - Duhring, Moscow, 1969, p.374.

In the 1957 assembly elections in Kerala, the CPI won two-thirds majority in all districts except Kottayam and Ernakulam which have a sizeable Christian population and in Kozhikode (which has a Muslim majority). Less than 10% of Catholics and Syrian christians supported the CPI.

Here we can refer to the 1957 elections results.

Table 2.1 Kerala - 1957 assembly election results by District⁶⁸

District	No. of seats	Congress	Communist
1. Trivandrum	12	1	8
2. Quilon	14	4	10
3. Alleppey	14	4	9
4. Kottayam	13	9	3
5. Ernakulam	14	10	4
6. Trichur	12	3	6
7. Palghat	15	3	10
8. Kozhikode	18	6	3
9. Cannanore	14	3	7
Total	126	43	60

Source : Nossiter (T.J.)- Communism in Kerala, Oxford Univ. Press, 1962.

68: Nossiter (T.J.) - op.cit., pp.153-57.

In the context of this discussion of election results, it would be interesting to highlight some aspects of Christians and their equation with the various political parties in Kerala. We have already observed that traditionally, the community had voted quite predictably for the Congress, more often than not at the behest of the Church.

Unlike some other minority groups and their parties, we refer here to the Muslim League which is very active in Kerala or other such parties, the Christians in Kerala have no such blatantly communal political organization. The reason perhaps is that having an organized Church with its elaborate hierarchy, the Church does the job of acting on behalf of the community thus precluding the need for a political party.

However, in the sixties a split in the Indian National Congress in Kerala - resulted in the creation of a break away faction known as the Kerala Congress. "The birth of the Kerala Congress was the direct result of inter community wrangle in the Indian National Congress in Kerala after the 1960 mid-term elections. The problem was unimaginatively handled by the Congress high command at the centre and consequently a part of a major community

(the Christians) was permanently alienated from the INC in Kerala."⁶⁹

The problem was innocuous to begin with. A factional fight (without which politics in Kerala is never complete) between the Chacko and Sankar group was the root cause of the problem. The high command, as it often does, supported the wrong candidate. To begin with, Sankar was not very popular and the fact that he was an Ezhava was held against him by the Nairs. The Christians within the Congress felt that Chacko had been treated rather high handedly by the Congress high command.

Chacko resigned and alongwith him 15 other Congress legislators crossed the floor and voted in favour of the no-confidence motion sponsored by the opposition against the Congress govt. This group was formally organized into a political party and named Kerala Congress some three months before the 1965 elections. The Kerala Congress has today come to be seen as a party of the Christians, it is fact that in all subsequent elections, whenever the Church has supported the Kerala Congress, it has tended to perform well in the Christian dominated areas.

69. Rao (Lakshmana) and Cane (Leonard), "Religious Parties in Kerala - A multiple Regression analysis" - Political Scientist, vol. 8-11, Ranchi, 1972-74, p. 83.

However, it is not a communal party along the lines of other well known communal parties. This distinction is very essential and has to be kept in mind. The Kerala Congress does not have any so-called Christian ideology or outlook on politics, neither does it have a set of religious tenets as its foundation, nor is its membership restricted only to Christians. In fact, many Nair Service Society members actively support and campaign for the Kerala Congress.

The Kerala Congress contested with the backing of the NSS and the Christian Church in 1965.⁷⁰ The Kerala Congress had a very humble beginning with not even an election symbol. The Kerala Congress did not enter into any electoral alliance for this election. In the final tally the position was as follows.

70: Ibid. p.84.

Table 2.2 Election Results of 1965 Kerala Legislature
Assembly General Elections⁷¹

Party	Final Results
GPI(M)	40
INC	36
KC	23
SSP	13
ML	6
CPI	3
Swatantra	1
Independents	11
<hr/>	
Total	<u>133</u>

Source : Election Commission's Report on General Elections to
the Kerala Legislature Assembly.

Thus, for a party that was so recent in its origin
the Kerala Congress did quite well, predictably in
Ernakulam and Kottayam, Alleppey and Quilon (districts
with substantial Christian population), although 10 of
its candidates lost their deposits.

71: India (Govt.) Election Commission, Report on
the general Election to the Kerala Legislature
Assembly. - 1965.

In 1967⁷² the Kerala Congress contested without the support of the Church and this time its vote was reduced by half.⁷³ Meanwhile the Congress tried hard to bring back the Kerala Congress into its fold. This was quite a difficult task, given the fact that in the earlier mid-term elections, the Kerala Congress had engineered a slander campaign against the Congress. Vayala Idiculla depicted the Congress ministry as an anti-Christian agency responsible for breaking the Cross and desecrating the Holy Communion. Deepika the leading Catholic daily wrote "we are not prepared to canvas for thieves, robbers and Church breakers" referring to the Congress."⁷⁴

Though difficult, the Congress was very keen to win over the Kerala Congress, in order to fight the left opposition. With this in mind the Congress approached

72. On March 24th, 1965, President's Rule had been declared in Kerala and extended upto March 1967 when election to the Legislature Assembly were held alongwith the general election - Election Commission - Fact Sheet Relating to Kerala.

73. Rao (Lakshmana) and Cane (Leonard) - op.cit. pp. 83-84.

74. Varughese (K.V.), United Front Government in Kerala 1967-69, CLS, Madras, 1978, p.13.

the Church. This once again clearly points out the fact that the Church in Kerala has a significant role to play in the context of largely Christian groups like Kerala Congress and their politics.

A great deal of negotiations were carried on between the Congress and the Kerala Congress and the Archbishop of Trivandrum Benedict Mar Gregorioso actually took steps to break the deadlock and bring about a settlement, which however did not take place. The Church was not willing to give up and wanted to try its best to bring about a settlement that the Congress wanted. This time the negotiations mediated by Sebastian Vayatil - Bishop of Palai also ended in a failure. Attempts made in November 1966 by His Grace Yuhanan Mar Thoma and Bishop Tharayil were also not very fruitful. Thus, it is quite obvious that when we discuss politics in Kerala, vis-a-vis the Christians there, a very important factor is the role played by the Church hierarchy.

The failure of the repeated rounds of talks led to a situation where both Kerala Congress and the Congress were wooing voters from different platforms. The Bishops in their anxiety to save Kerala from another spell of Communist rule now decided to put their weight in favour of the Congress. They appealed to the voters to vote

for the Congress. Benedict Mar Gregorioso the Archbishop of Trivandrum had already warned the Christian hierarchy against supporting the Kerala Congress:

Benedict Mar Gregorioso considered these developments to be unfortunate as he believed that Kerala Congress was mainly a Christian political group and here was a situation that was almost a political disaster, which the Church and the Christian leaders had always been trying to avert. He expressed his desire to now see the Congress voted to power. In fact many Bishops openly canvassed for the Congress by appealing from the same political platform.

In fact the Church hierarchy was almost embarrassed⁵ by the existence of the Kerala Congress - for here was a basically Christian political group which could not be directed or controlled by them.⁷⁵ The fact however, was that the hard core following of Kerala Congress- the clergy and laity-remained with the Kerala Congress. While the higher levels of the Church hierarchy campaigned for the Congress, the priests below them campaigned for the Kerala Congress:

75. According to some accounts, the Kerala Congress could not come to an understanding with the Congress, because of the former's demand that those Congress men who were defeated in 1965 should be kept out. This was a deliberate move to oust R. Sankar. However this was not acceptable to the Congress. Shiv Lal (ed), The Election Archives, No. 32, New Delhi, Oct. Dec. 1977.

This new turn of events was really significant in so far as it initiated a lively discussion among the Christians on the role of the Bishop in politics. While some people upheld the right of the Bishops to give guidance in political matters, many others pointed out that they should never take sides in political tussles and that their official position should not be misused for the sake of strengthening any political party.⁷⁶

Such developments led to a serious re-evaluation regarding the role of the Church in politics, as well as the nature of its politics much of these debates set the tone for later developments, that were to take place in the late seventies and early eighties. The Kerala Congress and Congress failed to reach an understanding and the latter defunded its inability to make electoral adjustment with the Kerala Congress "on the ground that it was tantamount to unprincipled opportunism."⁷⁷

The seven party united front led by CPI (M) won the election.⁷⁸ The results were as follows :

76. Varughese, (K.V.), op.cit. p:22.

77. Ibid. p:25.

78. The other members of the front were CPI, SSP, KIP, KSP, and ML.

Table 2.3 Election Results of 1967 Kerala Legislature
Assembly Election⁷⁹

CPI(M) including 2 Independents	54
CPI including 1 Independent	20
SSP	19
ML	14
RSP	6
KIP	2
KSP	1
Congress	9
KC	5
Independents	<u>3</u>
	<u>133</u>

Source : Varughese K.V. in United Front govt. in Kerala 1967-69, GLS, Madras, 1978.

and the

The Congress, Kerala Congress with their shrunken image were not in a position to play the role of opposition effectively in the state legislature. In the first session of the 1967 assembly the Kerala Congress aligned itself with the Treasury Benches in the matter of accusing the Centre of neglecting Kerala. One of the major decisions taken by the new govt. was the scrapping of prohibition, the Kerala Congress gave "moral support to the government in getting the decision implemented" for obvious commercial reasons.

79: Varughese(K.V.)- op.cit. p.28.

By May 1967, the difference between the various partners of the coalition became clear and the Congress exploited this rift by staging public protests and rallies which the Kerala Congress supported. This therefore marked the beginning of a better understanding between the two parties.

Once again the Kerala Congress and the Congress acted in unison over the issue of the attack on the Indian diplomats by Chinese Red Guards and the food situation in Kerala on which they sought an adjournment motion which was refused by the speaker, forcing them to stage a walk-out.

By 1968, there was considerable improvement in the relation between the Congress and the Kerala Congress and there was a general understanding regarding the formation of an united anti-Marxist front, incorporating the Muslim League also, if possible.

III

Thus we notice a closer alliance between the Kerala Congress and the Congress. What this effectively suggests is that the nature of politics and political commitments of the dominant Christian groups remained pro-Congress, and that the Kerala Congress was but the result of a faction

fight in the Congress though a faction largely of the Christian, it did not voice any specific religious issues, but at the same time was not averse to emphasizing the fact that it had the backing of the Christians:

Gradually, this was to lead ^{to} a situation where the Congress and the Kerala Congress moved very close to each other and had a perfect electoral understanding, with the Kerala Congress fielding candidates from the Christian dominated areas on the basis of an electoral alliance with the Congress. The latter kept away from such areas, backing the Kerala Congress candidates. Differences between the Kerala Congress and the Congress are however not non-existent even today.

After the 1970 elections in Kerala, we see that the CPI emerged victorious with the support of the Congress, Muslim League, ISP and the Kerala Congress, which later left it. However, even out of the coalition, the Kerala Congress was not an opposition group.

Though a small regional party, the fact is that the Kerala Congress commands a position of authority by virtue of its hold over the Christian population and therefore, by implication, Christian votes.

Rao and Cane on the basis of a multiple regression analysis of the election results conclude that, in spite

of a great deal of socio-economic differentiation within the community, the Christians have displayed a certain degree of voting solidarity, to cause political instability by extending electoral and legislative support to one or other political party and withholding it from others at will.

They point out that caste and communal cleavages in Kerala are more sharp than elsewhere in India. This would perhaps, in their opinion, be attributed to the fact^{that} in the very early years of this century, politics in Travancore and Cochin was essentially under the aegis of this or that communal association.

Lieten's considered opinion is that "what seems to have been the case in Kerala is that vested interests have been trying to keep the masses under the regressive ideology of communalist organisation, who transmitted their followers to political parties of the same vested interests.⁸⁰ However, one cannot ignore the fact that, whatever the difference within each communal or caste group, they have all invariably, at a certain stage in their historical development thrown up movements and associations aimed at the betterment of the caste and Church members - making their contribution a positive one."

80. Lieten (G.K.) - op.cit. p.3.

Lieten has this in mind when he says that "in caste associations as well as in the organizational structure of Churches and mosques, two types of an emancipatory aspiration found their expression. On the one hand, it helped the emerging bourgeoisie to adapt themselves to the new colonial order, and to discard the old social system. They found an appropriate vehicle in the establishment of broad-based caste associations aimed at the advancement of the whole community."

Lieten believes that these types of movements concealed the class oppression of the majority of its members, and that the success of the movements was due to the severe exploitation and oppression, which, given the stage of development, was automatically translated in terms of caste and religion.⁸¹

These associations have always participated in politics, and have tremendous political influence and much of the instability in Kerala politics can be attributed to the hard bargaining that any of the major political parties have to enter into with such associations and groups as the Kerala Congress or the Muslim League.

In such a situation, it is obvious that political parties attach a lot of importance to these groups. The

81: Ibid.

fact that Christians (or even Muslims) are territorially segregated, (so much so that we can even speak of Christian districts), strengthens the cleavages. Thus, wherever they are concentrated in sufficiently large numbers to elect assembly members on their own strength or in alliance with other parties, the Kerala Congress obviously gains in importance.

In this period (1972) to be precise a major issue that was taken up by the Kerala Congress on behalf of the Christians was once again related to the running of the educational institutions by private managements. It is indeed a fact that these colleges were run like profit making concerns, with no regard to the quality of education, or facilities provided, however the fees charged were exorbitant.

This was popularly referred to as the Kerala College crisis. The issue stemmed from the disparity between the number of colleges run by the government and those run by private and religious bodies. Majority of the colleges belonging to the latter category were run by Christians and catered to nearly 89% of the college students of Kerala spread all over the state. These colleges were charged with corruption, maladministration and various other malpractices.

It was decided that the government would take necessary steps to ensure that uniform fees was levied, however it agreed to make good 80% of the deficit of the college and also pay the teachers directly, but on the condition that the government would have a greater control over the admissions and recruitment.

CPI(M) being in opposition, as was to be expected criticized the move as premature, CPI though in government felt that the plan was quite foolish politically. Mr. K.M.George the leader of the Kerala Congress and member of the managements negotiating committee charged the government with infringing the rights of the minorities. Here, we can see quite clearly the kind of the minority interests the Kerala Congress was actually representing. Predictably, the Church machinery was set in motion. The Christian community as a whole prepared to meet the challenge. Several demonstrations were held by Bishops, priests, nuns and the laity and a team went to meet the Home Minister and (even) the Prime Minister.

Cardinal Pareccattil described it as an attack on the rights of the minorities. In New Delhi. On July 13th mammoth protest demonstrations were held all over Kerala by Christian churches and the leadership of the various

diocese. Negotiations were unavoidable, and on the eve of the meeting on July 27th 1972, father John Vaillanatom, the secretary of the Management Association said that they would never agree to any interferences with minority rights. Demonstrations were held against the government as no decision could be reached on the basic issues of unification of fees.⁸²

Very soon, by August 1974, the discontent had grown so much that the Kerala congress was planning to reach an understanding with the CPI (M) to oust the government. It is interesting to see that Kerala Congress which had been described as communal and reactionary party of the landlords by the CPI(M), was now coming closer to the same party. This once again clearly demonstrates the fact that Kerala Congress by virtue of being a representative of the Christians was and continues to be an important actor on the political stage in Kerala.

In fact the Kerala Congress is so significant, because of the above mentioned reason that none less than the P.M. Mrs. Gandhi was wooing the Kerala Congress by January 1975. By June 1975, Mrs. Gandhi declared emergency,

82. UNI Backgrounder, Kerala College Crisis, vol. IV no.31, Aug 3 72.

the coalition ministry in Kerala was always faced with the problem of ensuring its existence. Mrs. Gandhi described the Kerala Congress as communal and not reactionary, thereby facilitating its entry into the Congress - CPI coalition government. This government continued till March 1977 when elections were declared. It is obvious then, what the Kerala Congress stand vis-a-vis the emergency.

In general, the leadership of the Churches in India fully supported Mrs. Gandhi during the emergency. Of course, there was opposition also. In Kerala, M.M. Thomas helped form a group of young clergy, 'Fellowship of the Clergy Concerned with Human Rights'. This group began to educate people on the undemocratic measures of the government and to mobilise them.

Many members of the clergy praised the emergency and Mrs. Gandhi's efforts during the emergency as having brought stability and progress. However, by this time, it was quite noticeable that a vocal section of the laity and the clergy had started taking a stand that was clearly opposed to the establishment Christian interest.

IV

It would not be possible to understand the position of the Christians without taking into account the importance of the ecclesiastical organization itself. For the institutional framework plays an important role and provides a definite unambiguous and institutionalized leadership.⁸³

However, the differences in position on politics, by late seventies, was increasingly articulated by even the members of this definite, unambiguous and institutionalized leadership. We have Rev. Fr. S.Kappen from Kerala, pointing out the "appalling misery and want of the masses." He comes out against concentration of power and also against the set of values disseminated by "our schools and colleges of capitalist origin."⁸⁴

The Church establishment's vested interests and collaboration with the ruling classes, poses before a socially conscious Christian the dilemma of how to relate

83: Francois (Houtart), Genevive (Lemerainier) - "Socio-Religious Movements in Kerala : A reaction to the capitalist Mode of Production" - Social Scientist, Vol:6, No.12, July '78, p:37.

84: Rev. Fr.S.Kappen- "The Goals of Revolution" - Religion & Society, vol.xx No.1, Bangalore, March '73.

his Christian beliefs to the society he is confronted with.⁸⁵ In spite of a re-evaluation that is going on, by and large there are striking similarities with the earlier period and even though there are differences there is still a remarkable like mindedness in the reaction of the Christian community on various political issues (of course with notable exceptions) at the Church's behest.

Religion and religious consciousness continues to be an important factor in Kerala politics. However in the recent years there have been efforts to make religion move away from being a bulwark of an oppressive status quo to being a part of a movement for radical political and social changes. It is these and other related developments in the context of Christians in Kerala and their political involvement that will be the subject of the remaining sections.

85: Mathew (P.M.) - "Liberation Theology in Practice", Mainstream, vol. xxiii no.49, N.Delhi, Aug. 3'85.

CHAPTER III

COALITION POLITICS AND THE CHRISTIANS

IN KERALA

Minority politics in Kerala, specially in the case of the Christian population came to be organized fairly well before independence and the states re-organization. In fact such organized communal groups of religious minorities such as the Christians, play a very significant role in Kerala politics, a fact acknowledged even by E.M.S. Namboodiripad who feels that caste and communal linkages in Kerala cannot be wished away. This might perhaps be due to the fact that they have been in existence for long, and made positive contributions at one or other time and also because it's language is easily understood and identified with by the people.

By and large, inspite of the various differences within the Christian community, the trend has been to react to politics and political issues in a like-minded manner, in many cases at the Church's behest. In all this the Kerala Congress has been in the forefront. Launched in

the 1960s as a splinter group of the Indian National Congress, it gradually came to be viewed as the chief spokesperson of the Christian community - albeit of a certain section. If so, then it would be interesting and in fact essential to look at the growth and performance of the Kerala Congress - a major actor in the theatre of minority politics in Kerala.

Ever since the formation of the Kerala Congress, the party has continued to play a very dominant role in Kerala's political and electoral scene. Any study of minority politics in Kerala ~~vis-a-vis~~ vis Christians would therefore have to take into account this largely Christian group. It is also important because the Church has recognized the Kerala Congress as a representative of the Christians and very often interferes in the affairs of this party.

Thus any discussion of Christian minority politics in Kerala will have to take into account the role and involvement of the Church and its open interest in the political affairs of the state; specially on issues that the Church perceives as affecting the Christian interests, this interest and involvement in political matters is heightened as can be imagined during election time.

It has to be admitted however that in the shaping

of the politics of the state, the Church's role, remains normally viewed.⁸⁶ In fact with its institutional as well as categorical identity, the Church has become a formidable political factor in Kerala. However the emergence of the Kerala Congress as virtually a party of the Christians has diminished the role of the Church as a political interest group.

I

For the first two decades of independence, the Christian Churches in Kerala remained absolutely identified with the Indian National Congress. With the birth of the Kerala Congress, practical expediency warranted the Church to have some sort of political identification with a party whose rank was mostly swelled by Christians.

The Kerala Congress however has from its very inception aroused the interest of the Church, inspite of the fact that the Kerala Congress was just a factional splinter group of the Indian National Congress. However the Kerala Congress decision to join the Communist ministry in 1969

86. Thomas (Cyriac) - The Church and Politics in Kerala (1947-72) - unpublished thesis submitted to Department of Politics, University of Kerala, Sept. '77 - Preface.

embarrassed the Church. In those early years the Church did make it's opinion known and often appealed straight to the electorate, it was only later⁸⁷ that the Church actually started taking sides in the Kerala politics generally and affairs of the Kerala Congress per se.

When the right to franchise was confined to largely to the landed aristocracy, the Church leadership found it easy to influence the voting patterns of the Christian electorate. Those who sought elections, took enough caution to invoke the Bishop's blessings.⁸⁸

The interference of the Church in the elections need not always be direct. On the contrary, it often prefers only to drop certain hints to indicate it's political preference to the Christian electorate. For instance, in the 1950s when the All Kerala Catholic Congress put up it's candidates in predominantly Christian areas, they had to admit defeat to the Indian National Congress, because the electorate prudently followed the guideline given by the Church leadership regarding their political

87. In fact after the Kerala Congress leader K.M.George's death in 1976 and the subsequent split in the party - on the issue of forging an alliance with the Marxists.

88. Thomas (Cyriac) in Chander (Jose) ed. - Dynamics of State Politics - Kerala, Sterling, N.Delhi, 1986. pp.86 - 104.

choice.⁸⁹

The role of the Church really became important once the Kerala Congress split, and often the two factions were at loggerheads. To sort out the differences between the two sections the Church became very important. Since 1970 the CPI was in alliance with the Congress, the Christian groups backed the Communists considering it to be a lesser evil than the Marxists. In fact even the nuns voted for the CPI.

With the split in the Kerala Congress, the Church, in fact the Bishops were kept busy trying to bring together the warring factions of the Kerala Congress. The Church and the Kerala Congress thus were drawn closer.

In the seventies, the emergency was the most important political landmark, the Church in Kerala and the Kerala Congress supported the Congress and the emergency declaration. The subsequent Janata rule was opposed, this was also because of the various measures adopted by the Janata government which were seen as being against the interests of the minorities.

89. Ibid.

In the 1980 election arrangement these were some unexpected alliances when one of the Kerala Congress groups KC(M) decided to join hands with the LDF. This created an embarrassing problem for the Church - in terms of which group to support. However the electorate soon demonstrated that it did not care for this new political experiment of KC(M) allying with the Marxists.

In fact on the eve of the 1980 elections the Kerala Catholic Bishop's conference issued a joint statement, signed by 22 Archbishops and Bishops, which was nothing but an open declaration of their preference for the Congress (I) led anti-Marxist democratic front. The whole electoral scene was quite strange, with some non-Catholic Christian groups issuing a rejoinder supporting and defending the LDF.⁹⁰

This is a very important and crucial event in the relationship between the Church, elections and the Kerala Congress. It is noteworthy because it is the first time that the Bishops and the Christian community (at the institutional level) stood divided publicly over the question of alliance, with the Marxist party.

The election results in 1980 clearly favoured the

90. Ibid.

LDF. However the Kerala Congress (Mani) and Congress (Anotony) criticized the LDF and very soon bickerings began and they came out of the alliance and both the factions joined hands with the UDF rendering the Bishop's task much easier.

Thus whenever the Christian community accepts the leadership of the Church it inevitably means the leadership of the Bishops and the clergy. The lay leadership often constitutes only a second-line, but in times of actual confrontation they function as agencies for implementation. The reason is that the resources of the community remain ultimately at the disposal of the Bishops and the clergy.

The emergence of the Kerala Congress has however diminished the importance of the Church as a political group greatly. The party has established itself by virtue of impressive political victories inspite of repeated splits and unity moves. In fact in the 1977 elections there were as many as 3 Kerala Congress factions - (Mani), (Joseph) and (Pillai).

Table 3.1 - Election Results by Party-Kerala Legislative Assembly 1977⁹¹

<u>Party</u>	<u>Seats contested</u>	<u>seats won</u>	<u>%</u>
1. INC	54	38	19.3
2. CPI	27	23	9.6
3. KC	22	20	8.0
4. ML	16	13	6.4
5. RSP	11	9	4.0
6. CPI(M)	68	17	21.4
7. B.D (Janata)	27	6	7.6
8. ML (Opposition)	16	3	4.2
9. KC (P)	15	2	4.3
10. Independent	313	9	11.3
	<u>569</u>	<u>140</u>	<u>100.00</u>

Source : Varghese (T) - The Kerala Congress - study - Kerala Univ. Ph.D. Thesis Dec.'82.

The Kerala Congress thus became one of the partners in the United front after the 26th March 77 elections. Kerala Congress as a major constituent of this front asked the government to give top priority to the problems of agriculturists of the hill areas. The Kerala Congress also protested against the neglect by the centre and the

91. Varghese (T) - The Kerala Congress - A Study, Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Kerala, December '82, p.3;

disparity of incomes between the states. A special appeal was made for solving the problems of hill settlers.

Thus, we can see that inspite of claiming to be a party of the Christians, it is actually a political group that is a regional party which represents the middle and upper class Christians and their economic interests.

During the eighteen months of Kerala Congress in government it had to tackle many problems. Though it was comfortably placed in the united front, the Kerala Congress insisted on getting three very important portfolios - industries, finance & revenue.⁹² The demand for these specific portfolios once again underlines the economic ambitions of the Kerala Congress.

It is interesting to observe that most issues and demands that the Kerala Congress took up during its 1977-79 term were Christian-only in as much as these were concerning the economic interests of the wealthier sections of the Christians in Kerala. The basic issue which this largely Christian political interest group took up while in government was a provision to validate with retrospective effect, the gift of land in excess of of ceiling limit. Till then land in excess^{of} the ceiling was taken over as government property.

92. Ibid - p.254.

An amendment bill was introduced to revalidate the gift deeds executed between 1st Jan. '70 (when land ceiling was imposed) and 5th Nov. '74. CPI(M) objected to the amendment, however the Kerala Congress put its whole might behind it. This legislation would in effect help the affluent among the minority communities.

However the CPI, Congress ministry fell because of squabbles over the gift deed amendment bill, which escalated to such an extent that the Muslim League candidate Muhammad Koya was installed as the Chief Minister. In an unprecedented move the Kerala Congress walked out to join hands with the LDF, which even proposed a KC candidate as the next Chief Minister. Before any further developments President's Rule was imposed in Kerala.

The Kerala Congress has always been opposed to devices like the President's Rule. This is so because it is basically a regional party and seeks to represent the aspirations of the regional elite; their main demands are greater autonomy for the states and more financial resources for the states. However, in case of the Kerala Congress it represents a regional elite - although a section of it - the Christian elite. Often it's

demands gather support from the other elites as well.⁹³

II

At the end of the President's Rule came the elections to the Kerala assembly in 1980. The Kerala Congress joined hands with the LDF. The significance of the Kerala Congress lies in the fact that its support and presence is considered a must for any front to emerge victorious at the polls:

This association with the LDF thus caused acute embarrassment to the Church which had always been opposed to the Marxists.⁹⁴ The Kerala Congress would not join the UDF as it had left it due to serious differences.

93. More often than not, the demands put up by the Kerala Congress are economic in character-economic demands that would specifically satisfy the upper crust, such demands are not surprisingly supported by non-Christian upper classes as well.

94. Pre-election scenario in Kerala has always been marked by efforts to woo important regional parties like the Kerala Congress. Both the major fronts UDF & LDF realized and accepted the need for this alliance. However prior to the 1987 elections, the LDF decided not to approach any communal group and therefore kept away from the Kerala Congress as well.

Before proceeding to take a look at the poll results it would be worthwhile to state a few facts about the Kerala Congress. As mentioned earlier, after the Kerala Congress leader George's death the party split; on the eve of 1980 elections there were as many as 3 Kerala Congress factions. The convention has been to recognize the faction getting the majority support as the real Kerala Congress. Thus in the 1980 polls Kerala Congress (Mani) and Kerala Congress (Pillai) fielded candidates as part of the LDF, whereas Kerala Congress (Joseph) fielded candidates as part of the UDF.

Table 3.2 - Election Results by Party, Kerala Legislative Assembly - 1980⁹⁵

Party	Seats contested	seats won	%
1. CPI(M)	50	35	19.3
2. CPI	22	17	7.9
3. INC(U)	30	21	10.9
4. KC(M)	17	8	5.2
5. KC(P)	2	1	0.8
6. AIML	11	5	3.5
7. RSP	8	6	2.1
8. INC	51	17	17.3
9. Janata	29	5	7.6
10. IUML	20	14	7.2
11. KC(J)	15	6	4.9
12. NDP	11	3	2.7
13. SRP	6	-	1.4
14. PSP	4	1	0.7
15. Independents	<u>304</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>5.9</u>
	<u>581</u>	<u>140</u>	<u>100.00</u>

Source : Varghese (I.) - Ph.D. Thesis submitted to Kerala Univ. - The Kerala Congress - Dec.'82.

95. Varghese (I) - op.cit., p.89:

Thus in these elections the LDF emerged victorious, this was the first major election after the Kerala Congress split and both were trying to prove their group as the real Kerala Congress. However both groups were more or less equally placed as the results show. Both the important factions KC(M) and KC(J) did not do well, because the Christian votes got divided. Besides, the majority of Bishops and Catholic community supported the UDF.

George Mathew sees the 1980 election results as a positive trend where people gave a declining preference for political expression in terms of communal ties since the LDF won 93 seats with 50.4% votes and the UDF and Janata between themselves could manage only 46 seats and 40.10% votes.⁹⁶ However what seems a more plausible explanation is that the voters were confused to find the two factions in opposing fronts. But there is some element of truth in Mathew's analysis.

On the eve of the 1980 elections the Kerala Church in keeping with its past practices directed the voters to vote only for those who believe in God, which obviously meant that the Bishops frowned upon the LDF. In spite of this the LDF won.

96. Mathew (George) - "Primordality and Elections: The Case of Kerala" - Religion and Society - Vol. XXIX, No. 3, CISRS, Bangalore, Sept. '82, pp. 12-25.

One must mention here that, many Church heads came out on Oct. 10th 1979 with a joint statement against such calls for political alignments on the basis of declared belief in God. They issued statements saying that "the politics of adopting a stand in favour of the poor and downtrodden, (is what) we consider a way of the Christians. Inhumanity not atheism is the central issue today." The signatories to this statement included - Most Rev; Geevarghese Mar Osthantiose, Rt. Rev. Paulose Mar Paulose and many others.⁹⁷

Table 3.3 Seats won by UDF & LDF in 4 Christian dominated districts - 1980 elections to Kerala Assembly⁹⁸

<u>Districts</u>	<u>Total seats</u>	<u>Seats won</u>	
		<u>UDF</u>	<u>LDF</u>
1. Kottayam	10	1	9
2. Ernakulam	14	3	11
3. Alleppey	14	5	9
4. Quilon	16	-	15

Source : Mathew George in 'Primordality and Election' in Religion and Society Vol. XXIV, No.3, CISRS, Bangalore, Sept. '82.

In fact ever since the downfall of the UDF ministry

97. Editorial - 'Christian Church Heads Powerful Rejoinder to Catholic Bishops' - People's Democracy, Calcutta '79.

98. Mathew (George) - op.cit. pp.12-25.

In 1979, the Archbishop of Trivandrum and some other Bishops tacitly gave assurance of support to the two factions of Kerala Congress to form an alternative ministry. However, soon KC(Mani) left the UDF as mentioned earlier to join the LDF.⁹⁹ The Archbishop had warned against this.¹⁰⁰

Since KC(Mani) went against the Church's guidelines, the Church as was to be expected supported the KC (Joseph) which was with the UDF; Catholic Bishop's Conference issued a pastoral letter - in fact not one but many letters asking the people to vote for the democratic front led by Congress (I) of which the Kerala Congress (Joseph) was a prominent part.

However the election results had a very different story to tell, with the LDF emerging victorious, inspite of the Church's disapproval it did well even in the Christian dominated districts;

Thus when the KC (Mani) group entered the LDF, the Catholic Bishops Conference was not jubilant and in fact against his usual practice the Archbishop of Trivandrum - Benedict Mar georgiose did not even attend the swearing in of the Kerala Congress ministers.¹⁰¹

99. Varghese (I) - op.cit, pp.272-301.

100. These developments clearly demonstrate the fact that the Church in Kerala is involved and takes an active interest in the political affairs, even to the extent of making it's preferences clearly known.

101. Varghese (I.) -op.cit, pp.272-301.

While in power, Kerala Congress tried to protect Christian interests and Churches. In spite of the Nayanar Ministry - (which was a Left Democratic Front Ministry) the Kerala Congress could get educational institutions sanctioned in private sector. This was an area of obvious interest and benefit to the Christians.

In its 1980 party manifesto the Kerala Congress had given top priority to programmes meant for the working class, relief to Harijans and hill settlers,¹⁰² pension for agricultural workers, insurance to fishermen,¹⁰³ concession to students. The Kerala Congress asked for the inclusion of small income groups, small farmers and small scale, industrialists in the category of working class.¹⁰⁴

Kerala Congress criticized the policy of the Central Government in levying more tax on petroleum products. The Kerala Congress criticized the economic policy of vis-a-vis Kerala. The party wanted equal economic

102. Hill settlers is a polite substitute for forest encroachers and most of them are Christians.

103. Fishermen are again mostly Christians.

104. Varghese (T.) - op.cit, p.152.

protection to be given to the agriculturists when the cost of agricultural production increased. The Kerala Congress has always been critical of the rising cost of agricultural production and therefore believes that agricultural products should be given price proportionate to the cost of production or at least financial aid.¹⁰⁵ In fact the Kerala Congress wants the government to set up an agency to look into these and other related aspects.¹⁰⁶

The Kerala Congress demanded that subsidy should be given to agriculturists by considering the increasing cost of production index - just as D.A. is given to government employees by considering the living index.¹⁰⁷ The same manifesto demanded a moratorium on the loans of small agriculturists.

In its economic proposals, the Kerala Congress stated that it is against the practice of overtime work and payment for such work, since it hampers employment opportunities for others. The Kerala Congress wants a cordial relationship between the employer and the

105. The bulk of support that the Kerala Congress draws is from the land owning farming Christian population, hence it easy enough to appreciate the precise nature of these demands.

106. Varghese (I) - op.cit.

107. Ibid.

employee. It also seeks better wages and living conditions for the workers. Kerala Congress advocates an amicable reconciliation of labour problems and is strongly opposed to class antagonism. It pleaded for the exemption of plantations and religious institutions in the state from the provision of land ceiling.¹⁰⁸

The Kerala Congress has repeatedly stated that it is in favour of placing education under the private sector.¹⁰⁹ The Kerala Congress is, as can be expected against any interference by the government in the affairs of the minority community and specially in the running of their educational institutions.

Given these aims, it is to be expected that originally the Kerala Congress had among it's aim-the elimination of Communism from Kerala however later political expediency compelled it to join hands with the Communists on several occasions.

108. This demand is a definite indicator of the kind of interests that the Kerala Congress represents - that of the healthy plantation owners, and the very rich Churches in Kerala.

109. This position is to be expected given the fact that the upper class Christians have a great deal at stake in the control and running of these educational institutions, which are almost like commercial establishments,

It is interesting to observe that in 1980 KC(M) was in power and KC(J) in opposition, however both had an identical set of demands and were opposed to the same policies. In fact it almost seemed that the same party had two pressure groups—in the ruling front as well as in the opposition front.

Both the factions concentrated on the demand for fixing fair prices for cashew nuts, better working of intensive paddy development (I.P.D.), fair price for paddy, better irrigation facilities, public health centres in village, more industries in the state, fair price for paddy, better irrigation facilities, public health centres in village, more industries in the state, fair price for the production of ginger, arecanut, cardamom, pepper, turmeric.¹¹⁰

KC(M) & (J) paid special attention to the issue of purchase tax which they wanted to be abolished; among other things KC(M) & (J) also wanted a reduction of sales tax, implementation of UGC scales for college teachers, agricultural worker's pension, unemployment dole provisions for the benefit and security of the "gulf

110. Varghese (I.) - op.cit., p.224.

labourers'.¹¹¹ Both the sections opposed the centre's move to bring the production and distribution of electricity under its control.¹¹²

In the Nayanar ministry the Kerala Congress was given a great deal of importance as can be gauged from the fact that the Kerala Congress which is a prominent political representative group of the christians got 3 portfolios - the very important portfolios of transport, finance and electricity.

Being in-charge of the finance portfolio really indicates the status of the Kerala Congress and the importance attached to it - the 1980-81 budget thus was a handiwork of the Kerala Congress which was as was to be expected heavily in favour of plantation, agriculture, small business, educational institutions, and minorities. These economic activities which had a predominant Christian composition were singled out for special attention and concessions.

111. Kerala has been in the forefront of the large scale exodus of Indian Labourers to the middle-east. Of late, there has been a steady stream of these men and women coming back, often to a very unwelcome situation-economically and from the point of view of employment as well.

112. Varghese (T), op.cit.

In the Kerala Congress budget these were special concessions from agricultural tax for paddy, tapioca, ginger, plantain cultivation. The budget had concession for small businessmen, small industrialists, it incorporated provisions for protection of people in coir, cashew, handlooms, fishing sector - all primarily dominated by Christians. Besides concessions for orphans, old age pensions, it also had special provisions for Harijans converted to Christianity, pension for agriculture, reduction of sales tax on ginger and tapioca, abolition of land tax upto 4 hectares from 8000 Rs. - 10000 Rs.

The Kerala Congress transport minister put special emphasize on development of roads to high reaches and inland waterways. The electricity minister of the Kerala Congress decided to give 10 units of power free of charge to farmers.

A most significant issue raised by the Kerala Congress minister on which he put a great deal of personal prestige and pressure was to get the silent valley project passed. This project would have greatly benefitted the contractors who would have been in-charge of this whole project - this project would also have been of great assistance to the upper class Christians engaged in such activity.¹¹³ However, all through the tenure of the Kerala

113. Ibid.

Congress in the Nayanar ministry there were constant differences of opinion and friction.

Thus, a look at the demands, policies, budget and issues championed by the Kerala Congress clearly demonstrate the character of the party and the nature of politics that it represents.

Kerala Congress seeks to further the cause of the 'Christians' in Kerala - however it does appear that these interests seem to be largely of the upper classes. Kerala Congress is thus a splinter group of the Indian National Congress, which has grown in stature as a regional party. The party represents the regional elite of which a large chunk happens to be Christian. Hence the party's main demands and its central image revolves around the Christian populace in Kerala.

As explained earlier, Kerala Congress does not have any so-called Christian ideology or outlook on politics, neither does it have a set of religious tenets as its foundation, nor is its membership restricted only to Christians. Thus, it is not a communal party in the way it is traditionally understood. However, we can treat the Kerala Congress as a powerful group which claims to represent the interests of the 'Christians' which can safely be substituted by the term upper class Christians, -

engaged in agricultural, plantation, or other business ventures.

This is quite clearly demonstrated by the nature of demands that the Kerala Congress took up while in government. Its budget reflected the party's class bias in no uncertain terms. In fact, it is very interesting to observe that even the faction of the Kerala Congress in opposition echoed most of the demands and concerns of the Kerala congress in power. It is on this basis that we can conclude that the split occurred due to personality clashes and not due to any profound ideological or policy differences.

The fact that such an openly pro-rich party should be a partner in the Left Democratic Front would surprise many. However, given the tradition of coalition politics in Kerala, this wasn't anything new! As pointed out earlier, the tension existed and the undercurrent of the Kerala Congress relation vis-a-vis the LDF coalition was distinctly uncomfortable and often hostile. In such a situation a parting of ways was but natural and was to follow an attempt at unity between the KC(M) - KC(P) thereby increasing the strength of the KC in the LDF

ministry, under the leadership of K.M.Manil.¹¹⁴

Very soon the differences specially on economic issues like taxation policies, subsidies hill settlers and the silent valley-project were making it impossible for the existing coalitional set up to continue? Thus the KC as was expected walked out of the LDF ministry bringing about the downfall of the Nayanar ministry. This fact clearly points out that the Kerala Congress which is a representative of the Christian community in Kerala is an important & vital element in any political configuration. The Christian community in Kerala exerts it's pressure on Kerala politics through the Kerala Congress."

III

The fact that almost every ministry¹¹⁵ since the formation of the Kerala Congress has been dependent on the goodwill and continued support of the Kerala Congress which draws it's strength and support from the Christians of the state. Although it espouses the cause of the middle and upper class Christians, it is perceived as a spokesperson

114. Kumar (Dr. G.Gopa), Regional Political parties and state politics, Deep & Deep Publications, 1986, pp.85-95.

115. The present 1987 LDF ministry under E.K.Nayanar has been free from this strain.

of the Kerala Christians generally and thus is a very important actor in the Kerala political theatre.

As pointed out earlier the Kerala Congress had joined the LDF against the advice of the Church & the Bishops and caused great displeasure and embarrassment to the officialdom of the Church. The Church tried it's best to prevail upon the KC to stop it from joining hands with LDF, but did not meet with any success.

This failure however, was rather shortlived, because very soon in 1981, Catholic Bishop's Conference deputed Bishops of Palai, Ernakulam and Kanjirakpally for bringing about unity between the two factions of the Kerala Congress.¹¹⁶

The initial displeasure of the Church at the KC decision was followed by attempts at persuasion and then condemnation in public in a bid to influence the electorate. Later, the Church tried to patch up the differences between the two factions of the Kerala Congress. These developments prove beyond doubt, the fact that the Kerala Congress is the political arm of the Christians in Kerala and it also proves and in very clear terms the importance and extent of involvement of the Church in the political affairs of the Christians in Kerala.

¹¹⁶. Varghese (I.) - op.cit., pp.272-301.

As expected the LDF ministry collapsed because the Kerala Congress walked out. Thus on Oct. 20th 1981 the Nayanar ministry fell, and UDF ministry was sworn in on Dec. 28th 1981. However this government had to resign on May 17th 1982 to make way for fresh elections.¹¹⁷ Soon elections were held to the Kerala Legislative Assembly in 1982.

For the general elections to the Kerala Legislative Assembly in 1982, the KC (Mani) and (Joseph) joined hands. These two had been rival groups and had been separate fronts, with the Mani group in the ruling LDF and the Joseph group in the opposition UDF.

On the eve of the 1982 elections however the two factions decided to come together and joined the UDF.¹¹⁷ As was to be expected the UDF won the elections with a creditable and convincing margin. The Mani group fielded 17 candidates and six of them won the elections, thus the Mani group polled 5.85% votes. The Joseph group improved it's position but contested only 12 seats and won as many as 8 of them polling 4.55% of the votes.¹¹⁸

117. Kumar (Dr. G.Gopa) - op.cit, pp:85-95.

118. Ibid.

In this context we can have a look at the party wise election results of the 1982 Kerala General Assembly Elections.

Table 3.4 - Results of 1982 Kerala Legislative Assembly General Elections. ¹¹⁹

Name of the party	Seats contested	Seats elected	%	Total
1. INC	35	20	14.29	1,37,374
2. ICS	17	7	5.00	5,25,291
3. BJP	69	-	-	2,63,331
4. JNP	13	4	2.86	3,86,147
5. CPI	25	13	9.28	8,04,869
6. CPI(M)	51	26	18.57	17,98,198
7. IMC	12	4	2.86	3,10,626
8. KEC	17	6	4.28	5,59,930
9. KCJ	12	8	5.71	4,35,200
10. MUL	18	14	10.00	5,90,255
11. RSP	8	4	2.86	2,63,869
12. NDP	8	4	2.86	2,55,580
13. Independents	414	30	21.43	3,492,232,182

Source : Election Commission, New Delhi

119. India (Govt.) Election Commission - Report on General Elections to the Legislative Assemblies - 1982, Kerala, New Delhi, 1982.

In the new government led by the Congress(I) (this ministry was generally referred to as the UDF ministry under the Chief Ministership of Karunakaran) the rival Kerala Congress groups were "over represented." Out of 8 legislators, the KC(J) got 2 berths, KC(M) with 6 legislators also 2 berths in the cabinet.

Thus, it was demonstrated once again that the minority groups in Kerala are very important and cannot be wished away. UDF had the support of the most significant minority group - the Christians in the form of the backing of the Kerala Congress, this virtually ensured the victory of the UDF in the 1982 elections.

This Karunakaran ministry was one of the few ministries in Kerala which could continue for its full term, and many political analysts attribute this to the fact that the UDF had the support of the Kerala Congress - representative of the Christians, and hence also the support the Church.

While this vital point of support by the church and is very significant, the fact was that the Congress(I) did not differ from the Kerala Congress in the nature of its economic policies and programmes and was quick to succumb to any pressure however marginal from the Christian groups in a desperate bid to somehow hold on to power.

This therefore meant that the UDF ministry was anything but stable, with repeated threats of walk out on policy differences, important political or economic issues, ministerial portfolios and so on; often we could find the Kerala Congress holding the UDF government to ransom in a bid to get their demands represented.

If not the Kerala Congress, then the Church often put pressure on the government. Thus the pattern of Christian minority politics remained quite the same with the Church actively involved and voicing strong political opinions. The opinions or demands suggested by the Church and the Kerala Congress have always been taken to represent the will of the majority of the Christian community.

The UDF ministry was barely two months old in July '82 when its existence was threatened by bickering within the UDF, over the absence of a Latin Catholic nominee in the 19 member ministry. The Church leaders not hiding their displeasure, called upon their flock to form a party of their own to guard their interests against future neglect.¹²⁰ The 19 member Karunakaran ministry was thus sworn in June '82. Meanwhile, the Democratic

120. Reported in Hindu, Madras, 20th July '82.

Sabha (fishermen community) which secured one seat in the assembly, as mentioned above staked its claim for representation in the ministry.¹²¹

As explained earlier the Latin Catholic Community which supported the UDF in the polls was upset because of this denial of ministerial portfolio. The dependence of the Karunakaran ministry on the goodwill of this community was evident from the fact that the Chief Minister went to Cochin to meet the concerned Church heads & assured the Latin Catholic Bishops that the interests of the Church would be well taken care of in future.¹²²

All this was not surprising because in the Travancore-Cochin part of Kerala right from the day popular government was ushered in, the Congress had heavily leaned on the Church's support. The Bishop's support was important to prevent the defection of Christian members of UDF.

IV

What emerges from this is the fact that the participation of the Christian minority in Kerala Politics is

121. Organiser - 13th June '82.

122. Ibid.

guided to a great extent by the Church and its leaders.⁵ The Church monitors and keeps track of all the political developments and does not hesitate to put forth its demands, which considering its weight in political terms is seldom ignored, specially in the context of a non-Marxist government.

We also observe the confidence of the Church in translating its interests into a political outfit in order to get what it wants. It appears that the Church is not satisfied with being merely a powerful pressure group, but wants to have a definite presence and say in the political process of Kerala.

Another interesting aspect of the minority politics in Kerala in the case of the Christians is the fact that this political phenomena of minority politics cannot be treated as one monolithic block. On the other hand these are various differences within; often these differences can be traced to personality clashes.

In spite of having coming together to join the UDF, the KC(M) & KC(J) in the 1982 ministry kept squabbling between themselves.¹²³ However both the groups had the vital support and backing of the Church.

123. Pratap (Anita) - "Karunakaran and the October Jinx" - Telegraph, Calcutta, 20th Oct. '82.

During its association with the ruling UDF front 1982 onwards the KC(M) & (J) took up many interests and demands. KC(M) is seen as a representative of the interests of a large body of Christians who are mainly rubber planters in the Idukki & Kottayam districts. Thus, the KC(M) took up cudgels against the Central Government's rubber import policy that in its view jeopardised the interests of its supporters. Here, it can be noted that the Kerala Congress represents the interests of Christians only in as much as these are the interests of the economically significant and prosperous sections of Christians.

The demands that the Kerala Congress brings up have, nothing specifically 'Christian' about them, except for the fact they also happen to be demands of a section of the Christian population in Kerala. Seldom do we find a demand of a religious or communal nature emanating from the Kerala Congress. More often than not, the Kerala Congress represents interests that are economic and would matter to a large number of Christians.

This does not mean that demands that are of a different nature are not taken up. For instance, KC(J) pressurized the Chief Minister Karunakaran with the demand for a Christian majority district of

Muvattupuzha.¹²⁴ Among the other demands of the KC(J) was the immediate reimbursement of the loss suffered by Kerala on account of the amendment to the central sales Tax Act, bigger rice allotment to the state and a ceiling on urban property.¹²⁵

An important and note worthy dimension of Christian minority politics as seen in the Kerala Congress is the strong regional sentiments that it involves. The Kerala congress has always been clamouring for greater regional autonomy vis-a-vis the centre.

The KC(J) did not compromise on this issue even when it was a partner of the Congress (I) in the UDF and caused great problems for UDF with it's decision to launch an anti-centre agitation.¹²⁶ The UDF coalition under Congress(I) thus was always under pressure to fulfil the demands of the various minority groups like the Kerala Congress with whom it had aligned. This meant that the Kerala Congress tried to draw the maximum mileage from it's status as the political representative of a very important minority group.

124. Editorial - "Communal Pulls" in the Hindustan Times, New Delhi, 16th March '83.

125. Reported in Hindu, Madras, March 18th '83.

126. Pratep (Anita) - "Will Joseph Be a Judas" - Telegraph, Calcutta, New Delhi, 24th March '83.

As a result the interests of state, it's economic development, industrialization were being sidetracked. Kerala had been forced to follow a patchwork economic policy. A few concessions for a particular section, a bridge here, a link road there and a few small industrial units at yet another place just to entertain the warring groups.¹²⁷

In the 1982 UDF coalition a permanent feature as far as the Christian minorities in Kerala were concerned, was the constant conflict between the KC(M) & KC(J)*. By the winter of 1983 the differences between the two groups had become sharp.

The immediate reason was that the Chief Minister, Karunakaran had intervened in a battle of strength between the two groups in favour of the KC(M)*.

KC(M) was in-charge of the forests portfolio and KC(J) leader Joseph was the Revenue Minister. The latter had granted Pattas or title deeds to Christian settlers on government forest land. However, the KC(M) forest minister got a stay order against the settlers on behalf of the chief minister.¹²⁸

127 Kartha (Hari S.) - "After Mohammed Koya" - Indian Express, Bombay, 24th Oct.'83.

128 "Crisis in the Making for the UDF Ministry"- Statesman, New Delhi, 15th Nov.'83.

The constant conflicts led the Church to the opinion that in fact it would be better to keep KC(M) & KC(J) in separate coalitions, as the Church felt that this way, no matter which front comes to power, the Christian community's interests would be represented.

This tussle between the KC(M) & KC(J) soon had an adverse impact on the KC(J) - Congress relationship on the question of title deed distribution to settlers in hill areas. The provision was that all the pre-'77 settlers should be granted ownership deeds. However the post-'77 settlers were to be treated as encroachers and hence were to be evicted. The communal angle was projected because the majority of these hill settlers are Christians who support KC(J).¹²⁹

To begin with the Chief Minister Karunakaran took a stand against the KC(J) on the issue of title deeds.¹²⁹ Faced with this stand the KC(J) threatened to walk out and this move forced the Chief Minister to rush to Mrs. Gandhi in order to sanction the KC(J)'s demands.¹³⁰

129. "Crisis Subsides, Distrust Singers" - Hindu, Madras, 25th Nov. '83.

130. "Yet Another Compromise" - Telegraph, Calcutta, 3rd Dec. '83.

The Congress (I) had all along spoken in favour of forest preservation and eviction of encroachers, but faced with the possibility of a withdrawal of support by the Christian representative group, it quickly reversed its policy;

Thus in late 1983 the UDF government led by the Congress(I) in Kerala was facing a threatening situation, which was averted by Mrs. Gandhi's clearance which made more than 75,000 families rightful owners of 50,000 hectares of forest land that had been illegally occupied.¹³¹

These developments clearly indicate the nature of minority politics in Kerala, specially in the case of Christians. Since these encroachers were mainly Christians, the Kerala Congress thought it fit to fight for their cause and sure enough the government had to accept the KC(J)'s demands since this is a political group that represents the interests of the Christians and has the backing of the Church.

Within a year's time the UDF had to face a lot of threats emanating from minority political groups like the KC, and also because of the differences between

131. Kumar (Dr. G.Gopa) - op.cit., p:20.

the two factions of the KC, & last but not least due to the pressure from the Church.

However on the eve of the 1984 general elections to the Lok Sabha the two factions of KC united and their manifesto called for liberalism and democracy. It was evident from a reading of the party programme that KC's interests were among the Christian settlers in the forests, plantation owners and agriculturists who were largely Christians.

As mentioned earlier, any discussion of Christian minority politics in Kerala must take into account the involvement of the Church and the clergy in politics. Very often the clergy reacts to any developments relating to their interests as if it is an assault on "minority rights."

For instance, when the suicide committed by the young mother¹³² of a convent school going girl (because of a poor performance in the exams) was criticized as being the result of a competitive education system; the

132. This incident was popularly referred to as 'Vandana Episode.'

clergy soon formed an action committee to defend its "minority rights."¹³³

The summer of 1985 saw the KC(M) in a very defiant mood, with its member, Electricity minister Balakrishna Pillai threatening to launch a Punjab style agitation in order to secure for Kerala its legitimate rights.¹³⁴ This once again shows that Kerala Congress is not just a communal party but has also taken up the responsibility of asserting regional right vis-a-vis the centre. With Pillai's ouster from the UDF, the situation was diffused, Pillai was brought in again.

The Christian lobby has a considerable clout in Congress affairs. It represents, class-wise, middle peasantry and small planters and traders. It was the peculiar development of politics in erstwhile Travancore that made the communal element so important. After independence the trend continued with the commercial interests that controlled the Christian pressure groups managing to ensure their own influence.¹³⁵

Our discussion proves beyond doubt that the influence of the Christian political has maintained itself

133. "Kerala's Curse" - Newstime, Hyderabad, 4th June '85.

134. Hindu, 6th June, '85.

135. Deccan Herald, 16th Sept. '85.

at a very high level, inspite of the 1980 vote in favour of the LDF, which was then seen by many as a clear indication of the fact that the pull of religion was becoming feeble in Kerala.¹³⁶

The UDF ministry thus was always under pressure from the various communal groups. However, the fact is that the UDF could continue only because of the support from such groups specially the Christian groups like the KC and more importantly the Church.

The 1987 general election to the Kerala Legislative Assembly however had a different story to tell, with the defeat of the UDF of which KC was a prominent part.¹³⁶ It is too early to say emphatically that the days of communal politics or the role of the minority communal groups is over. The fact however is that the LDF won in 1987, inspite of the fact that it did not have the support of the communal groups representing the minorities, without which it was believed that no coalition could win, let alone constitute a government. Here we can look at the '87 poll results.

136. Ganguly (Tarun) - Sunday, Calcutta, Feb. 10th '80.

Table 3.5 - Results of General Election to the Kerala
Legislative Assembly - 1987¹³⁷

Name of the party	Seats contested	%	% elec- ted	Total	% of votes
1. INC	76	23.57	33	13,164,229	24.81
2. ICS	14	4.29	6	511,777	4.01
3. JNP	12	5.00	7	482,408	3.78
4. BJP	116	5.63	-	70,488	5.63
5. LKD	2	0.71	1	78,389	0.62
6. CPI	25	11.42	16	1,029,409	8.07
7. CPI(M)	70	27.15	38	2,912,999	22.84
8. MUL	23	10.71	15	985,011	7.73
9. KEC	14	3.57	5	451,159	3.54
10. FBL	7	-	-	383	-
11. ADK	1	-	-	423	-
12. RSP	7	3.57	5	264,401	2.07
13. NDP	3	-	-	37,706	0.30
14. Independents	885	10.01	14	2,117,989	16.60

Source : Unpublished report - Election Commission,
New Delhi.

In the decade 1977-87, we observe that minority
politics in Kerala as far as the Christians are concerned

137. India (Govt.) - unpublished report on General
Elections to the Kerala Legislative Assembly,
1987, New Delhi.

has largely centred around the Kerala Congress which in turn has not been able to shake off its dependence and close relationship with the Church. The Church and clergy have continued to take part actively in affairs of the party and has expressed it's opinions, rather freely on many major political issues.

The political importance of the minority groups like the Christians stems from the fact that they are very politically conscious and well organized, thus the life span of any ministry, generally, seems to be resting upon how effectively it can accommodate the various communities and their demands.

Christians form a significant minority group in Kerala and are an important element in the political set up of the state. Organized through the Church and to some extent through political parties like KC whose interests are among the Christian settlers in the hill areas, forests, plantations, commercial agriculture, trade commerce, and educational and health institutions.¹³⁸

A visible interest group emerged in Kerala society even before independence when the Christians migrated from their towns and village to the high ranges

138. Kumar (Dr. G. Gopa) - op.cit., pp.85-95.

In the western ghats. No political party can hope to win them till 1962, however with the birth of the Kerala Congress, there was a large scale exodus of such Christians from the congress to the Kerala Congress.

To begin with the Kerala Congress was popular only among the Syrian Catholics. It had no influence among the Orthodox Christian communities. In the span of the last ten years or so this picture has changed and the party now flourishes in the Orthodox Christian dominated areas as well. Non-Catholic and Catholic have over the years demonstrated considerable enthusiasm and support for the KC.¹³⁹

This fact clearly proves that the Kerala Congress has succeeded in consolidated it's position very firmly in the political map of Kerala. It's influence has spread and it has won new supporters among the Christians in Kerala. The KC is thus bring perceived by the Christians in Kerala, across various denominations & Churches and classes as a party that somehow represents the interests of all the Christians in the state.

In it's early years the party was totally under the control and influence of the Church. In the past

139. Varghese (I.) - op.cit., pp.389-399.

decade we notice a decrease in the extent of this control.¹⁴⁰

This does not imply that the Church has stopped taking an interest in political matters, but what it mean is that the KC is not so easily persuaded. As a party of the Christian minority, the KC has in this last decade spoken, against Church descreation, curtailment of religious freedom and infringement on minority rights.

However, more than religious or cultural issue, the KC is usually seen championing those economic demands that are described as "Christian" interests. It is very fond of describing it's brand of socialism as Janakiya socialism,¹⁴¹ which does not recognize class differences, much less so conflicts.

KC is to a great extent a 'regional party' in the sense that it represents the regional bargeousisie and gives vent to their complaints against over centralization. However, this regional bourgeoisie that it represents is largely Christian - with the Christian land-owning class being it's major supporters, the KC obviously believes in status quo, democratic liberalism and a conservative class structure.

140. Ibid.

141. Ibid.

This class from which KC draws its major support is largely Christian in composition and has become a very important class. This increase in importance has been matched by a corresponding increase and growth in the stature and importance of the KC in the years 1977-87. This is proved by its quantitative increase in the % of votes polled and in the geographic spread of its influence.

In qualitative terms, we see that the KC which was a junior member in every sense of the legislative assembly and the governments or opposition, graduated to the status of an eminent political entity, getting such important portfolios as revenue and finance and even being offered Chief Ministership in the 1977-87 decade.

Thus, we see that Christians have continued to be a politically significant group and are organized remarkably well, through the Kerala Congress, which has led to a considerable shift away from the erstwhile dependence on the Church. In this sense, we note a difference in the Christian minority politics, in the last decade. This also implies that the KC has grown in confidence and strength as the representative and spokesperson of the Christian in Kerala.

The last decade has seen the KC holding some very important political offices and influencing the ups and downs in the fortunes of the various coalition ministries in Kerala.

However, the issues and interests that occupy importance in the horizon of Christian politics as seen through the Kerala Congress have not changed greatly, in the sense that it continues to identify itself with the economically well placed Christians; almost equating these with the interests of Kerala Christians by and large.



...

CHAPTER IV

EMERGING TRENDS IN CHRISTIAN MINORITY POLITICS

Our discussions in the earlier chapters, bring out one fact very clearly : any discussion of minority politics in Kerala in the context of the Christians will have to take into account not only electoral alliances and results - and government reactions and policies on the so-called 'Christian issues' - but also those issues that have been of very great importance and significance to the Christian community in Kerala. Being an organized religion, any analysis of such issues will also oblige us to look at the Church and its concern with these issues.

In this section, we will try to see some such issues that caught the imagination of the Church and the laity. These would be issues that are important not because the main political representative of the Christian - the Kerala Congress took them up, or because they were overtly political issues. These issues will be examined because they have had a great deal of bearing and impact of on the shaping of the Christian minority politics in Kerala.

The concerns that these years of 1978-85 threw up (in the context of Christian minorities in Kerala politics) have been such that they have called for a great deal of re-thinking on the part of the Christian leaders and organizations and of course the Church. There had always been a great deal of difference among them, a certain degree of pluralism has always existed however in this period, we see that these are indications of this pluralism getting converted into possible polarization? If so, then we should look at such & others issues and cases that have contributed towards the development of such a phenomena.

In this section it is our endeavour to see what kind of forces have been controlling and dominating Christian political involvement in Kerala Politics. As we look at the significant forces that are in control, we would obviously have to see what is it that draws them towards an active participation in political matters. There are of course many causes that the Christian political groups or even supposedly non-political groups have taken up. Here we shall highlight some of those concerns which are so very typical of Christian minority politics in Kerala.

I

One of the first issues that will be studied in

the proposal to pass a 'freedom of Religion Bill' and the controversy that it created in the wake of this proposal. Though this bill was proposed in the Lok Sabha in 1979 during the Janata government and thus is outside the territory of Kerala politics, but the fact is that this bill would have had a definite impact on the Christian populace in India. Christians as we know constitute the second largest minority in India and have a considerable presence in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and the north-eastern states.¹⁴²

Thus, it is quite evident that this issue has a definite and significant bearing on any study of minority politics in Kerala vis-a-vis, the Christians there. The bill referred to as the 'Freedom of Religion Bill' was introduced in the spring of 1979 by the Desai ministry. According to Morarji Desai the bill sought to prevent conversion by fraud or force.¹⁴³

Despite the constitutional grant of right to propagate religion, a continuous debate has been going on in our country, regarding the implications and consequences

142. "Minorities in India" - UNI Backgrounder, Vol. V, No. 35, New Delhi, Aug. 28th, 80, p.12.

143. "Indian Christians and Freedom of Religion Bill" - UNI Backgrounder, Vol. IV, No. 16, April 19th, 79, New Delhi, p.1.

of this right. The situation is rendered complex by the fact that mainstream Hinduism has no element of propagation or conversion. This added to the foreign (conqueror) association of the converting, propagating religion made things even more complicated.¹⁴⁴

The opponents of religions conversion believe that such acts have tended to disrupt the established patterns of family, caste and village social life; Besides, it is stated that conversion leads to the virtual abandonment of Indian culture (specially if conversion is to Christianity). Even Gandhiji is known to have expressed such a view. It has also been alleged that very often unfair means are employed in order carry out conversions.

However the Indian Christians had repeatedly stressed the uniqueness of their religion by stating that propagation and conversion is as essential component of Christianity. Besides, they pointed out that Christianity aimed at an inward change of the person or conversion rather than just proselytization which meant a social transfer of large numbers from one religion to another without any corresponding inward change.

144. Smith (Donald Engene) - India as a secular state, Princeton University Press, USA, 1963, pp.163-92.

The Indian Christians drew sustenance from the historical fact that Christianity in some parts of India as in Kerala was an integral and ancient part of the cultural tradition. They referred to the example of Syrian Christians in Kerala in so as to establish the antiquity of Christianity in India. Last but not the least the Christian community has always argued that Christianity believed in communal harmony and therefore Christian evangelization was not a threat to the Indian tradition of tolerance and harmony.

These sentiments and arguments notwithstanding there have been repeated efforts to regulate the freedom of conversion and with this in mind many a legislations have been attempted. One of the first attempts in this direction was in 1954 when a private member's bill dealing with conversion was introduced by Jethalal Joshi in the Lok Sabha. This bill proposed that persons or institutions engaged in conversions would have to seek licenses from the district magistrate, a register of conversion would be maintained, prospective convert to the District Magistrate and the license holder and convert would have to furnish details of the conversion within three months of the conversion.

As was to be expected this 'Indian converts Regulation and Registration Bill' was strongly opposed and

during the course of the discussion it became clear that the bill was aimed primarily against Christian evangelication. However, the government rejected the bill & Nehru who was the P.M. then, spoke against it and the bill was rejected.

In March 1960, the Lok Sabha once again rejected the Backward Communities (Religious Protection) Bill.¹⁴⁵ This was moved by Prakash Vir Shastri and sought to provide more protection to SC/ST in the face of conversion. The bill sought to define Islam, Christianity, Judaism and Zoarashtrianism as foreign religious.

Thus when the Freedom of Religion Bill was introduced by O.P. Tyagi in 1979 it was but a continuation of these earlier efforts; This bill was also strongly opposed right from its introduction in the Lok Sabha. However Desai sought to defend it. The Christian leaders and public came together against the bill, inspite of the fact that this bill would not have had any adverse impact on Kerala Christians, the most strong and vocal opposition was provided by the Kerala clergy. An interesting interpretation was provided when the opinion was expressed that the Freedom of Religion Bill was of tremendous political significance.

145. Ibid.

It was explained that the significance emerged from the fact that it was meant to harm the Christians and not allow hitherto oppressed and weak section of the society improve their lot by embracing Christianity so that they could be exploited as before.¹⁴⁶

The Kerala clergy and the Church with its numerous prior experiences in organizing and participating in political movements succeeded in organizing the public opinion against the bill and a very fierce opposition was built up against the proposed legislation and before any further action could be taken, very soon the government itself feel. However, the fact is that the Desai government had not visualized the intensity of the opposition to this bill which was orchestrated and given a definite direction to a great extent by the Kerala Church figure. In fact very soon after the proposal for the bill was tabled, on March 11th 1979, 28 Bishops including the Archbishop of Ernakulam, Cardinal Joseph Parecatil protested against the bill.

This issue is outside the scope of Kerala minority politics, but a brief discussion of this issue is inevitable

146. "Indian Christians and Freedom of Religion Bill" - UNI Backgrounder, No.16, April 19th, 79, New Delhi.

given the fact that one of the major events concerning the Christians (at the national level) was definitely this proposed bill and therefore has to be included in our discussion of minority politics in Kerala vis-a-vis the Christians there;

The response to this proposed bill and the manner in which it was articulated was quite predictable and justified. The ever vigilant Kerala Church - sensitive to any move that it perceived as adversely affecting its minority status was quick to evaluate the implications of the proposed Tyagi Bill and condemn it in the strongest possible terms.

In the Kerala political scene caste and Communal consciousness has always co-existed alongwith sophisticated and radical political ideologies and positions. In fact, at time it does appear that both the ideological streams need each other, this dependence is reinforced specially on the eve of elections when in a bid to win the most votes; very many bizarr and unimaginable combinations are seen. As the years have gone by, the political consciousness of Kerala has come to be admired, however this maturity is not accompanied by a growing secularization of politics. Caste and communal calculations and identities are still strong in the Kerala's political configuration.

This fact gains even more significance when we note the reality of many religious groups, and caste groups that are remarkably well organized, even possessing political fronts.

However, inspite of this Kerala had been free by and large of the worst aspect of the possible consequences of such a socio-political set-up -- that of communal riots and communal violence. This absence can be attributed to a great extent to the fact that historically Kerala has been a crucible for all faiths and there had generally been an open, democratic and welcoming attitude towards all new religions. This tradition was best exemplified by the kings who ruled over the various small kingdoms (which now constitute Kerala) who were most respectfully, helpful and welcomed the Jews, Muslims and Christians, granting them favours and privileges in order to help them make a comfortable living.

This tradition of communal harmony and amity had continued almost uninterrupted, however the first signs of communal difference coincided with extension of colonialism into Kerala, uneven economic opportunities and exploitation that accompanied it. Later the introduction of electoral politics seemed to have worsened the situation. Inspite of this, these differences or

feelings of being exploited never led to rioting and violence.

Post-independence India has been a scene of repeated and severe communal tension and violence, Kerala, inspite of being the home of all the major world religions and having very substantial minorities had always prided itself in having been free of communal killings or tension.

However in the post emergency period, we do see that this is no longer true of Kerala and there have been repeated occasions of communal tension the kind of which was popularly associated with the volatile north. A discussion of this trend is very essential because this change in the trend has been of significant importance for the Christians in Kerala, since these have been instances when the Christian community has felt threatened by the majority community and been involved in tense and violent confrontations. This rather new trend has led to a great deal of serious re-thinking and many Christian leaders have adopted an aggressive posture, while others are probing deeper to find reasons for this changing scenario.

This change is amply demonstrated by what many

people are calling the 'Hindu Revival'.¹⁴⁷ Hindu militancy seems to have gained in popularity in reaction to what is claimed as discrimination against the majority community. In all this, organisations like the Rashtriya Swayam-sevak Sangha and some prominent Hindu spiritual leaders have played a very significant role. In Kerala these groups and leaders have come together not so much against the Muslims as would be expected but against the Christians.

In case of Kerala this is not really surprising, given the fact that Christians constitute a significant, traditional and economically flourishing minority, which has today translated this economic power into political terms as well. The Namboodiripad ministry's land reforms and the inevitable decline and collapse of the oppressive feudal order upset the traditional power and prestige enjoyed by certain dominant sections of the Hindus. They believe that the Christians have taken unfair advantage of their minority rights provided in the constitution in order to enhance their economic position at the cost of the others.

147. Menon (Venu) - "The Hindu Revival", The illustrated Weekly of India, 15th June '86, pp.42-45.

However, no objective student of Kerala politics can deny the fact that the Muslims and Christians have become powerful pressure forces within the government, even in opposition, armtwisting their way to special privileges and benefits. All these has led to assertions of a Hindu renaissance, replete with implications, because behind this elevated expression lurks seething sentiment of political hurt. Political because, politicians in power, pampered and fattened the big communal groups with an eye on their votes. It does appear that in the teeming socio-political landscape of Kerala, a party can cruise to power, very often, on the communal vote alone. Once a small part of the government, groups like the Muslim League and the Kerala Congress became Goliaths on whose shoulders a rickety coalition created along.¹⁴⁸

A section of the Hindus are of the opinion that the Kerala government's eagerness to please the communal lobby did not extend to the vast unorganised segmented mass of Hindus in the states. Their resentment crystallised when the government time and again pooh-poohed some of their major demands regarding temples and their administration. Hindu (rather a section of the Hindus) resentment defined itself in the last elections in the

148. Ibid.

state when a br ad-based conglomeration of Hindu organisations formed a platform under the name Hindu Munnani and to everyone's shock polled a total of around 3 Lakh votes, which, in the context of Kerala's razor edge poll outcome, is a more than respectable figure. In the 1987 assembly rolls, the Hindu Munnani has improved it's lot. Thus, the Hindu organized groups have given a fair indication of their destabilising potential;

II

Thus, since the beginning of the 1980's we note the Hindu-Christian equation has not been a very happy one. The Nilakkal episode of 1983 marked the explosive point in their relation. The crisis was detonated when the Bishop of Kanjirappally, Joseph War Pewathil crusaded for the building of Church (where a Cross was supposedly found transfixed) which fell within the precincts of the Hindu temple - Sabarimala.

A mystery Cross that was found in the dense forests of Nilakkal, 115 km. away from Kottayam became the point of clash between Hindus and Christians.¹⁴⁹ This Cross, it was claimed was set up by St. Thomas during his

149. Prasad (Ayyappa) - "A Mystery Cross Rocks Kerala"-
Sunday Observer, Bombay, May '83.

stay in Kerala. The Cross was allegedly 'discovered' by two workers of the Kerala state farming Corporation and it was claimed that within two days of this discovery, the Cross disappeared.

Very soon a Nilakkal Church Action Committee was set up to safeguard and set up a Church on the spot. This aroused the wrath of Hindu groups and associations like the RSS. The Hindu leaders, represented by Sanyasis and the RSS formed a Nilakkal Action Council and Protested against the Bishops. The first claim for a Church at this location had been made in 1957 when it was claimed that a Christian priest and his followers had chanced upon it. Namboodiripad had then appointed a commission to probe into these claims and it was stated that the claims were unsubstantiated. The issue remained frozen, but claims were repeated in 1969 and 1972. In 1979, 23 Christian MLAs gave a joint petition to the state and central government to get land for erecting a Church. 5 hectates of land was given by state government to Bishops to erect a Church.

By 1980, the Central Forest Reserve Act came into being and this made it necessary for the everyone to obtain clearance from central govt. to build on the forest lands and thus this forced the Christians to seek clearance from the Central government. The situation

turned for the worse, with the bishops and the Hindu groups organizing themselves and ranging against each other.

The Hindu groups alleged that the Church was being set up enroute to the famous and holy Hindu shrine of Sabarimala in order to defile the temple and detract from its importance. The situation became tense, when the Christians insisted on putting up a Church and employed the services of toughmen, and both sides accused the other of having resorted to violence.

Nilakkal issue as it came to be called could easily have been defused but, we have to remember that the ministry in power was the UDF government, where the climate was conducive for exploitation of such communal issues, specially since the Kerala Congress was a major part of the UDF. Very soon the KC ministers were being pressurized.¹⁵⁰ The government backed the Bishops.

With this the whole area around Nilakkal became tense with threats of violence emanating from both sides.

The issue was exploited fully by the Christian as well the Hindu leaders. A few cases of stone throwing and looting and destruction of temple property were reported. The widely read Malayalam press highlighted the issue

150. Nilakkal Sambhavam ^{N. Delhi,} - Suruchi Sahitya, , June 1974, p.8.

and the communal passions were sought to be aroused.

It was alleged that those who wanted to set up a Church in the midst of the Nilakkal forests were actually doing it in order to gain a foothold in the forests so as to exploit the resources of the forests. Both sides accused each other of having used force and threat of violence. The Karunakaram ministry dependent as it was on the goodwill of the Church and Christian groups chose to support the Bishops. However, when the crisis threatened to explode, the government relented to the demand of the Hindus and the Church was not allowed to be built at Nilakkal.

Ever since this episode the underlying tension and frustration has become a reality and the Christian groups and leaders have sought to make political capital out of it, by constantly referring to their special rights as minorities.¹⁵¹ The appeal made by Bishops and clergymen is that of protecting Christianity as it is being threatened. These sentiments came to be widely expressed and accepted to a certain extent only in the aftermath of the Nilakkal controversy.

151. This does not mean that the Hindu groups and their leaders did not make political capital out of this issue. In fact this is exactly what they did.

Prior to this what was common was often specific demands based on genuine or imagined economic or political grievances garbed in communal terms - as a 'Christian demand'. However the Nilakkal issued has set a new trend wherein the protection and preservation of the faith itself is being portrayed as a risky proposition - as can be imagined this is indeed a very dangerous trend as communal passions are easily aroused on the basis of a call of 'religion in danger'. This has meant that once again the Church has come into own as far minority politics in the context of the Christians in Kerala. With the emergence of the Kerala Congress in Kerala. With the emergence of the Kerala Congress and strengthening of it's position the Church and it's leaders had begun to keep a low profile, preferring to do the back-seat manouvers, however with the future of Christianity and the Church itself at stake these was nothing to keep them away from politics.

The whole controversy surrounding the Nilakkal Church/temple has been severally criticized and condemned specially because Kerala was always fancied as one part of India where despite the existence of many diverse religious groups there had always been an appreciable level of harmony amity and integration. The ugly turn of the Nilakkal incident forced everyone to face the reality in it's true form - a reality that was far from being a happy one.

This then is the reality in Kerala as far as minority politics is concerned - it is almost a vicious circle : the politicians eye the Christian and Muslim vote banks to consolidate their own power base: Special privileges and benefits are heaped on these communities. While the Muslims seem to be largely pre-occupied with preserving their community's identity, the Christians in Kerala have relentlessly pursued their economic interests. At the forefront of this effort is the Church establishment, which has deeply entrenched interests in the state's economy. The Nilakkal episode seemed to threaten their strong and powerful position in the Kerala scene and hence the uproar.

At yet another level this was also a clash of institutional interests between Church leaders and their Hindu counterparts. Whatever the underlying reasons or explanations, the fact remains that the whole episode has added yet another (unwelcome) dimension to the minority politics in case of Kerala Christians.

As a fall out from the Nilakkal controversy, today, we see in Kerala an increase in the prestige and popularity of the RSS and similar other militant organizations. There is today such a parallel move

among the Christians as well. What is common today is an upsurge in fundamentalism among the minority groups like the Christians as well as the majority community. The RSS is perceived by many Christians as being against them.¹⁵²

In many areas we see that the Christian community has organized itself along lines similar to the RSS. For instance in Chinnithala town the Christian community has organized itself into a local chapter of the Christian Youth Movement (CYM) much like the RSS. These groups are flourishing, thanks to the monetary support provided by small businessmen and the sentiment of their faith being challenged or threatened.

Protection of religious faith obviously calls for the support and active participation of religious figures and religious heads. This has been accompanied by a growing militancy and assertion of fundamentalist positions. This however is not the only trend or direction towards which Christian minority politics is moving, there is another, equally appealing and forceful trend - however a radical one; as far as political forces controlling & shaping Christian minority politics in Kerala are concerned.

152. Prasad (Ayyappa) and Pillai (Ajith) - "Raising Battalions for the RSS and Muslim League", *N. Delhi, Sunday Observer*, 27th April '86.

III

Thus it is quite clear that it would not be possible to understand the position of the Christians vis-a-vis politics without taking into account the importance of the ecclesiastical organization itself.¹⁵³ For the institutional framework plays an important role and provides a definite unambiguous and institutionalized leadership. Within this leadership in Kerala, since the last eight years, a small, but growing, group of priests have nearly waged war on what they call the Church's pro-rich bias. Taking their cues from Marx and the new credo of Liberation Theology sweeping Latin America, these clergy people have taken up a variety of causes ignored previously by the Church.

That differences existed, within this institutionalized leadership was becoming evident when many came out and condemned the Emergency in 1977. Gradually there were many prominent persons like Tom Kochery, S.Kappen, Dominic George, Alice Lukose and Philomena Mary among many other clergy people who voiced their differences openly & boldly. For instance, we have Fr. S.Kappen

153. Francois (Houtart) and Genevive (Lemercurier) - "Socio-Religious Movements in Kerala - A reaction to the Capitalist mode of production", Social Scientist, Vol: 6, No.12, July '78, Trivandrum, p.37.

pointing out the "appaling misery and want of the masses." He comes out against concentration of power and also against the set of values disseminated by "our schools and college of capitalist origin." ¹⁵⁴

The Church establishment's vested interests and collaboration with ruling classes, poses before a socially conscious Christian the dilemma of how to relate his christian beliefs to the society he is confronted with. ¹⁵⁵ Kerala, having the largest Christian population in the country and having a most status quoist church had therefore towards the end of the last decade experienced the first instances of a re-evaluation of the nature of 'Christian politics' - this then became a trend setter for the dramatic developments in the eighties.

As is well known the Christian Church, which in the recent past, has been subject to a number of sharp inner contradictions and tensions, as newly radicalised and fighting sections of the people have come to challenge old beliefs and practices. The anti-revolutionary

154. Rev. Fr. S.Kappen - "The goals of Revolution" - Religion and Society, vol. xx No.1, March '73, Bangalore.

155. Mathew (P.M.) - "Liberation Theology in Practice", Mainstream, vol.xxiii, No.49, Aug.'85, N.Delhi.

positions and dogmas of the Church and the concern to protect the existing social order have come under increasing attack from those who consider themselves Christian radicals.¹⁵⁶ It is clearly such a trend that is witnessed in Kerala, as far as politics and the participation of self proclaimed "Christian" group is concerned.

There is thus a plea today that Christians being a prophetic community should take the side of the poor in their struggle for a just society, voiced by people like Rev. Fr. S.Kappen in Kerala.¹⁵⁷ The impact of all this on the mainstream Christian Church is clear - it has to acknowledge these questions and the Church and leadership in Kerala incorporates at least the language if not the concerns of prophetic radicalism. Thus in Kerala, we notice an effort on the part of many Christian religious groups to make Christianity move away from being a bulwark of an oppressive status quo to being a part of a movement for radical political and social changes.

Religion can very often be as Engels had commented "nothing but the fantastic reflection in men's mind of

156. Ram (Susan) - "Religion, Development and Political Organization" - Social Scientist, Trivandrum, vol.7, No.5, Dec. '78.

157. Kappen (S.) - "Christian Responses", Seminar, April '83, New Delhi.

those external forces which control their daily life, a reflection in which the terrestrial forces assumed the form of super-natural forces."¹⁵⁸ However although religion can generally be described as an opium of the masses, but there have been great historical movements where religious faith has played the role of a leader in the people's struggle.¹⁵⁹ It is therefore that Engels distinguished between Christianity as an ideology (of the slaves, oppressed classes) and Christianity as an institution.¹⁶⁰ It is indeed very interesting to observe that both aspects of religion are in existence in Kerala's Christianity.

The great historical religions have been those that have been rich enough both to express and to sanction the existing social structure and to provide a vision of an alternative even if that alternative could not be realised within the present world.¹⁶¹ Thus rival theologies often express rival political visions of the world. It appears that it is in the contrast between what society tells a man he is and what religion tells him he is, that he is able to find grounds both

158. Engels (F.) -Anti Duhring, Moscow, 1969, p.374.

159. Garaudy (R.) -From Anathema to Dialogue, Collins, , 1967, p.98.

160. Ibid. p.100.

161. Spengler (O) in Mac Intyre (Alasdair) ed. - Marxism and Christianity, Penguin, , 1969, pp.10-11.

for criticizing the status quo and for believing that it is possible for him to act with others in changing it. It is this potential of Christianity that many in Kerala are seeking to exploit in order to help the oppressed people fight for their rights.

A Marxist would point out in a class society religion buttresses the established order by sanctifying it and by suggesting that the political order is somehow ordained by Divine Authority and it consoles the oppressed and exploited by offering them in heaven what they are denied upon earth. At the same time by holding before them a vision of what they are denied, religion plays at least partly a progressive role in that it gives the common people some idea of what a better order would be.¹⁶² But, when such an order becomes achievable then religion becomes a reactionary force and starts sanctifying the existing social order, and it is thus that religion becomes a conservative force. Here we may point out that in origin, all religions are often revolutionary.

This above mentioned fact led Engels to observe that the history of early christianity had many commonalities with the labour movement of his times. For, like the latter, Christianity was at first a movement of the

162. Ibid. p.80.

oppressed, it began as a religion of the slaves and the poor and outlawed, of the people defeated and crushed by the force of Rome. It is this spirit and history of Christianity that some of the socially and politically conscious Christian leaders in Kerala are trying to invoke.

In a bid to do this, they are trying to manifest their religion once again with a social purpose and to instill in it a socio-political content so as to enable Christianity to once again be a liberating force that it was.

It is not as if this trend came about in an isolated or sudden manner. By the mid 1960's the ecumenical movement was already pointing to the importance of political action in promoting social change. It was also emphasized that nations of the third world should shake off their dependencies on the advanced nations. It was clear that the churches should besides pressing for more decided action for development, undertake development. The Church has shown an awareness that poverty in the world is increasing, underdevelopment persists and that economic growth brings benefits only to a minority at the cost of majority; this realization has led many sections of the Church to take a radical

stand. This is referred to as the militant Church and it identifies with the poor, fights with them and for them.¹⁶³ This implies mass mobilization where the Church would have to come forward to initiate and give a direction to the struggle. Thus in many parts of the world, the Church is increasingly occupied with the pursuit of a more just society and with the material problems of humanity.¹⁶⁴

It is clearly such an understanding that we see in a section of the Kerala clergy impressed and inspired to a certain extent by what is popularly known as 'Liberation Theology which is not about liberation but for liberation.'¹⁶⁵ This involved three things - sociological analysis to uncover the various levels of exploitation and unmark the oppressors. The educational task of making the exploited aware of what is happening to them and then the struggle against the oligarchies who were in alliance with the oppressors - this struggle would obviously take many forms and political action would necessarily have to be one of them.

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163. To Break the Chains of Oppression - World Council of Churches, Geneva, 1975, p.63.
164. Norman (Edward) - Christianity & The World Order, Oxford University Press, 1979, p.11.
165. Hebblethwaite (Peter) - The Christian Marxist Dialogue and Beyond, Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 1977, pp.40-41.

It would be correct on our part to claim that today any discussion of Christian minority politics in Kerala will be incomplete without a look at this trend and its impact on the Church and the traditional leaders of the Christian community. The impact of this was felt in the questioning of some clergy people of the generally accepted Church and Christian stand on Kerala Politics. That there was considerable following of this alternate trend became evident in the interest that some popular struggles of downtrodden people aroused in a certain section of the Kerala clergy. The most well-known of these has been the fishermen's agitation, which has benefitted from the sustained support and leadership of the clergy persons.

The years 1981-84 witnessed two major month-long agitations with active participation of thousands of fishermen including women and children which was led by the Kerala Swatantra Matsya Thozhilali Federation. (Kerala Independent Fishermen's Federation) - non-party-affiliated, registered trade union. The fishermen had to take to the agitational course because the fishing industry was going through a severe crisis period. Though the number of fishing implements and fish workers have increased, there was a declining trend in the fish catches. At the heart of the problem was the new type

of mechanisations which took place in the Kerala Fisheries affecting its catch and income. The expectation that the mechanised boats would exploit resources beyond the reaches of the country crafts did not materialise. The small trawlers in fact competed with the traditional crafts in the coastal waters for the same fishing grounds and the same species. As a result there is the problem of overfishing in inshore waters upto 50m. depth and thus decline in fish catches.¹⁶⁶ Infact the pressure of fishermen in the small-scale sector, the indiscriminate bottom trawlers, the introduction of purse-seines which catch pelagic species in large scale and other factors had resulted in a drastic fall in fish catches per fisherman from 2.6 tonnes in 1969-72 to 1.6 tonnes per annum in 1980-82.¹⁶⁷

After remaining passive for many years, compared to workers in many other traditional industries who fought many successful battles in the labour front, the fishermen got unionised and began to take up issues in the fishing industry only by 1980. The initiative did come from some progressive clergy people. This was possibly because the majority of the fishermen were

166. Fishermen's Agitation in Kerala - issued by the KMF for the Press in Delhi, p.1.

167. Ibid.

Christians. However even though the fishermen's union was initiated and organized by the clergy it had a secular outlook as it evolved and got registered as a trade union. Many progressive priests and nuns who actively took part in this process were always under the criticism of the church authorities for their involvement in trade unionism and it is still so.

These priests and nuns saw in the fisherpeople's movement a struggle of those have been marginalised by the present pattern of development. In spite of some ambiguities of God's "working in our times"¹⁶⁷. They believed that the poor who are suppressed recognised this spirit and struggled in solidarity, inspired with the same hope that in former times led the People of God out of bondage into freedom. The priests and nuns who joined the fisherpeople's agitation against the govt. were described as a sign of the solidarity of the Church with those who struggle for a more just society, and a strengthening of their hope for a new life to emerge out of their death.

It was thus an illustration of a situation where a section of the Kerala clergy had incorporated among its duties and responsibilities, besides the usual religious activities, a deep socio-political concern, as well. This has definitely been very different from

167. Reflection on The significance of the fishermen's struggle in Kerala and the Implications of the Kerala Bishop's Statement - ISI, New Delhi, Sept.. '84. p.1.

the earlier instances when the clergy and the Church by and large had taken status quoist, conservative and even reactionary positions on issues of social and political significance. This is definitely contrasted with the situation we see in the eighties when at least a substantial, deeply committed and thinking section of the clergy felt the urge to relate it's spiritual tasks and theological studies with the social and political reality of the life outside the boundaries of their Churches - in a radical and consciously political manner. Thus, we can add that it is for the first time that Christian minority politics in Kerala, guided and influenced by the Church as it is, has succeeded in adopting a radical and militant stand on social and political issues.

In this context, an interesting fact can be mentioned is that at all stages the Church kept up it's close association with the fisherpeople's agitation, however it was the the priests and nuns who associated with the struggle at all levels and in diverse capacities, the Bishops kept away from the agitation. In the wake of the agitation's initiation and participation of the nuns and priests in it, the powerful Church in Kerala clamped severe restrictions on it's clergy in an

apparent bid to curb the growing involvement of a section of it's priests and nuns in militant, popular political struggles. The Bishops of Kerala, met at the Catholic Bishop's House on July 10th 1984 and commented on the participation of priests and nuns in the anti-government agitation by fisherpeople, they decided that under no circumstances was fast upto death and use of violence or participation in demonstrations and protests involving use of such means to be allowed.

This agitation has in a certain sense been a turning point as far a Christian minority politics in Kerala is concerned. The agitation saw both men and women of the Christian orders taking to the streets and even resorting to hunger strikes. A Bishop's directive took strong exception to all this, specially to women getting involved in such popular struggle.

Kerala's Christian minority politics has not been the same ever since the clergy associated with the fisher people's agitation, it took a radical turn when clergy women like Sr. Alice actively associated with the movement and spoke out against the establishment Church and questioned most of the earlier political stands of the Kerala Church. The questions that Sr. Alice

posed have become a serious challenge to the Kerala Church. Nuns and priests who believe alongwith Sr. Alice that the Church has become redundant are seeking to imbue the Church with a social purpose. They believe that while the clergy should keep away from conventional politics of the kind that is commonly associated with politicians, however they are of the opinion that there is a kind of "politics" totally different from the politician's politics, a politics understood as the management of human affairs for the happiness and well-being of man, with a special emphasize on the happiness of the poor, the weak and the oppressed.¹⁶⁹

There is a growing recognition of the fact among such circles (as described above) that in Kerala the Church has by and large been on the side of the rich. Thus this agitation led by the young priests and nuns should be seen as a writing on the wall as far as the state of affairs of the Kerala Christian minority politics is concerned. Thus instead of always representing the conservative status quoist position, a section of the Kerala Church has been trying to challenge this and this would have a significant impact on the political scene in Kerala in the context of the Christian minorities.

169. Sister Alice Throws a Challenge - a Private circulation document;

This is so because they constantly look towards the Church for leadership and guidance on political matters and with this radical or militant section gaining in ascendancy the face of Christian minority politics would undergo a drastic change.

However, this change that is the continuous crusade by the Christian activists for justice in Kerala, inevitably brought them into conflict with the official Churches and the government. The clergy which has taken to this path, seeks to be like Jesus - identifying with the powerless : the simple, the uneducated, the little ones, and the socially despised.¹⁷⁰ Since the second Vatican Council many Christians priests, nuns and laypersons - have taken to politicizing and organizing slum-dwellers, the rural poor and the tribals - as we are seeing in Kerala.

Thus there are numerous struggles going on conducted by the exploited poor in which many of the Church figures have become members. They believe that this continues the work of Jesus who enabled the oppressed to be free from slavery and was killed in the struggle for fullness

170. Kappen (S.) - Liberation Theology and Marxism, Asha Kendra, Ahmednagar, 1986, p.35.

of life for all.¹⁷¹ Indian society is in ferment and class contradictions are steadily being sharpened with clear re-alignments of socio-political forces. The Church being part of the society in Kerala has to take sides in this re-alignment. The collusion of one section of the Kerala Church with the erstwhile Karunakaran ministry and its opposition to popular struggles, and the support extended to these very struggles by yet another section of the Church are a clear illustration of this phenomenon.

Many issues that concern the Church and the attitude of the Kerala Church on many important issues sharply point out the status quo stance of the Church of course of the mainstream section. The Kerala Church, usually has no fitting or concerned political response on social or political events.¹⁷² It chooses to respond certain specific issues only like the O.P. Tyagi Bill, or the Education Bill, this besides giving a certain communal colouring and promoting vested interests, contributes to the strengthening of the minority complex - which in its turn can be held to be responsible for a streak of religio-political communalism.

171. "Statement of the National Conference on The Emerging Church of The Poor", Lokayan Bulletin, Jan-Feb'86, Delhi, pp.76-85.

172. Ibid.

However all is not lost. There are new stirrings and a new awakening of thought and sensitivity in the Kerala Church (and in the Church elsewhere as well) as is evidenced in the struggle of the marginalised who have become conscious of their rights and human dignity and in the committed lives of individuals and groups of Christians and others who have opted to be with the poor. Among them, it is said that there would emerge a new Church of the poor. This hope the statement of the National Conference claims is in the struggling fisher people of Kerala or other such people's struggles.

The National Conference on the emerging Church of the poor aims at the creation of a movement of the poor people where they will be the central reference point for all the Church activities and thus convert the existing feudal character of the Church, specially in Kerala, into a social institution which responds to the upheavels and contradictions in the society by being on the side of the poor and the oppressed thus crusading for justice and fairness.

As can be imagined, this is not the complete or even the dominant picture of the Church vis-a-vis politics in Kerala. When we say the Church we obviously also imply the Christian minority politics in Kerala because the two are quite inseperable and influence each

other greatly. By and large the dominant trend has been a conservative one, with an upsurge of radicalism in recent years.

In the eighties as we had observed earlier, conservatism or status quoist positions have been supplemented by an increasing fundamentalism which has been responsible to a certain extent for the growing communalization of the political scene in Kerala. The Nilakkal episode discussed earlier is in a certain sense a trendsetter for later developments concerning the Christian minority in Kerala.

One such issue that sparked off a great deal of debate and controversy in Kerala was the staging and teaching of a play 'The Last Temptation of Christ' by Nikos Kazantsaki. The kind of reaction and passion that it aroused among a certain section of the Christians forced the government (Congress I - Karunakaram ministry) to react and put a ban on the play. It was alleged that the play hurt the sentiments of the minorities. Even if it did, what was really alarming was the swift and organized opposition to the play specially under the leadership of the Church. Bishop Kundukullam of Trichur succeeded in mobilizing public opinion against the play and staged massive demonstrations against the play.

What is of significance is the fact that even though there were many among the Christians who were not with the bishops who were opposing the play, yet it was the latter who were more powerful and vociferous and the government which depends on the goodwill of this section for continuing in office readily accepted the demand for banning the play.

Thus in the context of Christian minority politics we notice the emergence of what may be referred to as fundamentalism or religious intolerance in Kerala. This trend is relatively new although we can see this as a development or evolution of the earlier conservative or status quoist trend in Christian minority politics in Kerala. The eighties then present a very interesting picture - one full of contradictions, where the Kerala Congress maintains its important position in Kerala politics as a representative of the Christians, there has been a continuation of the earlier trend wherein the Church and clergy play a dominant role in the political affairs of the state. However, this has today split into two different kinds of trends - a new radical and militant section that is taking part in popular people's struggles and sympathizing with the oppressed. On the other hand there is also today a section of the Church hierarchy which is becoming more

and more intolerant and fundamentalist seeking to play the 'minority - card' in the most opportunistic and unreasonable manner. This period has seen the unfortunate trend of a worsening of relationship between the Hindus and the Christians:

On the whole, we see that the heightened economic powers and prosperity of the Christian minority in Kerala has created a certain amount of tension and class-antagonism along religious lines among the various communities in Kerala, resulting in an inward looking trend. There is also, among yet another section, a realization of the inequality and injustice in the society and a heart felt need to come together in order to fight this situation.

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SUMMING UP AND CONCLUSION

In the preceding chapters we have tried to examine minority politics in Kerala, specifically of the Christians of that state. We can conclude that politics in Kerala is based to a great extent upon the minorities (that are diverse, substantial and demographically concentrated in specific geographic locations) - in fact we could say that the minority factor is a very important factor while discussing the political scene in Kerala - not only for electoral calculations, but even for government decisions, opposition politics and day to day administration.

The first chapter examines the systemic and constitutional dimensions of the religious minorities in Kerala. This has been done keeping in mind the overall the constitutional and political situation of the minorities in the larger Indian context. We have noted that India is the home of diverse minorities. To ensure their rights, the constitution has granted extensive rights to the minorities. However the decision to incorporate these rights was not an easy one. As

explained in the first chapter, the constituent assembly had elaborate discussions regarding the desirability and nature of such rights. As an outcome of these discussions the Indian constitution has a fairly long list of rights that are primarily meant to safeguard the rights of minorities.

We have seen that the Indian constitution has consciously described India as a secular state. Our discussion shows that the historical background of communal tension and partition were greatly responsible in moulding a secular Indian constitution. However, we have also noted that there is a considerable amount of disagreement regarding the nature of secularism in India. There is one school of thought represented by writers like Luthera who believe that a secular state is not possible in India, because the religion of the majority i.e. Hinduism is not organised and has no institution or organisation which can be separated from the state. However, there are others like D.E. Smith who believe that India is basically a secular state, but does not keep itself away from religion in all instances.

Thus it is seen that the Indian state is caught in a dilemma. By the strict principles of secularism

It cannot interfere with any social custom (except) on the grounds of public order, morality and health as stated in the constitution. On the other hand, modern conception of social justice demands radical changes in the Indian Social structure, which would imply interference in the religious affairs.

Our study also shows that in India secularism has often meant the maintenance of an equidistance towards all religions as far as the state is concerned. This has however created problems for the functioning of a secular polity, as is evident in Kerala, where almost all the world religions are represented, among these Christians form an important section. We have seen that the Christians came to Kerala even before Christianity reached Europe. Christians in Kerala are a part of the mainstream Kerala society. The Christians in Kerala are Syrians and non-Syrians who are found in Catholic and non-Catholic communities.

On the basis of this study, we see that the Christians had started organizing themselves along political lines much before independence and were part of the broader, progressive anti-imperialist, anti-feudal movement in Kerala. However, we note that from the early years onwards

the Church had a dominant role to play in the socio-economic and later political life of the Christians in Kerala.

Thus we see that the Indian constitution declares our nation to be a secular state. In spite of this, the fact is that the governments at both the central and state levels cannot really be described as secular governments because their dependence on religious groups (for electoral and political purposes) and religious heads still continue. On the basis of our study we can say that the importance given to this consideration is very high, as far as Kerala is concerned.

In the second chapter we have examined a very major event that shook Kerala politics in the 1950s. 1957 saw the emergence of the first Communist ministry in Kerala. This ministry proposed certain land and education reforms which would have an adverse impact on the commercial and economic interests of a substantial section of the Christians (along with many others) in Kerala. This was inevitable given the fact that it was they who owned large estates and took a keen interest in the management of schools. In our study, we have seen that the 'Liberation Struggle' that was launched against the ministry acquired distinct communal overtones

and has thus set a precedent for much of the minority politics that has followed in Kerala.

On this basis, we can conclude that the minority factor is very effectively and easily exploited politically in order to safeguard and enhance the economic interests of the land-owning, rich upper class christians. It is such people who give strength and support to the Kerala Congress, which came up in 1965 as a result of Chacko-Sankar factional fight in the Congress. The Chacko group that walked out is today the Kerala Congress which seeks to represent the interests of a certain section of the Christians.

In the light of our study, we can conclude that today the Christians in Kerala identify to a great extent with the Kerala Congress. We can also say that the emergence of the Kerala Congress has meant a decline in the role of the Church in active politics. However, we can also conclude after a study of the Kerala Congress that it is certainly not as communal or anti-national as some other communal parties. It can at best be described as a political party of the economically advanced Christians of Kerala who have come together on a common political platform and do not fight shy of exploiting their status as a religious minority in order to preserve and enhance their economic position. Our study also leads us to conclude that the Kerala Congress, because of this minority factor is a very important component

of any coalition government in Kerala.

Chapter three of our study has examined the Kerala Congress and its electoral and political performance in the years 1978-85. Our study leads us to conclude that the Kerala Congress, which is the result of infighting in the Congress, is itself plagued by factional fights. We also observe that the Kerala Congress has no permanent political partners as far as the changing coalition arrangements in Kerala are concerned. It would be right to conclude that all the major demands that the Kerala congress has spoken for and the portfolios that it has sought have been closely linked with the economic and commercial interests of the upper class land owning, businessmen, who are very often christians in the case of Kerala.

We note on the basis of this study that the Church in Kerala takes an active interest in the political affairs of the state - in fact we see that it goes out of its way to make its political preferences known. The Church tries to guide the political life of its members. In recent years, the increase in the importance of Kerala Congress meant a decline in the political role of the Church, however, now the Church has started asserting itself once again. This reassertion is

what we have tried to examine the fourth chapter. We see that this resurgence has been marked by one fact - the interest shown by the Church in championing the cause of the poor. This only indicates a radical transformation of a certain section of The Church.

Our study of communal scene in Kerala shows us that the state has been free of communal tension and violence unlike other parts of the country. However, on the basis of the fourth chapter we can conclude that today this communal amity is being gradually pushed away by an increasing communal upsurge, involving both the Christians and the Hindus. The communal tension in the wake of the now well known Nilakhal episode is a case in point.

The example of the fishermen's agitation and the role played by the radical section of the clergy in mobilizing and supporting these fisherpeople indicates a trend that is different from the trend that is exemplified by the Nilakhal episode. Here we see that the Church (although only a section of it) has come forward to help the exploited poor. Thus we can conclude that the Church in Kerala is today characterized by two very different trends - one that is conservative, reactionary and seeks to support the vested interests, yet another that is

radical and forward looking. However it is too early to applaud this latter role, for it does seem that in a context like that of our nation's any use of religion - by it majority or minority can only create situations that have the potential of being dangerous by acquiring strong communal overtones.

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