Chapter V

General Dalit Movements and Dalit Political Parties

The study of the various categories of dalit movements of the state illustrates that, apart from the caste based organisations, general dalit movements which are opposed to caste divisions that exist among dalit masses, constitute a major organizational field for the social consolidation of dalits in Kerala. Simultaneously, in order to politically empower the dalit masses and to transform them as an organized political group, a few dalit political parties, though low profile, have made their presence felt in the political and election arena of the state. The present chapter examines the activism of the general dalit movements and dalit political parties and their role in the socio-political consolidation of the downtrodden castes through their timely and appropriate interventions. The analysis initially dwells on general dalit movements.

5.1 Major General Dalit Movements

Dalit movements which are characterized by its thrust on dalit unity and which are opposed to all kinds of caste differences are referred to in this study as the general dalit movements. They claim to be the champions of dalit fraternity and try to build a common platform for the dalit community without the distinctions of varied subcaste loyalties, religious differences and diverse political divisions. They accommodate dalit masses who belong to different castes, communities and religions including the converts to other religions especially dalit Christians. They strive to mobilise the downtrodden castes as an organized political entity highlighting the
strength of ‘dalit communitarian politics’ in the midst of the diverse divisions created among them by different political parties. Dalits should organize themselves as a political power. The ideology, policies and programmes of these movements are based on the common consciousness and identity of downtrodden castes. However, in the absence of concrete and vibrant action plans to realise these noble goals, they often fail in achieving the targets. Further compared to caste organizations, general dalit movements, except a few, do not often exhibit a strong and regular organizational structure or mass membership support. This remains a barrier to achieve the goals set by the organization. The study analyses the major general dalit movements functioning in the state in terms of the various parameters of a leading dalit organization as given in this study. Among them, Kerala Dalit Panthers (KDP), Indian Dalit Federation (IDF) and Dalit Aikya Samithy (DAS) constitute the three major movements.

5.1.1 Kerala Dalit Panthers (KDP)

The origin of KDP was from Regional Engineering College, (REC) at Calicut (presently NIT-National Institute of Technology) in 1986. The dalit students belonging to different states of India while pursuing their studies in the college used to share their ideas and organize discussions on the life experiences of their dalit brethren in their native places. They discussed the nature of their movements, literature and above all the Ambedkarite ideology. Consequently they formed a student organization called the Ambedkarite Student Movement of India (ASMI). Such deliberations and students activism in South Kerala were centred around NSS College, Pandalam and it functioned under the name ‘Dalit Cultural Front’ (DCF) in 1987. Thus ASMI and DCF jointly formed the Kerala Dalit Panthers (KDP) on 18th May 1988 at Pandalam in the presence of Arun
Kamble, the then All India President of Dalit Panthers of India. The founding leaders of the organization were K. Ambujakshan, Girishkumar Kottayam, Anil Kumar Vadakara and so on. K. Ambujakshan was elected as the founding convener.

The formation of KDP was influenced by different factors. The organization emerged as a reaction against the atrocities committed against the dalits in different parts of India. The dalit students who studied at REC, Calicut hailed from different states like Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andra Pradesh etc and they brought the emerging dalit literature of their respective states and circulated them among the students. Consequently, they became aware of the cruelties done to the subaltern sections and determined to resist it. Further, as educated youth, they were influenced by different dalit periodicals and publications of the period like ‘Jumdhak Lekhar’ published from Jellundar, Punjab, ‘Praja Bandhu’ with L.R. Belly as its editor published from Andra Pradesh, ‘Dalit Voice’ published by V.T. Rajasekhar, and the ‘Final Call’ an Afro-American publication with Louis Ferra Khan as its editor. These writings influenced the ideological formation of KDP. The publication of Dr. Ambedkar’s speeches and other writings started around this time and their richness and vitality drew the attention of a large number of downtrodden castes. The Ambedkarite ideas influenced the formation of KDP and young people who belonged to different dalit castes soon got organized ignoring all caste distinctions. The organization marked a rapid growth and the chief leaders who assisted in the growth of KDP were T.K. Narayanan, Gopinath Meppayil, V. Prabhakaran and others.
5.1.1.1 Growth of the Organization

The fraternity and the organizational initiative of dalit students which started functioning at REC, Calicut began to spread to different parts of the state. They visited other Colleges in Malabar like Farooke College at Farooke near Calicut, Malabar Christian College at Calicut, MES College at Mampad in Malappuram district, Government College at Manasserry, Mukkam in Calicut district etc and shared their views with the dalit students of these colleges. The new organization attracted the students and they began to mobilize the people of their own native places and draw them into KDP. They organized study classes emphasizing the teachings of Dr. Ambedkar every week in their respective villages. Branches of KDP started functioning in different villages. In Wayanad, Government College at Kalpetta constituted an important centre of the organization under the leadership of Ramakrishnan. The activities of KDP revolved and gathered strength around the Vythiri area of Wayanad. The organization also marked a sound growth in different places of South Kerala like Pandalam, Adoor, Mavelikkara, Harippad etc. The formation of the movement spread to Trivandrum region under the leadership of R. Anirudhan and Dr. Sagar. Thus the branches of KDP spread to different parts of the state through its College student network and village groups who mobilized the members in large numbers to KDP. Many families especially young people in their villages gathered under the banner of the new organisation and KDP was quick to establish its branches in different parts of the state.

The ideology of KDP is founded on the rock-bed of Ambedkarism. The mission undertaken by KDP is to organize the dalit-bahujan sections in Kerala by imparting ideological education and awareness of rights by opposing the evils of untouchability, caste discriminations, persecutions
and violations of human rights based on the three fundamental principles of Ambedkar namely ‘Awake’, ‘Agitate’ and ‘Organise’

Further, the objective of KDP as given in its constitution is: to end all exploitations, oppressions and inequalities based on caste, religion, class, lineage and sex; to work for establishing the social, economic, political power for the liberation of dalit-bahujan sections; to build a democratic society based on the principles of equality, fraternity and freedom; to work for a democratic social system which protects the human rights of all sections of people and which guarantees equal opportunities to all.

KDP has always been blessed with a team of dedicated and enlightened leaders to guide the organization. Among them K. Ambujakshan, Girishkumar Kottayam, Dr. Anilkumar Vadakara, Ramakrishnan (Wayanad), Soman G. Venphuzhasserry (Ernakulam), Sasi Pandalam, Surendran Karippuzha, Sreekumar Peyad (Thiruvananthapuram), Ashokan Edavattom (Kollam) and so on deserve special mention.

The organizational structure of KDP is divided into different levels as presidium, state secretariat, state committee, district committees, taluk committees, panchayat/town/area committees and units. The state level administration of the organization is managed by the presidium, state secretariat and state committee. Presidium is a core group entrusted with the task of conducting study, analysis and research for the organization and carrying out its intellectual pursuits. It is composed of the senior members of the organization who shaped its ideology and delegates nominated by the secretariat. The Presidium is managed by a convener elected from among its members. The state secretariat is a high power committee entrusted with the task of policy formation, initiating programmes for the organization and giving state level leadership for executing it. The state committee coordinates the
activities of the organization at the state level. The office bearers of the state committee are the president, vice-president, general secretary, joint secretary, organizing secretaries and finance secretary.

The District committee coordinates the activities of the organization at the district level and the district executive initiates and executes the district level programmes of the organization. While considering the district-wise strength of the organization, it is noticed that the presence of KDP is found in all districts of the state except Trichur and Kasargode. Among these districts, KDP is active in Wayanad, Calicut, Malappuram, Palakkad, Ernakulam, Idukki, Pathanamthitta, Alappuzha, Kollam and Thrivananthapuram districts. The strongholds of the organization among those are Pathanamthitta, Alappuzha, Kollam and Thrivananthapuram districts. In Pathanamthitta district, Pandalam, Adoor, Ezhamkulam, Kodumon, Thiruvalla etc constitute the important centres of KDP. Likewise in Alappuza district, Chengannoor, Mavelikkara, Pandanad etc, in Kollam district, Kottarakkara, Ezhukon, Kundara etc and in Thrivananthapuram district, Vattiyoorkkavu forms the nerve centres of the organization. Further in Malappuram district, Mancherry, Areekkodu etc, in Calicut district, Balussery and in Wayanad district, Padinjarethra also counted as the places where the organization is active.

The taluk committee which coordinates the activities of KDP at the taluk level is formed by five or more panchayat/town/area committees joined together. The panchayat/town/area committees are formed by three or more units, the basic structure of KDP, joined together. Panchayat/town/area committees coordinate activities of the units under its jurisdiction. The maximum members required to form a unit is sixty. There are around 550 units and 25000 registered members of KDP at present. The leaders claim
that there are approximately 3 lakh KDP sympathizers which includes all the family members of the organization. The organization also conducts regular membership mobilization campaigns with monthly and annual subscription fees to attract new members to the organization. The head office of KDP was located at Calicut in 1990. It was shifted to Trivandrum in 1997 and from 2001 onwards the headquarters of the organization has been located at Chengannoor. The important two feeder organizations of KDP are Dalit Students’ Forum and Dalit Women’s Forum. The organization is also hopeful of launching a Trade Union soon. The monthly called the ‘BahujanVoice’ is the official magazine of the organization.

As far as the political leanings of the organization is concerned, the movement has not maintained a permanent political support or affiliation to any political party or coalition. It was rather issue based. In the coalition political scenario of the state, KDP has supported both LDF and UDF coalitions according to changing circumstances and times. However, the organization is keen to support those who protect dalit cause or interest, when confronted with political choices. Though the organization has not contested independently in the Lok Sabha or Legislative Assembly elections, it has contested in different local body elections in Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam, Pathanamthitta and Alappuzha districts. In 1995, it contested in 20 seats and won 3 seats; in 2000 it contested in 40 seats, but lost all; in 2005 in 60 seats and won 11.

The critics have alleged that for a long period a certain amount of militancy existed in the KDP ranks. The leaders of KDP maintain that such a criticism was true to certain extent in the early stages of the formation of KDP. The militancy of the organization was only ideological. It was opposed to the use of violence and bloodshed in achieving its aims. KDP
has always challenged the orthodox social order which imposes social disabilities upon the downtrodden castes. The agitations of KDP resorted to different methods such as protest marches in the villages, blockade of public roads, traffic etc. At times, these social interventions and public campaignings of KDP aimed at questioning the oppressive social systems have met with tough resistance from different sections of society including political parties. It has even led to clashes between KDP and different political groups on different occasions and the leaders claim that they have always been the victims of such confrontations.

In this context, it is relevant to discuss the important orientations and the thrust areas in which the movement is involved. Firstly, KDP always intends to uphold dalit unity as its main objective and emphasizes the cultural identity of dalits as a single community apart from its varied subcaste differences. The movement accommodates all sections of dalits including dalit Christians and dalit Muslims. In fact, KDP aims at building a fraternity of dalit-adrivasi-backward sections. Secondly, it tries to impart the Ambedkarite community education among dalits. KDP gives great importance to moulding a team of leaders to head the future agitations of the dalit community by imparting continuous training programmes. The 15 day residential training programme conducted annually from 2001 onwards is such one. Thirdly, the movement vehemently reacts against the astrocities against dalits. As part of its human rights activities, the organization provides protection to the victims of social oppression and gives leadership for judicial remedies by preparing the fact finding report. Lastly, the movement is also concerned about the issues of gender equality and its related problems.
5.1.1.2 Early Stages : Programmes, Demands and Struggles

The KDP is a vibrant organization which has conducted a wide range of programmes. It organized a state-wide campaigning programme in 1989 against the savarna fascists raising the slogan, ‘India is not a Hindu nation and Babri Masjid is not a Hindu temple.’ It revealed KDP’s antagonism towards caste-Hinduism and underscored its broader and secular outlook.

The KDP organized the ‘Ambedkar Birth Centenary Sandesh Yatra’ from Kasargode to Trivandrum from 1st to 14th April 1991, highlighting the theme, ‘Dalit Liberation through Ambedkarism’. T.K Naryanan, the famous follower of Dr. Ambedkar attended the concluding function at Thiruvananthapuram. The programme was attended by around 5000 members of KDP.

The KDP vehemently opposed anti-reservationists by arguing that creamy-layer discussion was unconstitutional in the light of the Supreme Court verdict on Mandal commission report in 1992. The organization presented the murder case of C.T Sukumaran IAS, before a public trial organised by Asian Human Rights Council in Bangalore with Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer and Justice Suresh (Bombay High Court) as members of jury on 24th March 1994. The ‘Budhagaya Liberation Conference’ was convened at Thiruvananthapuram on 14th October 1994 demanding the release of Budhagaya in Bihar from the hands of Hindu fascists to Budhists. The KDP organized the ‘Dalit-Afro-American Cultural Meet’ aimed at linking the dalits of the state with the blacks at the international level, attended by Runokko Rashidi, the famous Afro-American thinker and his team on 15th April 1997. The secretariat march was organized at Thiruvananthapuram on 2nd September 1997 demanding the installation of Ambedkar’s statue in front of the
Legislative Assembly of Kerala, which was attended by hundreds of members of KDP. The ‘Dalit Unity Sandesha Yatra’ was conducted from Kasargode to Thiruvananthapuram in October 1997 raising slogans such as the implementation of the Adivasi land law of 1975, granting of reservation to dalit Christians according to their population etc. The KDP called for a bandh on 11th December 1997, centred around Thiruvananthapuram area by coordinating different dalit organizations, to protest against the killings of dalits by the police, in the aftermath of the desecration of Ambedkar’s statue in Bombay by garlanding it with sandals. The leaders of KDP attended the fellowship of the human rights activists organized by Amnesty International in Bangalore from 16th to 18th December 1999. The state leadership training camp, ‘Bodhi Sangamam 2002’, was conducted at Palai from 2nd to 18th October, 2002. The KDP along with Dalit Aikya Samithy conducted an ‘Agitation Declaration Rally’ and meeting at Kottayam on 19th December 2002 demanding the implementation of reservation in private sector.

The KDP conducted the ‘Dalit Political Advancement Journey’ from Wayanad to Thiruvananthapuram from 21st March to 14th April 2004, under the leadership of Pandalam Sasi-the then general secretary of KDP. It was organized in connection with the Lok Sabha election of 2004, as a reaction against the continuous neglect by mainstream political parties in granting adequate representation to dalits in elections. This agitation aimed at the political mobilization of dalit community and also at the politicization of issues concerning dalits. The agitation concluded with the dalit political advancement rally and the dalit political conference in Thiruvananthapuram on 14th April 2004. Leaders of different dalit organizations, dalit intellectuals, leaders of KDP and above all, hundreds of members of the organization attended the programmes.
Demanding the implementation of reservation in private sector, the organization conducted the Raj Bhavan march at Thiruvananthapuram on 8th November 2004. As part of the agitation, a memorandum signed by around 10 lakh people also was submitted before the state/central governments. Hundreds of people belonging to KDP attended the agitation.

5.1.1.3 Recent Programmes, Demands and Struggles

The KDP organized a seminar on ‘Reservation in the Private Sector’ at Thiruvananthapuram on 9th April 2005. This demand was accepted and included in the Common Minimum Programme (CMP) of the then UPA government and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh convened a conference of state Chief Ministers to discuss this issue on 31st May 2005. It was an issue widely discussed at the national level and the seminar was organized to present this issue before different dalit organizations of the state as to formulate a common policy and to present it before the central government. The programme was attended by leaders and activists of different dalit organizations, intellectuals, political leaders, leaders and activists of KDP etc.

The state committee of KDP conducted a 48 hour satyagraha before the state secretariat in Thiruvananthapuram from 11th to 12th July 2005. The main demands of the agitation were as follows: implement an integral land reform policy; allot agricultural land to landless dalits; ensure the due reservation of jobs for dalits at the proposed IT project, Smart City, Cochin etc. These demands are relevant in the present scenario where the dalits are increasingly marginalized from agricultural lands and new land reforms are needed to protect their interests. Besides, the job opportunities of dalits are seriously challenged today due to the impact of new economic reforms policy followed in the country. Leaders of different dalit organizations, leaders and
well-wishers of the organization and a large number of members of KDP attended the agitation.

From 16\textsuperscript{th} to 18\textsuperscript{th} August 2005, the organisation conducted an empowerment camp at Adoor, for its candidates contesting in the local body elections. It also organized a legal awareness/human rights study camp at Thiruvalla from 17\textsuperscript{th} to 21\textsuperscript{st} October 2005, aimed at imparting training to human rights activists to effectively intervene in human rights issues and to provide legal assistance. This camp was relevant in the context of the ever increasing atrocities against dalit/tribal sections, women, children, labourers etc in different parts of the state. The KDP has attached great importance in protecting the human rights concerns of the weaker sections. Members of state Human Rights Commission, human rights activists and experts, legal experts, leaders of KDP etc. led the different sessions of the camp.

The state committee of KDP declared a hartal in Kerala on 2\textsuperscript{nd} December 2006 in protest against certain incidents which occurred during the period such as the demolition of statue of Dr. Ambedkar at Kanpur in Uttar Pradesh, the killing of four dalits in Maharashtra and an ever increasing atrocities against dalits throughout India. The response of the people towards the hartal was lukewarm and the movement put the blame squarely on the media which failed to highlight the news of the agitation acting in connivance with authorities concerned. However, the call for hartal by KDP as a dalit organisation should be commended.

Raising the slogan, ‘Land, Employment and Development’ for dalits, KDP organized a prolonged campaign in the strongholds of the organization from 26\textsuperscript{th} January to 26\textsuperscript{th} May 2008. The concluding meeting of this programme was conducted at Pathanamthitta on 26\textsuperscript{th} May 2008. This
programme was organized also to express the solidarity of the organization with the Chengara land agitation at Pathanamthitta district\textsuperscript{11}. In addition, KDP in collaboration with other dalit organizations, convened the dalit community land rights convention at Thiruvalla on 10\textsuperscript{th} December 2008, raising the demand of agricultural land for dalits. This convention also sympathized with the Chengara land agitation.

5.1.2 Indian Dalit Federation (IDF)

Indian Dalit Federation (IDF), founded by Kallara Sukumaran\textsuperscript{12} (1939-1996), has a long history of struggles aimed at the empowerment of downtrodden castes of the state and the movement in its present form has evolved through different stages of growth. The first move in establishing an organization for them was the formation of the Peermade Taluk Harijan Federation on 20\textsuperscript{th} September 1957. It was an organization for harijans centred around Peermedu in Idukki district and it functioned beyond the considerations of caste, religion and politics. The name of the organization was changed to High Range Harijan Federation in a meeting at Elappara on 12\textsuperscript{th} August 1962, in order to extend its activities, throughout Idukki district. Meanwhile, an extensive meeting of the organization held at Vandiperiyar decided to admit certain smaller dalit organizations functioning in the area to the High Range Harijan Federation and to form a coordination committee. Consequently seven dalit organizations joined together and formed a coordination committee at Peermedu in April 1969. Later in 1972 the Harijan and Depressed Christian Federation, an organization functioning around Wagamon in Idukki district also joined the organization. The High Range Harijan Federation was changed to All Kerala Harijan Federation at the 15\textsuperscript{th} annual conference of the organization held at Elappara on 16\textsuperscript{th} and 17\textsuperscript{th} December 1972. As a result the organization which was functioning in
the high ranges of Idukki district began to expand its activities throughout Kerala. The organization was also admitted as a member of the Kerala Harijan Joint Council, the common forum of dalit organizations of the state in 1973. The name All Kerala Harijan Federation was changed to the Kerala Harijan Federation (KHF) on 13th January 1974. KHF was an organization of the working class people of Kerala, comprising the SC/ST and other depressed Christians which was formed without the considerations of party politics and sub-caste thoughts.

Kallara Sukumaran promoted trade union movement in order to strengthen the functioning of KHF and also aimed at the political empowerment of dalits. The majority of the members of KHF was employed as labourers in agricultural and timber trade sectors. These labourers were members of the trade unions of different political parties. When he realised that this situation was a hindrance to the dalit cause in general, he thought of establishing separate trade union for them. There was already an organization called the Kerala Plantation Labour Union (K.P.L.U) which he established on 30th August 1977 aimed at the welfare of plantation labourers. Simultaneously he also decided to start union activities among the timber and construction labourers. Consequently he registered the Kerala General Workers Union (K.G.W.U) in September 1982. Simultaneously, he thought of union with a centralized character in order to coordinate the labourers working in different sectors. He established the Centre of Kerala Trade Unions (C.K.T.U) on 19th April 1983 during the jubilee celebrations of KHF at Kottayam from 17th to 20th April 1983. It was a movement led by dalit leaders who worked for the welfare of the dalit laboures. The union aimed at the liberation of the labour class from the clutches of savarna political slavery. In this attempt, Kallara Sukumaran succeeded to some extent. It also
accelerated the pace of the political mobilization process carried out by KHF among its members. Another important declaration of the jubilee celebrations of KHF at Kottayam was the formation of the Indian Labour Party (ILP) on 20th April 1983. The launching of this dalit political party was the fulfillment of Kallara Sukumaran’s belief that the political empowerment of downtrodden castes could be achieved only through the political organisation of the same castes.14.

Meanwhile, the name KHF was changed to Indian Dalit Federation (IDF) on 14th April 1986. This transformation was influenced by certain circumstances of the period. The term ‘Harijan’ was considered as discriminatory incurring degradation to the status of downtrodden castes. They had been demanding a ban on this usage for a long time. Respecting the longstanding demands of the dalit community, the central/state governments banned this term at the central/state levels. Consequently KHF was christened Indian Dalit Federation. The new name gave a national outlook to the movement and it decided to function in collaboration with like-minded SC/ST organizations at the national level. However, the change of name invited criticism from several quarters. It was seen as a move for temporary gains and Kallara Sukumaran was accused of deserting the KHF and forming a new political party.15.

During this period, another important incident took place in the history of the movement. After six years of the formation of ILP, it merged with Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) in Kanshi Ram’s presence at the Bank Employee’s Hall, Trivandrum on 15th August 1989. In fact, it was Kallara Sukumaran who invited Kanshi Ram to Kerala. Kanshi Ram was in the lookout for partners in Kerala to mobilize his ideology and movement and Kallara Sukumaran readily collaborated with him. BSP-ILP tie-up provided a national outlook and character
for IDF. However there were instances of leaders leaving the organisation in protest against this alliance. Besides, the relationship between ILP and BSP did not grow in the right direction and it got strained gradually. Kallara Sukumaran faced many instances of humiliation from the BSP. It was painful for him to see that the movement which he nurtured was confronted with the challenges of disintegration due to its internal problems. Thus the ILP-BSP tie-up disintegrated and broke down in 2004.

5.1.2.1 Objectives and Organizational Set-up of IDF

The study now focuses on the objectives, ideology, organizational structure and other important features of the IDF. The definition of IDF as given in its constitution dwells on the national outlook, cultural identity and the unifying mission of the organization. The term ‘Indian’ denotes the absence of discriminations and divisions of language, religion etc within the organization. ‘Dalit’ means the black tribes who are the adivasis and adi dravida race in India. ‘Federation’ means ‘joint’ signifying the unification of dalit community who are in fact a multitude of different castes and subcastes. The main objective of the organization is to establish unity and equality in society by completely annihilating inequality and discrimination on the basis of caste, colour etc. Thus IDF tries to realize the communitarian integration of dalits by opposing the caste based divisions of the community. This is a fraternity of all sections of dalit community including dalit Christians. In fact IDF grew as a vibrant movement by opposing all kinds of differences in the name of religion, caste, party politics etc. The ideology of IDF is Ambedkarism. The organization upholds the concepts of ‘five gurus’ or preceptors as its guiding spirit namely Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Ayyankali, Poikayil Yohannan, Pampady John Joseph and Kallara Sukumaran. IDF believes that the teachings of these gurus can liberate the oppressed castes from the clutches of their bondages.
Several important leaders have made substantial contributions to the growth of the IDF. Kallara Sukumaran was the founder and architect of the organization. Apart from him, the dedicated services of leaders like Paul Chirakkarodu (Maramon), V.K. Vimalan (Vaikom), Pallickal Samuel (Kottarakkara), Samkutty Jacob (Thiruvalla) Mamood Kuttappan, Chenganoor Thankachan, P. Bharathan (Calicut), N.V. Saseendran (Calicut), Barttin Hill Sasi (Thiruvananthapuram), Kallara Saseendran, P.G. Gopi (Thalayolaparambu) and others transformed it into an active and lively organization of the dalits in Kerala.

The administrative bodies such as general council, central council, and committee exists at the state, district, taluk, panchayat, branch levels of the organization. The general council of a particular level acts as an electoral college to elect the respective committee of that level. The central council supervises the activities of the committees, the lower feeder units and controls their budgetary processes. The committee manages day-to-day affairs and the budgetary transactions of the organization. The office bearers of the committee are the president, vice president, general secretary, secretary and registrar.

IDF is a vibrant dalit organization of the state functioning in different districts like Kollam, Pathanamthitta, Kottayam, Idukki, Ernakulam, Malappuram, and Calicut. The strongholds of the organization are Pathanamthitta, Kottayam, Idukki and Ernakulam districts. Mallappally, Konni, Punalur, Adoor etc in Pathanamthitta district, Erumely, Mundakkayam, Kanjirappally, Ettumanoor, Kottayam, Meenachil, Vaikom in Kottayam district, Wagamon, Peermadu, Kumily, Adimali etc in Idukki district, Perumbavur, Thrippunithura, Pallikkara, Aluva etc in Ernakulam district constitute certain important centres of IDF. The number of primary life membership of the organization, which is given to a family, is around 6000 and
the total number of the registered members of IDF is about 50,000 spread out in 800 branches. The headquarters of the movement is located at Peermade in Idukki district. There are different feeder organizations of IDF to mobilize its members according to different age group such as Ambedkar Balavedi(ABV) for children, Indian Dalit Students Federation (IDSF) for young students, Indian Dalit Youth Federation (IDYF) for youngsters, Indian Dalit Mahila Federation (IDMF) for women and Indian Dalit Employees and Scholars Federation (INDEF) for employees and educated members of the organization. ‘The Voice of Harijans’, the Malayalam bi-weekly was the official magazine of KHF in the past. Later the monthly magazine ‘Jwalamam’ was started. Due to financial difficulties, its regular publication was stopped. As a man of letters, Kallara Sukumaran authored many books and which are counted as an exceptional contribution made by a leader to the dalit community.20.

It is a unique feature of the functioning of the IDF that it has always paid special attention to educating its members particularly in imparting the visions of Dr. Ambedkar. At the same time, the organization is engaged in a series of agitations and other social involvements to tackle the various issues concerning dalits. The IDF evolved as a vibrant dalit organization, passing through different stages of growth. Its programmes and agitations are discussed under three heads namely the early period, then the period of KHF and lastly the phase of ILP, CKTU, BSP and IDF.21

5.1.2.2 Early Period: Agitations and Programmes

The Harijan Federation strengthened itself as an organization by involving in different labour strikes among the estate labourers in Idukki district. Kallara Sukumaran conducted an eleven day fast demanding the increase of bonus in 8 companies of S.I.T.E in 1962 and the demand was sanctioned. He also conducted a nine day fast against ABT company lockout in August 1964
and the agitation was successful. The Harijan Federation organized a 3 day training camp for its activists at Vandiperiyar from 17th to 19th August 1973. Kallada Narayanan, leader of Sidhanar Service Society, attended the camp. After this camp, the Federation became a member of Kerala Harijan Joint Council, the common forum of different dalit organizations.

5.1.2.3 Events and Agitations During the KHF Period

The following tables show the important events during the period of KHF (Table 5.1) and agitations organized by the movement (Table 5.2). It was an organization which championed many struggles of downtrodden castes. At the same time, the evolution of the movement witnessed the occurrence of many important events.

Table 5.1
Major Events During the Period of KHF

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl.No</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>31 Jan. - 2 Feb. 1975</td>
<td>Volunteer’s training camp at Chinnar in Idukki district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1977</td>
<td>Kallara Sukumaran contested as an independent candidate from Peermade constituency but was defeated in the state Legislative Assembly elections.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>16 April 1979</td>
<td>Formation of the Confederation of the Depressed Classes Organisations of India (CDO) in order to coordinate the activities of dalits in different states</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>From December 1979 onwards</td>
<td>Decided to show its political nature by fielding independent candidates in general elections.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>17-20 April 1983</td>
<td>Jubilee celebrations at Kottayam. The formation of the Centre of Kerala Trade Unions (CKTU) and Indian Labour Party (ILP)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Kallara Saseendran, op.cit., pp.16-21
### Table 5.2
Agitations Organized by KHF

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl.No</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Agitations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>14 November 1977</td>
<td>Secretariat march raising the following demands: consider the persecutions of harijans as a crime, implement the adivasi land law of 1975, implement reservation in cooperative societies, formulate an integral agricultural land reform law etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2 October 1978</td>
<td>Mass dharna before the secretariat and collectarates raising the following demands: reject the gift deed bill, publish the communitywise list of government employees, fill up the backlog on harijan appointments etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>20 July 1980</td>
<td>Collective fast before the secretariat raising the following demands: establish special courts and if necessary mobile courts at sensitive points to check atrocities against harijans, form special police squads under IPS rank officers to enquire about such cases etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>14 June 1982</td>
<td>Secretariat picketing raising the following demands: arrest the culprits in the murder case of Soman, the Sub-Inspector of police belonging to dalit community, return to adivasis their encroached land, grant reservation to dalit Christians according to their population etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1-13 February 1983</td>
<td>Famous ‘Guruvayur Padayatra’, a 350km long march by foot of 100 KHF workers from Sree Padmanabha Swamy temple at Trivandrum to Sri Krishna temple at Guruvayur against the discriminatory practice of serving meals to Brahmans alone at the ‘uttupura’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>13 February 1984</td>
<td>Kallara Sukumaran, Paul Chirakkarodu, T. Manas and others led a march from the church premises at Valiathura, Trivandrum to the Malankara Catholic Archbishop’s House, Trivandrum to draw the attention of Christian churches to the problems faced by dalit Christians.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Kallara Saseendran, op. cit., pp.17-22
5.1.2.4 Programmes and Agitations during the Period of ILP, CKTU, BSP and IDF

The ILP organized a secretariat march on 14th November 1983 raising the following demands: implement an integral land reform law to get the ownership of agricultural land for agricultural labourers, implement pension scheme for all labourers who have completed 55 years of age, implement ceiling on urban assets and plantations, implement reservation in all government aided institutions.

A human rights protection jatha was conducted by the ILP from Kasargode to Trivandrum from 20th November-7th December 1986. This jatha was organized under the leadership of Kallara Sukumaran to highlight the human rights violations suffered by dalits. The agitation concluded with the secretariat march attended by hundreds of activists of the party on 8th December 1986.

It was decided by the ILP to contest for the first time in state Legislative Assembly elections in 1987. Though the party contested in 75 seats, it was defeated in all constituencies. However the party showed its presence in the election arena. In the subsequent Parliament elections in 1989, ILP tried to form a third front called the ‘National Democratic Front’ with the support of 8 minor parties like the Congress (Kuttiyani), the SRP (C.G.Janardhanan group) etc. Paul Chirakkarode of ILP and Manarcadu Pappan with the support of the Congress (Kuttiyani) contested in the Muvattupuzha and Idukki constituencies respectively. Both candidates were defeated and the experiment with the third front ended with the election.

The IDF organized an ‘anti-caste jatha’ from Kannur to Trivandrum from 1st to 25th March 1988 under the leadership of C.K. Gopinathan, the then general secretary of IDF. The agitation concluded with the rally and
dharna at the secretariat on 26\textsuperscript{th} March 1988. The objective of this agitation was to raise the consciousness of the people against the evils of casteism which hindered the development of marginalized groups. It was the first state level programme organized after the formation of IDF.

The IDF organized the northern region leadership training camp at Calicut on 17\textsuperscript{th} and 18\textsuperscript{th} August 1988. Ambedkar Bhavan at Peermade in Idukki district was inaugurated as the headquarters of IDF, ILP and CKTU on 23\textsuperscript{rd} October 1988. Southern region leadership training camp of IDF was conducted at Ranny on 26\textsuperscript{th} and 27\textsuperscript{th} November 1988. CKTU conducted a labour law study camp at Peermade on 11\textsuperscript{th} and 12\textsuperscript{th} February 1989.

The adivasi march conducted by IDF from Sultan Battery in Wayanad to Trivandrum, was counted as a long march in terms of its distance. P.K. Radhakrishnan, the then general secretary of IDF was the leader of the march which was conducted from 25\textsuperscript{th} March to 19\textsuperscript{th} April 1989. The agitation concluded with the secretariat dharna on 19\textsuperscript{th} April 1989. The jatha comprised of 101 members of IDF including 51 adivasis both men and women. The slogan for this agitation was ‘protect the land and pride of adivasis’. Though the adivasi land laws were passed in 1975, subsequent governments irrespective of party differences, failed in implementing the law. The march was a reaction to the discrimination against the adivasis by the governing classes.

Demanding the implementation of Mandal commission report, the BSP organized the secretariat march on 23\textsuperscript{rd} July 1990. Kallara Sukumaran led the ‘security yagnjna jatha’ organized by BSP from Kasargod to Parassala from 7\textsuperscript{th} to 28\textsuperscript{th} April 1992, aimed at protecting and mobilizing the dalit-backward-minority sections and empowering them for the gradual
social and economic transformation. IDF opened a counter for dalit literature at the International Book Fair at Kottayam in February 1993 to propagate dalit literature and to introduce new dalit writers.

The IDF organized the secretariat dharna on 30th November 1994 to protest against the increasing number of dalit persecutions in the state. They submitted a memorandum before the government to end the increasing number of killings of dalits as well as harassment at the workplace and demanded punishments for the persecutors.

A dalit literary workshop was organized by IDF at Kottayam on 14th May 1995. It was aimed at grooming the talented people in the dalit literary field and strengthening dalit literature. It provided an opportunity to the young budding writers to give literary expression to their creativity. The main dalit writers of the state attended the programme. Non-dalit writers also participated in the sessions.

The state leadership training camp of BSP was conducted at Aluva on 12th and 13th August 1995. IDF organized the dalit sangamam and arts evening at Kottayam on 1st January 1996 in order to promote the traditional art forms and cultural heritage of dalits. Kallara Sukumaran contested as the candidate of BSP from Kanjirappally constituency to the state Legislative Assembly elections of 1996, but was defeated. The activists training camp of BSP was conducted at Muttambalam, Kottayam on 28th and 29th September 1996. Demanding the implementation of the adivasi land law of 1975 and reservation in the private sector, IDF organized a dalit agitation journey from Calicut to Thiruvananthapuram in 2003. The growing opposition to granting reservation benefits to the creamy layer of SCs was a matter of concern for the dalit community and IDF in
collaboration with other dalit organizations conducted a meeting on this issue at Kottayam on 3rd December 2006. The IDF organized a meeting at Kottarakkara on 25th December 2006 for mobilizing public opinion for granting reservation benefits to dalit Christians in proportion to their population.

The golden jubilee of IDF was celebrated as a year long programme which concluded with the celebrations at Kottayam from 9th to 13th December 2007. Among the various demands raised during this occasion, IDF called for action from the part of the state government to entrust the appointment of teachers in aided educational institutions to PSC and a comprehensive land reform programme to take forward the earlier land reform efforts which excluded plantations and land belonging to the churches and temples from its purview. The reforms had only helped the middle class.22 As part of the jubilee valedictory ceremonies, different programmes like seminars, rally, public meeting etc were organized. Members of the state ministry, leaders of dalit organizations, leaders of IDF and above all, hundreds of members of IDF attended the programmes.

The state committee of IDF organized the commemoration meeting of the Vayalar agitation at Vaikom on 27th October 2008 to pay respects to the dalits who were killed at the Vayalar firing of 27th October 1946. The leaders of the organization contended that the majority of the so-called unknown people who were killed by the militia in Ambalappuzha, Cherthala taluks of Alappuzha district during this struggle were dalits. This programme was a unique endeavour conducted by IDF to assert the unrecognized role of dalits in this struggle.
5.1.3 Dalit Aikya Samithy (DAS)

Dalit Aikya Samithy was founded at Ernakulam on 26\textsuperscript{th} January 1999 under the leadership of K.M. Salimkumar\textsuperscript{23}. DAS is the gradual evolution and continuation of an earlier organization founded in 1987 by Salimkumar himself, called the ‘Adhasthitha Navodhana Munnani’. It was an organization which highlighted the self-esteem of dalits and exhorted them to become self-conscious of their identity. This movement opposed all forms of casteist structures. At the same time, it was also critical about the Marxian way of looking into dalit problems as issues of class-struggle. This organization functioned in different districts such as Pathanamthitta, Kottayam, Idukki, Ernakulam, Thrissur etc. Later it emerged as the DAS. As the name indicates, DAS as an organization stands for dalit unity which is conceived as a common endeavor to be fostered among different categories of dalit communities and organizations. The Policy Declaration Document of DAS states that a certain organizational structure, preferably a flexible one is needed to move ahead with the programme of dalit unity. It must be an organizational set up with the representation of individuals and groups who become partners in the efforts of unity. It also welcomes all those who are interested in becoming partners in this endeavour\textsuperscript{24}.

Several vital issues which occurred during the formative years of the organisation and other long-standing unresolved issues concerning dalits resulted in the formation of the DAS. Among them, the murder of C.T. Sukumaran IAS, a talented dalit administrator, demand for the implementation of Mandal commission report, the demolition of Babri Masjid at Ayodhya, denial of reservation rights to dalit Christians, impediments to the implementation of the adivasi land law of 1975, denial of reservation to the creamy layer of OBCs etc constituted the important factors\textsuperscript{25}. 

5.1.3.1 Objectives and Policies

Regarding the important objectives of the movement, the creation of an identity consciousness among the members of the dalit community had top priority. It is unfortunate that the dalit identity has often been fragmented into diverse caste-groupings, party affiliations, religious differences and innumerable dalit organizations\(^\text{26}\). The next important objective of DAS is the rediscovery of the self-esteem of dalits. The community had suffered bondages and subjugations of varied types for centuries which destroyed the self-confidence of the people. Further, the organization also aimed at the political mobilization of the community. Political parties often considered dalits merely as a vote bank. Organised communities collectively bargain for political power while dalits as unorganized groups are alienated from the corridors of power. Hence DAS is of the view that dalits as a community should transform themselves into a political force. Besides, the ideology of the movement is based on the teachings of Dr. Ambedkar. However, it must be said that the organisation has tried to apply his teachings in a practical manner taking into account the needs of the changing times.

The policies of DAS may be examined in terms of its opposition to several issues of dalit concern. Firstly, it is critical about the structures of casteism and the ascendancy of brahmanical governing class. Secondly, the leaders of the movement are critical about the Gandhian approach to dalit issues, which according to them, support a brahmanical or bania political line. Thirdly, the movement is opposed to the Marxian way of looking at dalit concerns which often interprets social phenomena in terms of class-analysis. Finally, DAS often criticizes the discriminatory approach of the Christian churches towards dalit Christians.
DAS as an organization functions at the state, district, constituency, panchayat levels. The organization strives to make its activities widespread and active by forming committees at these levels. All sections of dalits belonging to different tribes, castes, religions etc should become members of the organization. Representation should be given for women at all levels in committees. There are no office-bearers as president, secretary etc for DAS as found in other organizations. On the contrary, there is a state convener as the presiding coordinator of the organization at the state level, assisted by a convening committee, consisting of many members. Such convening committees are also found at the district, local levels, organizing the activities of the movement at these levels.

Though the organization started functioning around central Kerala, its intention is to spread its activities throughout the state. However while analysing the functioning of the movement so far, it has been noticed that DAS could not build inroads into every part of the state except a few districts. It is functioning effectively in Kottayam and Idukki districts and its activities are also noteworthy in Ernakulam and Thrissur districts. In Kottayam district, Vaikom, Kothanalloor, Kanakkari, Arpookara etc constitute the important centres of movement. Thodupuzha and Painavu in Idukki district, Kothamangalam, Vadattupara, Vaipin and Vazhakulam in Ernakulam district, Kodungalloor and Vadanapally in Thrissur district etc also form the main centres of the organization.

The organisation has been blessed with a team of selfless and learned leaders and among them, K.M Salimkumar (Idukki), Kunju Pazhanthattil (Kottayam), Adv. T.D. Eldho (Idukki), P.V SajeevKumar (Thrissur), K.M. Kunjumon (Kottayam) and others deserve special mention. The leaders of DAS claim that as the organization is run by a
group of like-minded people, it has not faced any serious challenges of divisions so far and that it has rarely resorted to any disciplinary action against its members. There is a monthly bulletin called the ‘Dalit Aikya Sabdam’ as the official magazine of the movement. In the past, the organization had published magazines such as Rakthapathaka, Adhasthitha Navodhana Munnani Bulletin etc as its mothpiece.

5.1.3.2 Early Campaignings, Programmes and Struggles

The DAS organized a wide range of programmes which included training programmes for the leaders, awareness programmes to educate the dalit masses on dalit ideologies, social and political interventions to solve different issues concerning dalits etc. Leadership training programmes are conducted regularly for different groups such as students, youth, women and other leaders of the organisation. Such camps are conducted at places where the movement has been active, aimed at inculcating different values among the people. For example, the theme of humaneness, regard for fellow beings, compassion etc formed the subjects of different camps. Besides, an important priority of the organization has been to educate the community against bad habits like alcoholism, gambling, adultery, unruly behaviour etc.

The DAS organized the ‘Dalit Unity Sandesh Yatra’ from Kasargod to Thiruvananthapuram from 1st to 25th February 2000 and it concluded with the secretariat march on the last day. It aimed at transforming dalits into a communitarian political force. The agitation propagated the message that the self-pride and consciousness of the dalits should be rediscovered for the restoration of their resources. The agitation also raised the following demands: consider an integral land reform policy which gives dalits rights on land, implement the adivasi land law of 1975, increase the SC/ST reservation in proportion to its population, give reservation benefits to dalit Christians
according to their population in the ‘peoples’ planning programme’ of the government, implement reservation in private sector etc.

The ‘dalit communitarian political conference’ was organized by DAS at Ernakulam on 20th May 2000. It was aimed at the political mobilization of the downtrodden castes as a single unified community. The formation of Dalit Rashtriya Munnani (DRM), an alliance of dalit political parties, was announced during this meeting. Leaders of different dalit organizations as well as leaders and around 1000 members of DAS as well attended the programme.

The DAS organized a prolonged agitation with dharnas and campaigning programmes at the panchayat level from December 2001 to May 2002. This struggle was conducted at Kottayam, Idukki and Ernakulam districts. The organization demanded reservation benefits to dalit Christians as given to SCs at the three-tier panchayat levels.

The state committee of DAS organized a one-day fast at Gandhi square, Kottayam on 16th October 2004 raising the following demands: implement the Narendran Commission report, settle the reservation issue of dalit Christians, grant reservation to dalit Christians in proportion to their population, implement reservation in the private sector etc.28. The leaders of different dalit organizations, leaders of DAS and a large number of people belonging to the organization attended the programme.

The state activists camp of DAS was organized at Vadattupara in Ernakulam district on 11th and 12th December 2004. This was the 19th state activists camp conducted after the formation of DAS. The policies and programmes of the organization are chalked out in such camps, particularly its communitarian political stands. Considering the increasing number of atrocities
against women in different parts of the state, a particular study on women’s social status and sex discrimination was conducted during the camp\textsuperscript{29}. Academics, leaders of DAS and its other activists attended the programme.

An evening dharna was organized by the Idukki district committee of DAS at Thodupuzha on 4\textsuperscript{th} December 2004. The main demands of the agitation were the following: implement the Narendran Commission report, settle the reservation issue of dalit Christians, grant reservation to dalit Christians according to their population, implement legislation for reservation in the private sector etc\textsuperscript{30}. The leaders of DAS and a good number of its members attended the programme.

5.1.3.3 Recent Programmes and Interventions

The state activists camp of DAS was organized at Periambra in Manakkadu panchayat near Thodupuzha on 12\textsuperscript{th} and 13\textsuperscript{th} February 2005, which resolved to actively move ahead with purposeful communitarian political interventions aimed at the consolidation of the community. The DAS organized a seminar on the topic ‘Dalit Unity: Problems and Approaches’ at Mangathotty in Rajakumari, Idukki district on 20\textsuperscript{th} February 2005. The seminar urged members of the community to transform themselves into an organized communitarian political power\textsuperscript{31}.

A discussion on dalit politics was organized by DAS at Kottayam on 21\textsuperscript{st} January 2006. Academics, leaders of different dalit organizations including dalit political parties as well as leaders of DAS attended the programme. The participants of the meeting were of the view that while the organized communities of the state exert great influence on governmental decisions, the unorganized downtrodden castes remain alienated from the centres of powers. Moreover, in the elections dalit political parties often
contest among themselves, without forging a united dalit alliance. The debate was a positive step towards the dalit communitarian political interventions which was to be strengthened in the state.\footnote{32}

The movement organized the youth camp for dalit students at Vadattupara in Ernakulam district on 6th and 7th May 2006. The leaders of the organization engaged different sessions of the camp. A study tour was also conducted to Bhoothathankettu dam near Kothamangalam as part of the programme.\footnote{33}

In order to protest against the denial of reservation benefits to ST students in the medical education field, a dalit resistance meeting was organized by DAS at Kottayam on 10th August 2006. The Medical Council of India introduced a minimum of 40% marks for ST students at the entrance examination for admissions to the medical colleges of the state. This reform was a barrier to a good majority of ST students who hoped to pursue medical education. The organization alleged that the Council did not consider their socio-educational backwardness which acted as a major hindrance in achieving meritorious results.\footnote{34} The programme was attended by legal experts, social activists, leaders of different dalit organizations, leaders of DAS and so on.

The Idukki district committee of DAS organized the dalit communitarian conference at Thodupuzha on 14th April 2007 aimed at fostering unity and promoting political consciousness among the members of the organization. DAS in collaboration with other dalit organizations conducted the dalit communitarian agitation meeting at Kottayam on 8th March 2008 demanding the appointments in the aided educational institutions be made through the PSC. A secretariat dharna was organized
by DAS in collaboration with other dalit organizations on 14th May 2008 demanding on the same issue as mentioned above.

A renaissance message yatra from Guruvayur to Eraviperoor, the headquarters of PRDS, was organized by DAS from 14th to 19th July 2008. It was an anti-caste rally upholding ideals of secularism. The main demand of the agitation was to retain certain school text books issued by the LDF government. Different political parties and religious sections had demanded the withdrawal of text books alleging that they upset religious faith and sentiments.

5.2 Major Dalit Political Parties

There is a growing interest among academics, political analysts, political activists and people at large regarding the emerging prospects of dalit politics in Kerala. In the post-independent political phase of the state, the dalit community as an unorganized group was often alienated from the corridors of power and remained only as a vote bank of political parties for a long period. However, there is recently an increasing endeavour on their part to be aware of their identity and to organize themselves as a political community. Many dalit intellectuals and organizations are now spearheading the idea of the communitarian political empowerment of dalits. They speak about the oneness and unity of the dalit community irrespective of the differences created by diverse caste loyalties, religious identities and organizational multiplicities. Based on the ideology of Ambedkar, they attempt to realize the empowerment of the marginalized groups by organizing and mobilizing the community politically. Dalit activists and theoreticians are now showing greater interest in educating the community about dalit concerns and are rallying them to react against the atrocities and persecutions against dalits occuring in different parts of the
state. They are engaged in formulating an ideological orientation for the liberation struggles of downtrodden castes. All these efforts have created a favourable atmosphere for them to emerge as an organized group having the political potential to influence the decisions of the government.

Dalit politics and its prospects are confronted with several challenges. Firstly, though dalit political leaders and movements are arguing for the consolidation of the community, they are often failing in formulating a coherent ideology and praxis to realise this goal. In fact the number of dalit organizations are increasing but they are failing in presenting a concerted effort in mobilizing the community as a single force. Secondly, certain dalit political organizations are functioning in close collaboration with the mainstream political parties. They compromise the interests of the community for temporary political gains. The party may accommodate a few of the dalit leaders who often toe the party line ignoring the interests of the dalit community. Thirdly, the dalit political movements are unable to present a united alliance before the voters during elections. Even in the same constituency, many dalit political parties compete with each other and the voters are in a dilemma regarding the exercise of their franchise. Lastly, the mainstream political parties are against the strengthening of dalit political parties. They want to retain dalits as a vote bank and are opposed to their political mobilization. In spite of these limitations, it is worth considering the prospects of the dalit politics of the state as an emerging voice of the marginalized groups. The impact of dalit politics should not be measured in terms of the number of votes and seats secured at the polls. At present, they do not seem to have the political acumen to achieve such success. However, the scope of dalit politics should
be gauged in terms of their the active and regular involvement in political mobilization process.

The analysis now focuses on the important dalit political parties functioning in the state. There are mainly three organizations such as Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), Republican Party of India (RPI) and Dalit Rashtriya Munnani (DRM) which are working as the political parties or alliances of the downtrodden castes. The BSP, though a ‘bahujan’ party with a core dalit identity, has been transformed to a ‘sarvajan’ party attracting all social groups and communities.

5.2.1 Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP)

Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) is considered as a political movement which tries to combine the interests of all sections of people including the dalit-backward-minority sections as well as the upper castes. As a national political party functioning in Kerala, the analysis of BSP is done in two parts: the first part discusses the origin and evolution of this movement in Uttar Pradesh, the second part discusses its activities in Kerala.

5.2.1.1 Evolution of the Organization

Kanshi Ram, popularly known as ‘Saheb’ or ‘Mannyavar’ among the BSP cadres, is the founder of BSP movement. He was born at Khawaspur, a village in Roper district, Punjab on 15th March 1934. After his early education at his village and graduation from Roper in 1956, he joined the government service. In 1957, though he qualified for a job at the ‘Geological Survey of India’, he did not take it up because of the unfavourable bond conditions. Later he joined as a chemist at the Explosive Research Defence Laboratory at Kirkee, Pune. The assertive nature of Kanshi Ram’s personality forced him to resign the job in 1964. Afterwards, he began to associate with the Republican
General Dalit Movements and Dalit Political Parties

Party of India (RPI). The tie-up with RPI lasted for some time but later he resigned from it as he realized that RPI could not move forward with the ideals of Ambedkar. Hence he resigned from RPI and started organizing dalits independently which resulted in the formation of the Backward and Minority Communities Employees Federation (BAMCEF) 35.

During the period 1971-78, Kanshi Ram organized the educated dalit employees. Though he worked among the dalits, he was keen, even at that stage to relate the problems faced by dalits with the concerns of marginalized groups such as SC/ST, OBCs and minorities. Consequently Kanshi Ram and his friends established the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes and Minorities Employees Welfare Association in 1971. As the next stage of the evolution of the organization, he established the All India Backward and Minority Communities Employees Federation (BAMCEF) in 1973. BAMCEF was again relaunched with great pomp and glory at New Delhi on 6th December 1978. The organization helped Kanshi Ram to organize a wide network of educated dalit employees in Maharashtra, Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh etc.

Kanshi Ram established another organization called ‘Dalit Shosit Samaj Sangharsh Samiti’ ie, DS4 at Delhi on 6th December 1981. This organization aimed at highlighting the grievances of dalits and bahujans and it functioned as a broad socio-political platform which looked after the interests of other sections of society other than employees. There was a popular slogan of Kanshi Ram propagated through DS4, ‘Thakur, Brahmin, Baniya Chhod Baki Sab Hai DS4’. The slogan speaks about the exploitation of the dalits by a nexus of the three twice-born castes. It asks the exploited dalit masses to wage a united struggle against their exploiters 36. Thus DS4 has been considered as a
forum to establish an independent dalit organization which alone can carry forward the struggles of dalits.

Kanshi Ram and other leaders of the organization clearly understood the relevance of print media in mobilizing the community. BAMCEF published an English monthly magazine called the ‘Oppressed Indian’. The dalit newspaper called the ‘Bahujan Times’ was started from New Delhi. Both publications were later on stopped due to financial constraints. The weekly newspaper called the ‘Bahujan Sangathak’ is regularly published from New Delhi and other places in different languages such as Hindi, Marathi, Bengali, Telungu etc.

The mobilization of bahujans carried out through BAMCEF, DS4 and the campaigns through the media created the preparatory ground for launching a political party for the marginalized groups. Thus Bahujan Samaj Party was established at New Delhi on 14th April 1984, the 93rd birth anniversary of Dr. Ambedkar. The formation of BSP popularized the use of the term ‘bahujans’ as referring to dalits, other backward communities and minorities. He argued that ‘bahujans’ constituted the majority of the population of the country and that they have been exploited by the minority upper castes. To concretize this identity, he floated the argument that ‘bahujan’ constituted 85 percent of the country’s population. They have been suppressed, oppressed and exploited by 15 percent of the upper castes. This unjust social order can be changed only through the political empowerment of the marginalized groups. In order to establish a just and equitable social structure, he advocated political representation to each section of society according to their population. The SC/ST, OBCs and Minorities who constituted the majority population of the country have been the victims of brahmanical persecution for centuries. When these sections of society are equipped with political power, the present social system which has been characterized as a vertical one based on the
exploitations against the bahujans will be transformed into a horizontal system where the equal rights of all sections of people protected.

The BSP is considered as a social transformation movement rather than a political party. BSP’s guiding ideology is to uphold the visions spread by the social reform movements in this country. Its driving spirit is the legacy of a pantheon of leaders of dalit, backward communities who have waged continuous struggles for the liberation of the marginalized groups in different parts as well as among different castes of the country. BSP always revered the fond memories of the Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, Chhatrapati Sahuji Maharaj, Periyor E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker, Sree Nayarya Guru, Baba Saheb Bheem Rao Ambedkar and so on as the prominent leaders of this legacy. There are also a host of other spiritual and enlightened leaders who are considered as the gurus of the movement.

BSP as a political movement marked tremendous growth in Uttar Pradesh, the stronghold and the laboratory of the successful political experiment of the organization. The party also showed its lively presence in other states of the country like Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab, Bihar, Gujarat, Maharashtra etc. Eventually it attained the stature of a national political party. Along with Kanshi Ram, the success story of BSP is closely linked with Mayawati. She was the close associate of Kanshi Ram during the formation of the party in 1984 and declared her as his political heir in 2001. She took charge as the national president of BSP in 2003 when Kanshi Ram fell ill and became its supremo after his demise in 2006. It was a new history constructed for dalits when Mayawati, a dalit woman, occupied the Chief Ministership of Uttar Pradesh. She was the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh for the first term from 3rd June-17th October 1995, the second term from 21st March – 20th September 1997 and the third term from 3rd May-25th July 2002. Besides she was elected to the Loksabha four
times in 1989, 1998, 1999 and 2004 and to the Rajya Sabha twice in 1994 and 2004. BSP achieved a historic victory winning the Legislative Assembly elections of UP in May 2007 singlehandedly. It established a convincing one party rule of BSP in U.P. and Mayawati became the Chief Minister of the state for the fourth time. The feisty BSP supremo achieved for her party what Bhim Rao Ambedkar could only dream of and what her mentor Kanshi Ram envisioned but could not realize in his own life time\(^3\). In fact, the party adopted a significant shift in its approach towards the electorate, projecting its new identity as sarvajan samaj (all castes) which attracts all castes and social groups rather than bahujan samaj (majority castes) which caters to only narrow caste interests. To realize this goal, she successfully combined dalit-backward-minority-brahmin voters together which brought about a miraculous victory for BSP. The Assembly and Lok Sabha election results of BSP in U.P for the past years (Tables 5.3, 5.4) show the gradual growth of the party in terms of the seats won in the elections and its vote percentage.

**Table 5.3**

The BSP’s Progress in the U.P. Assembly Elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S. No.</th>
<th>Years</th>
<th>No. of seats contested</th>
<th>No. of seats won</th>
<th>% of votes polled</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>373</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>386</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>20.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>403</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>23.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>402</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>30.46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Chief Electoral Officer, U.P., Lucknow
Table 5.4
The BSP’s Progress in the U.P. Lok Sabha Elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S. No.</th>
<th>Years</th>
<th>No. of seats won</th>
<th>% of votes polled</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>22.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>24.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>27.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Chief Electoral Officer, U.P., Lucknow

5.2.1.2 Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) in Kerala

The launching of BSP in Kerala was made possible through an alliance between Kanshi Ram and Kallara Sukumaran, the founder of Indian Dalit Federation, a vibrant dalit organization of the state. Kanshi Ram was searching for political partners to mobilize the functioning of BSP in Kerala. He visited Kerala and contacted the Ezhava, Muslim and other different dalit organizations urging them to ally with the BSP. In response to Kanshi Ram’s request, Kallara Sukumaran contacted him and initiated discussions for a merger of Indian Labour Party (ILP), the political movement of IDF with BSP. The ILP was founded by Kallara Sukumaran on 20th April 1983. The discussions for an alliance between the two organizations produced positive results and ILP merged with BSP in Trivandrum on 15th August 1989. The merger was aimed at the formation of a broader platform for the marginalized sections like SC/ST, OBCs, minorities etc. Along with the formation of BSP in Kerala, Kallara
Sukumaran, K. Vasudevan, V.C. Mathai and K. P. Chellappan assumed office as the conveners of the organization.

After the formation of BSP in Kerala, however, the BSP-ILP tie-up did not flourish as designed by the leaders of the organization. A few conveners of BSP turned against Kallara Sukumaran and he had to confront many humiliating experiences from the part of the organization. Kallara Sukumaran attributed the core reason for disunity which surfaced in the organization to the presence of four conveners who were elected as the leaders of BSP and alleged that the organization had given priority to caste affiliations and craze for power neglecting the interests of the party. Consequently the BSP-ILP relations ceased to exist from 2004 onwards.

The internal disharmony and schism within the party continued, after Kallara Sukumaran’s demise in 1996. In 1997, a state leadership of BSP was polarized with Paul Chirakkarodu, Adv. E.A. Abubakar and others on one side and Adv. P.K. Rajan, V.V. Rajmohan Thampy and the others on the other side. However, the central leadership of BSP intervened to solve this problem and a unified state committee was constituted in the reconciliation meeting held at Trivandrum in 2000 with Adv. P.K. Rajan as the president, Paul Chirakkarodu as honorary president, Col. P. Viswanathan as the working president and P. Bharathan as the general secretary. Due to differences of opinion among its leaders, the central leadership reorganized the state committee in 2003 with Col. P. Viswanathan and P. Bharathan as the president and general secretary of the organization respectively. Col. P. Viswanathan was replaced in 2005 by Adv. Saji.K. Cheraman who was appointed as the president of BSP by Dr. Suresh Mane-the newly appointed national coordinator of the organization for Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry.
The organisational structure of the Kerala unit of BSP comprises a state committee with the president, vice-president, general secretaries, secretaries, treasurer and executive members. There are also district committees at the district level, parliamentary committee for each parliamentary constituency, constituency committee for each state Legislative Assembly constituency, sector/panchayat committees (a sector is composed of 4 wards in Municipal/Corporation area) and booth committees. The party functions throughout the state with district committees formed in all the 14 districts. Among these districts, the strongholds of the party are Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam, Pathanamthitta and Kottayam districts. The state unit of the party has 25,000 registered members at present. The headquarters of the organization is located at Kalamasserry, Ernakulam.

The Assembly and Lok Sabha election results of the BSP unit in Kerala for the past few years (Tables 5.5, 5.6) show the poor performance of the party at the polls and also the inability of the organisation to mobilize the electorate. Though BSP constitute the largest political movement of the downtrodden castes of the state, it has not improved its electoral performance in a notable way over the years. The percentage of votes secured by the party in the elections has been too small and no marked increase is noticed in the percentage of votes in the consecutive elections. The policies and programmes of the party which are aimed at mobilizing different sections of society into the movement is yet to produce positive responses. It is a fact that the party is often failing even in mobilizing the votes of the marginalized groups who form an important section of the organization in the state.
### Table 5.5
The BSP in Kerala: Legislative Assembly Elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of seats contested</th>
<th>No. of seats won</th>
<th>% of votes polled</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: [http://www.eci.nic.in](http://www.eci.nic.in)

### Table 5.6
The BSP in Kerala: Lok Sabha Elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of seats contested</th>
<th>No. of seats won</th>
<th>% of votes polled</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1.28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.2.1.3 Early Programmes and Agitations

As a political movement, BSP organized a number of programmes aimed at strengthening the party and mobilizing the people. The party gives special attention to educate its cadres on the policies and programmes of the organization. BSP is also involved in organizing agitations to tackle different social issues. During the early stages of the party, the role of Kallara Sukumaran was evident in transforming it into a lively political movement.\(^{43}\)

The BSP organized the secretariat march on 23\(^{rd}\) July 1990 demanding the implementation of the recommendations of Mandal commission report. Kallara Sukumaran conducted the ‘security yagnjna jatha’ from Kasargode to Parassala from 7\(^{th}\) to 28\(^{th}\) April 1992 aimed at protecting and mobilizing the dalit-backward-minority sections to the party. The seventieth anniversary of Vaikom Satyagraha was celebrated at Vaikom on 30\(^{th}\) March 1994, attended by Kanshi Ram. The state leadership training camp of BSP was conducted at Aluva on 12\(^{th}\) and 13\(^{th}\) August 1995.

In memory of the pantheon of five illustrious leaders of the marginalized namely Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, Chhatrapati Sahuji Maharaj, Periyor E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker, Sree Narayana Guru and Baba Saheb Bheem Rao Ambedkar, saplings were planted at Parivarthan Chawk, Lucknow on 18\(^{th}\) October 1995 by Kanshi Ram, Kallara Sukumaran, Veeramani, Rajankam and Devanathan. The participation of Kallara Sukumaran for the programme was considered a great recognition for him and Kerala unit of BSP.

Kallara Sukumaran contested, but was defeated, as the candidate of BSP from Kanjrappally constituency to the state Legislative Assembly in April 1996. The training camp for activists of BSP was conducted at
Muttambalam, Kottayam on 28th and 29th September 1996. The state activists conference, together with the delegates meeting was conducted at Ernakulam on 5th May 2002, aimed at strengthening the organisation as a political movement of the state. A one day state cadre camp was organised at Ernakulam on 4th January 2004, attended by Mayawati, the national president of BSP.

5.2.1.4 Recent Programmes and Interventions

As part of the jayanthy celebrations of Sree Narayana Guru and Mahatma Ayyankali, the state committee of BSP organised the ‘Sree Narayana Guru and Mahatma Ayyankali Sandesh Rallies’. The two rallies started simultaneously from Kasargod and Parassala on 20th August 2005 and concluded at Kottayam on 29th August 2005. Mayawati attended the jayanthy valedictory meeting at Kottayam on 30th August 2005.

The BSP organized the ‘reservation protection rally’ at the district headquarters of the state on 3rd June 2006. This rally was organized as a warning against the protests of the anti-reservationists who objected to the move of the central government to implement 27% reservation for OBCs in its higher educational institutions. People belonging to SC/ST, OBCs, minority sections and others attended the agitation.

The state committee of BSP organized the secretariat dharna, inaugurated by Dr. Suresh Mane, the national secretary of BSP on 26th July 2006. This agitation was aimed at protecting the various reservation rights of the marginalized groups as follows: enact legislation for 27% reservation to backward sections in higher education sector, implement Narendran Commission report together with special recruitment, grant reservation to dalit Christians, implement reservation in private sector, fill the vacant
reservation category posts in the central/state government services, implement reservation in government aided educational institutions, increase the SC/ST, OBCs reservation in proportion to the population, implement reservation at higher levels of judiciary etc.

The district committees of BSP conducted ‘Kanshi Ramji Sandesh Yatra’ throughout Kerala on 15th March 2007. This programme was aimed at propagating the life-struggles and ideals of Kanshi Ram among the people. The leaders at different levels of the party led the programmes. The campaign was warmly received by the people making it a successful event.

The party organized a huge rally and public meeting at Kottayam on 14th April 2007 to commemorate the 117th Ambedkar Jayanthi. The leaders of the party and hundreds of people attended the programme. It was an occasion for the organization and its cadres to cherish the fond memories and visions of Dr. Ambedkar who always remained as a source of inspiration and strength for the disadvantaged sections.

A two day state level Trainers Training Camp (TTC) was conducted at Adoor on 23rd and 24th June 2007 aimed at strengthening the organization and equipping its cadres to move ahead in a well disciplined manner adhering to the party ideals. At the same time, it is considered as a serious educational training programme of the organization. BAMCEF Pathanamthitta district committee was the host of the programme. The chief resource person for the camp was Dr. Suresh Mane, the national secretary of BSP.

The state unit of BSP in Kerala organized the ‘Brotherhood Conference’ attended by Mayawati, the national president of BSP at Thiruvananthapuram on 31st December 2007. Prior to the public meeting, a huge rally was conducted which was attended by thousands of people. The
national and the state leaders of the party attended the programme. Mayawati demanded the Centre to amend the constitution to extend reservation to the poor sections among the upper castes as well as to the dalit Christians. She rejected the charges against BSP as a caste-based party and asserted that the party was not against upper castes and that it stood for ensuring justice to all sections of society. The vision of the organization was to create a society where all castes would be treated equally.46

A conference of the activists of BSP belonging to Kottayam, Idukki, and Pathanamthitta districts was conducted at Thiruvalla on 17th February 2008. Dr. Suresh Mane, the national secretary of BSP, state level leaders of the party and other activists attended the programme. This conference was aimed at empowering the cadres of the party and it exhorted them to be strengthened ideologically against the attempts of physical assault and battery.47

A sarvajan samaj brotherhood grand rally attended by Mayawati was organized by the Kerala unit of BSP at Kottayam on 23rd December 2008. It was aimed at mobilizing all sections of people into the party based on the principle, ‘sarvajan hithaya sarvajan sukhaya’. Mayawati reiterated the demand for the reservation for the economically weaker sections among the forward communities and also the extension of the reservation status to dalit Christians.48 Different leaders of the party and thousands of people from different parts of the state attended the rally and public meeting.

5.2.2 Republican Party of India (RPI)

Republican Party of India (RPI) is a political organization fully devoted to protecting the interests of downtrodden castes of this country. The analysis of RPI, which has its origins outside the state, is conducted under two heads. The first part discusses the foundation of this
organization in Maharashtra, and the second part elaborates its role in Kerala.

5.2.2.1 Founding & Growth of the Organization

RPI was founded by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the architect of the Indian constitution and the apostle of the downtrodden castes of the country, at Nagpur district in Maharashtra on 12th October 1956. Dr. Ambedkar himself had earlier formed a political organization called the Independent Labour Party (ILP) centred around Bombay on 14th August 1936. It was aimed at the political empowerment of the downtrodden castes in general and the social development of the unorganized labour class in particular. He believed that political power was the master key to all social development. He formed the ILP aimed at the empowerment of the unorganized labour-class. ILP recorded a grand victory by winning majority of all contested seats in the first elections of the Bombay Assembly in 1937, after the introduction of the Government of India Act, 1935. It was a great step in imparting political power among the downtrodden castes of the country. However, the activities of ILP slowed down gradually due to certain internal disharmony which surfaced within the organization and it prompted many of its leaders to leave the party. Meanwhile Ambedkar was appointed as the labour member at the Council of British Viceroy on 20th July 1942 and he found that this office would provide many opportunities for him to help the poor labourers of the country. To realize this objective, he formed an organization called the All India Scheduled Caste Federation on 1st August 1942. This organization played a significant role in many liberation struggles of SC/ST/OBC sections of the country. The ILP and the Scheduled Caste Federation merged and the RPI was founded on 12th October 1956. The national
committee of the party is located at Mumbai. The constitution of the party was drafted by Dr. Ambedkar. It was unfortunate that a few weeks after the formation of the party, Ambedkar passed away on 6th December 1956. The sudden demise of Ambedkar was a set back for the party. He could neither build the party at the national level nor propagate its policies and programmes among the people. The dalit-backward people of Maharashtra took up this responsibility as a tribute to their beloved leader.

RPI is a secular, democratic, socialist, political movement working at the national level based on Ambedkarism. The term ‘republic’ means democratic rule or democratic sovereign state. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the founding father of the party named it the ‘Republican Party’ for it was a movement based on strong democratic principles. The preamble of the Indian constitution emphasizes the values of sovereignty, unity, integrity and secularism of the country. The constitution of RPI article 1(a) also has reiterated these ideals as the objectives of the party and it claims to be the only party in the country that stands for upholding the principles of the Indian constitution. Thus, the declared objective of the party is to build a new democratic, sovereign, socialist state based on the values of equality, freedom, brotherhood and social justice.

The organizational structure of the party is divided into panchayat committee (town committee), constituency committee, district committee, state council, pradesh committee (state committee), national general council and national executive committee. Besides, the central organization of RPI has office-bearers such as the president, vice-president, general secretary, secretaries and so on. As a mass political movement, the party has feeder organizations like as Republican Students Organization (RSO), Republican Trade Union Centre (RTUC), Republican Womens’
General Dalit Movements and Dalit Political Parties

Progressive Federation (RWPF), Civil Service Employees Federation (CSEF) and Republican Youth Progressive Federation (RYPF).

The Republican party as a political movement of the downtrodden castes is functioning in 23 states. The BSP supremo Kanshi Ram was closely associated with RPI from 1964-1976. The Election Commission of India recognized it as a national political party in 1989 and the organization maintained that status till 1996. The party also had parliamentary representations from 1962 onwards. It is worthwhile to note that 7 members represented the party in the Parliament during 1989. During the formation period of the RPI Kerala unit in 1996, the party had 4 members in the Parliament namely R.S. Gavai, Ram Das Adhawale, Adv. Prakash Ambedkar and Prof. Jogendra Kawade. The XIVth Lok Sabha also had a member who belonged to the party namely Ram Das Adhawale. Again R.S. Gavai represented the party in the Rajya Sabha during this period till his appointment as the Governor of Bihar in June 2006. Apart from these leaders, the organization was blessed with a host of renowned leaders like Adv. Girish Khobragad, Dada Saheb V.K. Gaikwad, S. Rajendran, Rajendra Gavai, R.C. Mourya, A.G. Shinde, Doman Singh Nagpwe and such others in different stages of its growth. The party had MLAs in the Assemblies of Maharashtra, Haryana, Punjab, Madhya Pradesh, Assam and Bihar. It also had ministers in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra governments. Many representatives of the party often got elected to the local body elections of the different states of India.

Several demands are raised by the RPI at the national level as given in its Common Minimum Programme: grant land, shelter, employment and education to the whole landless people of the country without any delay; cancel the privatization of public sector institutions; implement caste
reservation in all appointments in government aided private institutions; cancel the redrafting of the Indian constitution; approve 33 per cent representation for women in the Parliament which includes the caste reservation criteria also; enact legislation for the freedom to choose one’s religion while maintaining the rights of SCs guaranteed by the constitution; declare the disputed land at Ayodhya as a cultural and tourist centre by the government taking over the land; solve the Kashmir issue through bilateral discussion etc.⁵³

The party had to face the challenges of divisive tendencies on different occasions. One of the important schisms that confronted the organization in recent times occurred in 1998. It broke into four splinter groups: two RPI groups under the leadership of Gavai and Adhawale, Barappa Bahujan Munch (BBM) under the leadership of Prakash Ambedkar and People’s Republican Party by Jogendra Kawade. All these organizations are centred in Maharashtra. It is unfortunate that the political organization established by Dr. Ambedkar split into different groups casting dark clouds on the noble objective of dalit unity in Maharashtra and the country itself.

5.2.2.2 Republican Party of India (RPI) in Kerala

The Kerala unit of RPI was formed at Alappuzha on 30th March 1996 in the presence of Dr. A. Seppan, the then national senior vice-president of the party. It was established chiefly due to the efforts of Ambedkar Study Circle (ASC), a progressive, cultural organization for dalit solidarity which started functioning at Alappuzha from 14th April 1984 onwards.⁵⁴ The first state committee of RPI was headed by N.T. Prabhakaran as the president. However, the party was dormant in Kerala till 2001. The joint meeting of the activists of RPI-ASC convened at
Ernakulam on 11th November 2001 decided to reorganize the Kerala Pradesh Committee of RPI and it elected a new committee with V.I. Bose and Panamkutty Pappachan as the president and general secretary of the party respectively. The functioning of RPI in Kerala was officially inaugurated by Adv. Prakash Ambedkar, the grandson of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and the national leader of the party, at Thiruvananthapuram, on 30th June 2002. Thus, the activities of the Kerala unit of the RPI became vibrant with the blessings of the national committee.

RPI marked a rapid growth within a short period of time and district committees were established in 10 districts of the total 14 districts of the state except Kannur, Calicut, Wayanad and Malappuram. Compared to other districts of the state, Alappuzha, Idukki and Kollam constitute the strongholds of the party. Besides constituency committees were formed in 16 Legislative Assembly constituencies of the state like Kilimanoor, Chadayamangalam, Punalur, Adoor, Mararikulam, Cherthala, Alappuzha, Ambalappuzha, Harippad, Mavelikkara, Puthupally, Piravom, Thodupuzha, Idukki, Devikulam, and Kanhangad. The party has around 4576 registered members as well as around 10,000 sympathisers in the state. The leaders like V.I. Bose (Kottayam), Panamkutty Pappachan (Idukki), P. K. Chakrapani (Alappuzha), Adv. K. Samuel (Pampady), Attipra Sukumaran (Thiruvananthapuram), Adv. Jayakumar Kavumkal and others made great contributions in building the party. The head quarters of the organization was shifted from Alappuzha to Kottayam (Vakathanam) in 2008.

The party is actively involved in raising various demands of the dalit community as well as other social issues. Some of the important demands as given in the Common Minimum Programme of the party at the state level are as follows: implement the adivasi land protection law of
1975; distribute land to all landless people; redraft the Kerala land reform laws; grant reservation to dalit Christians; increase the lump sum grant and stipends of the students according to the standard of living index; ensure the norms of reservation in the appointments of the personal staff of the ministers; install the statue of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar in front of the Legislative Assembly complex; appoint the state SC/ST commission; implement the recommendations of the Narendran Commission report; drop the mining of coastal black sand; expand crop insurance to save the agriculturists etc\textsuperscript{56}.

5.2.2.3 Programmes and Agitations

It is worthwhile to analyse the important programmes and agitations organized by the party. The state committee of the party has conducted mass secretariat dharnas (see Table 5.7) on different occasions raising various demands of the community.

Table 5.7
Mass Secretariat Dharnas Organized by RPI

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl.No.</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Demands</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>5\textsuperscript{th} April 2002</td>
<td>Install the statue of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar in front of the state Legislative Assembly complex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>22\textsuperscript{nd} July 2003</td>
<td>Appoint the state SC/ST commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>23\textsuperscript{rd} September 2004</td>
<td>Implement reservation in private sector institutions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The party has also organized study classes, campaigning programmes, and other agitations in different parts of the state aimed at mobilizing public support on different issues concerning dalits and other vital social issues. (see Table 5.8)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Modes and demands of programmes and agitations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>3-7 September 2002</td>
<td>Idukki-under the leadership of Panamkuty Pappachan, general secretary RPI Kerala Pradesh Committee</td>
<td>Vehicle campaign to commemorate the 140th Jayanthi of Ayyankali</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>14th January 2003</td>
<td>Alappuzha-before KSDP, Kalavoor</td>
<td>Mass dharna against the privatization of public sector institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>23rd January 2003</td>
<td>Alappuzha-before spinning mill at Kariyilakulangara</td>
<td>Mass dharna against the privatization of public sector institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>30th January 2003</td>
<td>Alappuzha-before the office of Education Dy. Director</td>
<td>Mass dharna against the privatization of public sector institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>27th March 2003</td>
<td>Alappuzha-at Kalavoor junction</td>
<td>Evenings dharna against America’s Iran-Iraq wars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>7th June 2003</td>
<td>Alappuzha</td>
<td>Vehicle campaign jatha against the mining of black sand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>26th November 2004</td>
<td>Kottayam-at the Gandhi Square</td>
<td>One day fast for granting reservation to dalit Christians according to their population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>18th January 2005</td>
<td>Alappuzha-before the collectorate</td>
<td>One day fast demanding the reservation in the private sector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>25th February 2005</td>
<td>Kottayam-before the head office of the Kerala Converted Christians Development Corporation</td>
<td>Mass dharna for granting reservation to dalit Christians according to their population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>11-12 February 2007</td>
<td>Kollam-Chinnakkada</td>
<td>Golden jubilee celebrations of RPI together with the 4th state conference.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>24th February 2007</td>
<td>Alappuzha</td>
<td>Evening dharna against the problem of inflation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>14th July 2007</td>
<td>Kottayam-at CSI youth centre, Changanacherry</td>
<td>One day seminar on the protection of educational rights in the context of the challenges faced by reservation category communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>25th October 2008</td>
<td>Kottayam</td>
<td>Conference to empower secularism and to spread the Ambedkarite visions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>2002-2008</td>
<td>Districts where RPI is active</td>
<td>Jayanthy and demise day memorial meetings of Ayyankali and Ambedkar, study classes to educate the community on issues concerning marginalized groups and other social problems</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: K. Samuel and V.I. Bose, op. cit., pp.7-8


5.2.2.4 Election Contests of the Party

Regarding the participation of the Kerala Pradesh Committee of RPI in the election process of the state, it is found that the party could not contest the state Legislative Assembly elections in 2001 as the party machinery was not prepared enough to contest the elections. In the Lok Sabha elections of 2004, RPI contested in Alappuzha parliamentary constituency fielding V.I. Bose, the then state president of the party as its candidate. However he was defeated and secured only 2291 votes in the contest. Though the number of votes secured by the party was small, RPI showed its presence in its first election contest in the state particularly in a Communist stronghold. Besides, the leaders of the party claimed that the votes gained by the party was crucial in determining election results as the margin of the LDF candidate who won the election was only 1009 votes. With regard to other constituencies in the Lok Sabha elections of 2004, the RPI supported C.K. Janu, the Rashtriya Maha Sabha candidate at Idukki and P.C. Thomas, the Indian Federal Democratic Party (IFDP) candidate at Muvattupuzha. The party supported suitable candidates in other constituencies without forming any political alliance. In the local body elections of 2005, RPI contested in 40 seats at different districts independently. Though no candidate won the local body elections, the party showed its presence in the contest. In the state Legislative Assembly elections of 2006, RPI entered into an electoral understanding with the UDF and supported its candidates. No independent candidate of RPI contested the election. The electoral understanding between RPI and UDF was continued after the elections also. The RPI was a member of the Congress led UPA at the centre in the 14th Lok Sabha and so the Kerala Pradesh Committee of RPI supported the Congress led UDF in Kerala. RPI
did not contest the Lok Sabha elections in 2009. However it was claimed that it had an electoral tie-up with the UDF.

5.2.3 Dalit Rashtriya Munnani (DRM)

Dalit Rashtriya Munnani (DRM) is a political alliance of dalit political parties formed under the aegis of Dalit Aikya Samithy (DAS)\(^{59}\), to contest the elections of the state. K.M. Salimkumar, the state convener of DAS is the coordinator of DRM. It was launched at the dalit communitarian political conference held at Ernakulam under the leadership of DAS on 20\(^{th}\) May 2000. In fact it is not a political party but rather a political alliance to contest elections. The DRM aimed to create a dalit political space in Kerala where the political scenario is controlled by mainstream political parties. Political parties often considered dalits only as a vote bank and controlled them either through their dalit feeder organizations or by making the leadership of dalit organizations docile to them. The Congress party, for example, has maintained the dalits as their dependent and subserviant people and as a community to be redeemed based on the Gandhian approach of harijan upliftment. Dalits constitute an important section of the cadres of Communist movements. The communists view dalits as agricultural labourers and consider them as a solid vote bank of the party. Political parties like BJP, different groups of Kerala Congress, Muslim League etc are also maintaining dalit feeder organizations to serve their political objectives\(^{60}\). Thus many dalit political leaders have emphasized the political empowerment of the dalit community as an alternative to this exploitation by mainstream political parties. Dalits should transform themselves as an organised political power. They should capture political power and turn themselves into the governing class having the potential to
determine their own destiny. Though a difficult task to be accomplished, this is the rationale behind the formation of DAS.

The DRM is also critical of the dalit candidates who have been elected to the local bodies, state Legislative Assembly or Union Parliament from reserved constituencies with the support of mainstream political parties. They are not promoting the interests of the dalit community. On the contrary, their loyalty lies with the party which helped them to get elected. Hence the real problems of the dalit community can be tackled only by political movements managed by the dalits themselves and by dedicated leaders who emerged from the downtrodden sections.

5.2.3.1 Objectives

The main objective of DRM is the communitarian empowerment of dalits. They have remained as an unorganized community for a long period and the various deprivations suffered by the community have slowed down or hindered the endeavours of the community to become mobilized. Besides, the strength and unity of the community have been often challenged by the presence of the several divisive forces which exists among them such as the diverse caste loyalties, religious/political differences and organizational multiplicities. The task of DRM is to mobilize the downtrodden castes as a unified entity beyond these multiple divisive tendencies. DRM believes that the empowerment and mobilization of dalits as a unified community can bring about positive changes in their endeavour to emerge as an organized political entity. The document approved by the dalit communitarian political conference held under the auspices of DAS at Ernakulam on 20th May 2000 also highlighted the unity among dalits as the most important concern of the movement and urged them to transform themselves into a communitarian political power like other organized communities of the state. In fact, the
political equations of the state are controlled by such powerful organized communities.

5.2.3.2 Election Contests of DRM

As a political alliance formed to intervene in the election contests of the state, an overview of its performance at the polls is important. The DRM so far has failed to present any strong alliance of dalit political parties or other dalit organizations in the elections. The leaders claim that such alliances were often planned with other dalit organizations before the elections, however, it did not turn out to be an effective and fruitful coalition. For example, an alliance of DRM with KDP was planned before the state Legislative Assembly elections in 2001, but could not be realized due to certain political ambitions of the latter. A similar alliance of DRM with KDP and RPI was planned before the state Legislative Assembly elections in 2006, but did not materialise due to certain political compulsions of the respective partners.

In the local body elections of the state in 2000, DRM contested in 33 panchayats belonging to different districts such as Kottayam, Idukki, Ernakulam and Thrissur. Though the alliance actively contested the elections, no candidate won the mandate. However, the leaders claim that other political parties, recognizing the presence of DRM, fielded candidates belonging to the dalit Christian community as their candidates to upset DRM in the contest.

The DRM contested in four constituencies viz Ettumanoor, Vaikom, Thodupuzha and Nattika in the Legislative Assembly elections of the state in 2001. All the four candidates were defeated and they secured only a nominal number of votes in each constituency. In the Lok Sabha
elections of 2004 DRM contested from two constituencies: Kunju Pazhanthattil in Kottayam constituency and P.R. Suresh Kumar in Idukki constituency. Both candidates were defeated and secured only a minimum number of votes. Kunju Pazhanthattil got 1264 votes while P.R. Suresh Kumar had 2752 votes. DRM had approached this election raising the following demands of the downtrodden castes: implement reservation in private sector, grant reservation to dalit Christians according to their population, implement the adivasi land law of 1975, implement an integral land reform law which can provide land to all landless dalits, implement the Narendran Commission report etc.\textsuperscript{63}

The DRM contested in 16 panchayats of Kottayam, Idukki, Ernakulam and Thrissur districts in the local body elections of the state in 2005. However no candidate won the contest. In the Legislative Assembly elections of the state in 2006, DRM contested in two constituencies: K.R. Janardhanan in Vaikom constituency and Kuttappan Nadukani in Thodupuzha constituency. Both candidates were defeated and secured only a minimum number of votes in the contest. In addition, it is also noticed that the organisation did not participate in the Lok Sabha elections of 2009. Though the influence of DRM has been nominal in all these election contests, the leaders opine that the alliance has always stood for value-based politics. It is true that the number of votes polled by the alliance have been minimum in the contests. However, it was opposed to the trading of votes during elections. DRM has always supported just and good governance opposing all kinds of corruptions in public life.

To conclude, the analysis of general dalit movements like KDP, IDF and DAS as well as the dalit political parties like BSP, RPI and DRM illustrate the attempts of these organisations at the socio-political
empowerment of the subaltern sections. The general dalit movements uphold the noble vision of dalit unity and attempt to transform the dalit masses into an organized political entity. Compared to caste based movements, tendency for organizational divisions are less among them and they possess better ideological orientations, policies and programmes. However, these positive aspects do not often produce effective results due to organizational lapses, failure in the execution of action-plans, absence of mass membership support or sometimes even the indifferent attitude of the people towards such endeavours. Simultaneously, while discussing the dalit political parties, it was found that their influence is minimum in the political arena of the state. The BSP contests in several seats in the Lok Sabha, State Assembly and local body elections in Kerala. Though the number of seats contested by the party has increased over the years, there is no marked growth in the vote share of the party. The political interventions of RPI and DRM are confined to contesting in only a small number of seats and in garnering an insignificant number of votes. Thus the dalit political organizations are yet to establish their hold in the political field. They do not even present a concerted effort or united alliance to contest elections and it is counted a major obstacle in the path of the strengthening of dalit politics. However, it is important that mainstream society should keep a favourable and positive approach towards their political empowerment, as an emerging force of the lower castes. Even if the outcome of the dynamism of subaltern politics is minimum in the political field of Kerala, the regular and vibrant interventions of these organizations can bring about gradual changes in the political map of the state.
Notes and References

1. Dalit Panthers of India (DPI) was an important dalit movement of Maharashtra in the post-Ambedkar period, particularly during 1970-92. The important leaders of this movement were Ram Das Adhawale, Prof. Arun Kamble, Jogendra Kawade, Arjun Dangle and so on. It was transformed into the Republican party of India (RPI) later. A similar movement at the international level is to be found in the Black Panther’s Movement in USA during the 1960’s, which was a revolutionary movement fighting for the rights of blacks.

2. For details see, Saindhavamozhy, Monthly (Mal.), March-April 2004, p.1

3. For details see, Ibid, p.2


5. Ibid, p.10.

6. For a detailed discussion on the organizational structure of KDP, see, Ibid, pp.16-21.

7. Interview with K. Ambujakshan, the founding convenor of KDP on 26th April 2007.

8. For a detailed discussion on the guidelines for the programmes of KDP, see, Constitution, Kerala Dalit Panthers, op.cit., pp.10-12.


10. For details see, Ibid, pp.1ff. This agitation also raised certain other important demands of KDP as follows: implement reservation in private sector; provide share to dalits in capital and resources; grant 5 acre each of arable land to dalits and tribals; give representation to dalits in governance and rule-execution levels in proportion to their population; allot educational, cooperative and industrial institutions for dalits; install the statue of Dr. Ambedkar in front of the Legislative Assembly of Kerala; implement zero-budgeting in the utilization of SC development fund etc.
11. It was a prolonged agitation by the poor, particularly the dalits for the possession of land which started on 4th August 2007 under the aegis of Sadhu Jana Vimochana Samyuktha Vedi (SJVSV) led by Laha Gopalan, which encroached upon the Kumbazha estate of Harrisons Malayalam Ltd at Chengara in Pathanamthitta district. This agitation received wide public attention as well as the support of many noted socio-political leaders and mainstream political parties including the Congress (I) and BJP. This agitation came to an end on 5th October 2009 through an agreement reached between the government and agitators for the possession of the land, though not to the full satisfaction of the latter.

12. He was born at Kothavarakkunnu in Kallara panchayat, Kottayam district as the son of Chothy and Mammy on 4th August 1939. He was fortunate to have the benefits of education in his early years. During the initial phase of his career, he was associated with the undivided Communist Party of India but later joined the Congress Party. The inability of these parties to address the pain and agony suffered by his people of his caste may have induced him to desert both parties and to choose the way of mobilizing the community independently. (Interview with Kallara Saseendran, former president, IDF on 10th May 2007).


15. *Ibid*, p.77

16. *Ibid*, pp.90-94. For more details on the nature of ILP-BSP relations, also see the analysis on BSP in the latter part of the present chapter.


19. *Ibid*, p.4
20. For details regarding the literary contributions of Kallara Sukumaran, see Elikkulam Jayakumar, op.cit., pp.98-100.


24. He was born at Velliyamattam panchayat, Thodupuzha taluk in Idukki district in 1949 as the son of Kunnath Manikkan and Kotha. He completed school education in his village. During his graduation studies at Maharajas College, Ernakulam in 1969, he was associated with the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist). During the emergency period in 1975 he underwent imprisonment for 17 months for his ties with revolutionary movement. His later years marked him as a dalit activist, writer and an intellectual. (For details see, K.M. Salimkumar, Dalit Prethyasasthravum Samudayavalkaranavum (Mal.), M. Pavithran Smaraka Dalit Padana Kendram, Kottayam, 2008, p.1.


27. Dalit Aikya Samithy, Policy Declaration Document, op.cit., pp.5-8

28. Ibid, p.14


37. *Ibid*, p.129

38. Mayawati was born in Delhi on 15\textsuperscript{th} January 1956. Her family was from Bijnore in U.P and later they settled in Delhi. After graduation in Law as well as Education, she worked as a teacher from 1977-84. Her association with Kanshi Ram changed her career to public service and politics.


40. For a detailed discussion on IDF, see the earlier section of the present chapter.


42. While examining the functioning of BSP in Kerala, the influence of Kallara Sukumaran was evident from its beginning in 1989 till his demise in 1996. Regarding the nature of ILP-BSP relation in the post-1996 period, the leaders opine that there exist a clear division between those members of ILP who merged with BSP and the other members of the BSP. (Interview with Adv. Saji.K. Cheraman, state president of BSP on 16\textsuperscript{th} June 2007).
43. For details regarding the functioning of BSP during the period of Kallara Sukumaran, see, Elikulam Jayakumar, *op.cit.*, pp.92-94. Also see, Kallara Saseendran, *op.cit.*, pp.23-24.


45. *Ibid*, p.8


52. *Constitution, RPI, op.cit.*, pp.7ff.


54. Ambedkar Study Circle (ASC), an organization established for fostering unity among dalits above the differences of party affiliation, was responsible for the formation of RPI in Kerala. ASC was engaged in organizing different programmes such as educating the community on dalit concerns through study classes, intervening to tackle various dalit issues and other social problems. It was also actively involved in organizing agitations to solve problems concerning dalit-backward-minority sections. The main leaders of ASC were V.I. Bose (Kottayam), T.G. Thampi (Ernakulam), P.A.G. Das (Kottayam),
Chandrababu (Alappuzha), N. Divakaran (Harippad), Lakshmi Gopalan (Ernakulam) and others. (Interview with V.I. Bose, general secretary, RPI, Kerala Pradesh Committee on 10th March 2007).


56. RPI, Policies and Programmes, op.cit., p.8

57. R.S. Gavai, the then national president of RPI presented a private bill in the Rajya Sabha on 16th July 2004 demanding reservation in the private sector, an item included in the Common Minimum Programme (CMP) of the then U.P.A. government. The bill was passed in the Rajya Sabha and sent to the Lok Sabha. RPI organized agitations at the national level for this demand and the Kerala Pradesh Committee of RPI organized this agitation to express its solidarity with this initiative of Gavai.

58. Interview with V.I. Bose, general secretary, RPI, Kerala Pradesh Committee on 10th March 2007.

59. For a detailed discussion of DAS, see the earlier section of the present chapter.


