CHAPTER III

STUDENT POLITICAL ACTIVISM IN KERALA

To understand student political activism in Kerala, it is important to consider both historical and attitudinal data. Thus in the first section of this chapter, an analysis of the historical course of the political activities of students is made, while in the second section, a questionnaire has been prepared and answers collected from students to understand their attitudes and aspirations regarding politics. A combination of historical data and attitudinal data will help put the facts collected in the right perspective leading to a realistic understanding of students' political preferences.

In the background of the entire student movement in Kerala is the student participation in the freedom struggle. The first half of the 20th century was a period when students supported the anticolonial struggle and actively participated in it. Then comes the 1950's when students had clamoured for educational reforms. But the political activities of students on an organisational basis became challengingly prominent only during the 1960's. The late 1950's and the 1960's witnessed the
birth of several student organisations of different political shades. Then on we read about the active involvement of students in the field of higher education, demanding concessions, confronting authorities, leading agitations, engaging in pitched battles with the police and finally gaining representation on the various university bodies.

Section I

Students have always and everywhere been courageous and they remained known champions of noble values. They love freedom and progress. It is only natural that they get inspired by noble leaders and attracted to capable organisations. They hate those leaders and organisations preaching narrowmindedness, and oppose all divisive tendencies. The elders therefore usually tolerate students and treat their problems as merely students problems and not as law and order issues.

The beginnings of student involvement in politics in Kerala can be traced back to 1882. There were then three students in the University College who met together very often to discuss political issues. Articles also appeared on their behalf in 'Argus' and 'Western Star'. The essence of these articles was the story of British
exploitation of their country. The Diwan also was subjected to severe criticism and he sought the expulsion of the three students. Their leader was the eighteen year old G. Parameswaran Pillai who was fondly called 'GP'. The other two were N. Raman Pillai and Rangarayan. These are the three students who were expelled from the college for political reasons for the first time and G. Parameswaran Pillai can be considered as the first known student agitationist in Kerala.¹

The students of Kerala had conducted agitations against social evils and administrative cruelties from the beginning of this century itself. In 1916 with the establishment of the Home Rule League the message of freedom had reached all sections of the people. Students had boycotted classes in Victoria College and Samoothiri College in Palghat and the Brennan College, Tellicherry for getting the right to wear the national flag and the national badge.²

In 1918 the students had challenged the presence of police in the meeting organised to celebrate the 60th

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birth anniversary of Sreemoolam Thirunal Maharaja. Students also participated in the Non-cooperation Movement of the 1920's by boycotting classes. In 1921 when the Prince of Wales visited India students in several parts of Kerala protested the visit by boycotting classes and observing hartals.

The picketing of foreign clothes selling shops, 1922-23; the movement against untouchability of 1924-25; the Vaikom Sathyagraha all had clear and evident student participation. Students also participated in the movements organised by T.K. Madhavan, E.V. Ramaswamy Naikar and Mannathu Padmanabhan. About 4000 students had gathered together to receive a jatha led by A.K. Gopalan in support of the Guruvayur Sathyagraha.

The year 1922 is important in the student political history of Kerala. It was in that year that students had come forward to oppose a fee hike. The agitation was strongly supported by the 'Swarad' paper of A.K. Pillai.

The students had supported the Salt Sathyagraha in 1930. It was during this period that the 'Kerala Vidyarthi Sangam' was born. In 1931, the students had led a demonstration in Payannur town to protest against the killing of Sardar Bhagath Singh. In the same year
K.F. Nariman had come to Kerala to preside over a student meeting held in connection with the Fifth Kerala Political Conference at Vadakara.

The students of Kerala, particularly that of Travancore became the admirers of the State Congress from its very beginning in 1938. They used to visit the Vanrose Bunglow at Trivandrum, the office of the State Congress. The congress leaders never allowed the students to make use of educational institutions for political gains. The student movement was all set for a take off at this stage. The Travancore Students Federation was formed along with the State Congress. Its leaders were K.E. Mammen, C.M. Stephen, K.M. Muhamed Basheer, M.K. Kumaran and Prakulam Bhasi.

One of the sad events in the history of Travancore students struggle for political and organisational freedom was the brutal lathicharge against the students of the University College in 1938. The Diwan could not tolerate the moral support which the students gave to the State Congress leaders. The students used to howl at those members of the legislature who supported the Diwan and his measures. The students were brutally lathicharged by the

police. The Diwan issued orders to school and college authorities not to allow students to participate in political activities. But all these police excesses were reported in the national press and it came as a morale booster to the students. The Diwan had also banned meetings of the State Congress for two months in connection with this incident.4

The students fought back the Diwan by boycotting classes and holding black flag demonstrations. Student demonstrations against the repressive measures of the Diwan were very common all over Kerala in those days. Even girl students participated in all these agitations. In the year 1938 while the Maharaja of Travancore was returning after one of his daily visits to the Sri Padmanabha Temple demonstrators which included girls submitted a memorandum to him to dismiss the Diwan. This was the first event of a crowd demonstrating in front of the Maharaja in Travancore.

Malabar

In the Malabar region also students had become politically conscious by this time. In 1936 the All India Students Federation was born at the national level.

4. Ibid., pp.310-16.
It was in the same year that the Calicut Students Union was born. A group of Muslim students had brought about a magazine called 'Vidya Kusumum'. In 1937 the All Kerala Students Federation had its first meeting in Calicut Samoothiri College. Saumyendranath Tagore was the chairman of the meeting. This meeting accepted a charter of students' rights. In 1938 the second meeting of the AKSF was held under Nariman's chairmanship at Palghat and the third meeting was held in Christian College, Calicut.

The AKSF was engaged in three types of activities to spread political consciousness among students. They are (a) anticolonial activities (b) imparting of political education, and (c) public relations activities.

Cochin

In Cochin, students were not that active in the beginning. Students had participated in the Civil Disobedience Movement of the 1930's. This is how they managed to come to the forefront of the political movement. In 1931 they had participated in the Guruvayur Sathyagraha. Students of this region took part in the agricultural labourers' agitation of 1932. In 1934 the students of the Maharaja's College boycotted classes in the name of fees hikes.
But the most memorable event for the students was the order issued by the Director of Education expelling a few students from the Sanskrit College, Thripunithara for treasonable and unlawful activities. The crime they committed was that they had participated in the 'Poorna Swaraj' day celebration and jatha. Although it was then said that they could be taken back provided they gave a letter of apology they did not heed it. Strikes and public meetings were conducted protesting against the dismissal.

The 'Akhila Cochi Students Federation's first meeting took place immediately after this episode. The meeting was held in Trichur Town Hall with Parvathi Kumaramangalam in chair. A few student leaders walked out of the meeting and they were C.M. Stephen, Ambady Damodaran, Ramunny Menon and others. They formed a new organisation called Students National Organisation.

Thus the Students Federation had now to face two rival organisations and their activists -- SNO in Cochin and Students Congress in Travancore -- during 1941-45. The dynamism of the SF was almost lost. It became weak and almost non existent.
It was in these circumstances that the Trivandrum Students Organisation (TSO) was born. Its leaders were K.S. Karayalar, Mathew Koshy, Ramaswamy and K.V. Surendranath. The organisation was concerned with educational as well as political matters.

Meanwhile the Panampilly Ministry had assumed office in response to the democratic upsurge in 1946. It was in August that year that a few students who were acting as security guards for the national tricolour hoisted in the Maharaja's College were roughed up by goondas. To protest against this, students from all over the Cochin area had come forward and it ultimately paved the way for the downfall of the Panampilly Ministry.\(^5\)

The Students Federation further weakened and efforts were made to rejuvenate it. In 1947 a meeting was held in Kuttalam to form a new organisation capable of working all over Kerala. Thus was born the Trivandrum Students Union. It was intended to be a unit of the All India Students Federation.

The students participated actively in the Quit India struggle of 1942. This time sensing the popular support

\(^5\) C. Bhaskaran, op. cit., p.99.
for the struggle the Diwan did not attempt to suppress the student agitations. He simply issued warning notices. Students observed fasts, boycotted classes, and picketed colleges.

The students of Travancore actively participated in the Quit India Movement despite the warnings given by the Students Federation not to participate in it. The Students Federation, it must be said, had already come under Communist control by this time. Student strikes were widespread in Trivandrum, Nagercoil, Kottayam, Changanacherry, Alwaye, etc. Student leaders like N.D. Jose, K. Prabhakaran, Salauddin, K. Balakrishnan, P. Shankunni Menon, G. Janardhana Kurup, K. Bhanu, etc. were arrested. Those students who participated in the Quit India struggle broke away from the Federation and later formed the Students Congress in Travancore.

The Travancore Students Organisation had contacts with the Madras student leaders. P.T. Punnose, M.C. Cherian and Thirumala Rao (Secretary Madras Students Organisation) had met the premier of Madras Presidency C. Rajagopalachari and held discussions with him.

The Students Congress had deputed an investigation team to enquire into the unfortunate incidents at Punnapra Vayalar in 1946.
The final struggle for freedom in Travancore had its beginnings in the form of a student agitation. The government had banned the annual meeting of the Students Congress which was scheduled to be held at Trivandrum. The speakers of the meeting like Ashok Mehta and K.B. Menon were arrested before reaching Kerala. But the organisers moved forward with their plans. At the Thampanoor Railway Station Maidan a public meeting was held. The All India Students Congress President G. Ravindra Varma was one of the speakers. All the speakers were arrested. As a result students boycotted classes all over Kerala. Many students who were let off were rearrested. The Congress president Acharya Kripalani and the Socialist leader Ashok Mehta condemned the arrests. This was really the beginning of the final struggle for freedom in Kerala.

After Independence

Though India became free in 1947 there was no much progress in educational reforms even after that. As a result there occurred a series of strikes in the 1950's. The Students Federation, the Students Congress and the Muslim Students Federation all joined hands and led a

6. Interview with P.K. Vasudevan Nair, former Chief Minister of Kerala.
strike in Malabar in 1947 for fee concessions and ending detention. Such strikes were common in Travancore and Cochin. Strikes were also held for the introduction of the part system and against the preuniversity course. It is to be pointed out that student strikes were not confined to academic issues alone. Students had extended their support for workers strikes also.

On 6th August 1951 a meeting of the students from Cochin and Travancore areas was convened in an attempt to bring together all the students under a single banner. There were about 20,000 students in the Thiru-Cochi Students Federation.

During this period the Students Congress was disintegrating. The Thiruvalla group and the Varkala group quarrelled with each other. The Varkala group later formed the PSU.

The Thiru-Cochi Students Federation had conducted other strikes also like the one against fee hike in the University hostel (1951-52, 1952-53) strike against detention in Fathima College Quilon (in 1951-52), the strike to reactivate the college union in M.G. College (1952-53), etc.
At the sametime in Malabar the United Students Organisation was born in 1951 with advice from the All India Students Federation. Its first meeting was held in Tellicherry. The main demands of the students were ending detention and fee regularisation in government and private schools. There were strikes and demonstrations for this purpose. The third annual meeting of the USO was held in Vadakara and the organisation decided to collect 10,000 signatures in support of various students demands like ending detention and allotting more funds for education. The memorandum with mass signatures was presented to the then Education Minister of Madras, C. Subramaniam. Students had won here a moral victory because since then they were not detained widely. The students of Kerala had also played their part in the emergence of united Kerala. The USO had appealed to the student community to participate in the movement for unified Kerala. Similarly the Thiru-Cochi Students Federation had submitted a memorandum to the States Reorganisation Commission to create states on the linguistic pattern basis.

It goes to the credit of students' growing political consciousness that a fruitful effort was made to unite the various student organisations. A combined meeting of the Malabar USO and the Thiru-Cochi Students Federation was
held in Trichur from October 26th to 28th 1956. It was at this meeting that the Kerala Students Federation was born. Thus when the State of Kerala was born on 1st November 1956 the KSF had already become a reality.

Communist Ministry and the Vimochana Samaram

In the first ever elections held to the Kerala legislature in March 1957, the undivided Communist Party under EMS Namboodiripad came to power. But the educational and land reforms initiated by the Communist government created many enemies to the government. It had to face stiff opposition from the privileged and powerful sections of the society. Demonstrations and agitations were held against the government and all these culminated in the liberation struggle or Vimochana Samaram. The EMS Ministry was dismissed in July 1959.

The liberation struggle or the Vimochana Samaram was highly significant for student political activism since students very actively participated in it. The Kerala Students Union was born during this period and for a decade it could control the activities of the students.  

The reasons for the domination of the KSU over other student organisations, especially the KSF can be summarised as follows.\(^8\)

Firstly, the private college managements had extended their support to the KSU. They were eager to encourage the KSU against the KSF which was antimanagerial in its outlook. Thus the students who were keen to please the powerful managements found an opportunity for it by supporting the KSU.

Secondly, the powerful communities of Kerala like the Nairs and Christians too supported the Kerala Students Union. They felt threatened by the utterances of the radical KSF leaders who were out to destroy the managers' stronghold on the educational institutions. So the KSU could grow in the suitable climate of anticommunist feeling which was widespread during the liberation struggle.

Thirdly, the newspapers of Kerala played a crucial role to suit the interests of the KSU. The KSU leaders and their statements were given the pride of place by them in these newspapers. In other words, most of the newspapers promoted the interests of the KSU.

Lastly, the KSF had failed to convince the students about their programmes and policies. The dismissal of the Communist Ministry was a blow to their image and aspirations. Naturally, the organisation could not attract into its fold students with leadership qualities at least for a period of time.

Whatever it be, it must be said that it is the emergence of KSU that paved the way for the decline of the Students Federation after independence. The KSU was formed immediately after the formation of the first Communist Ministry in 1957 by EMS Namboodiripad. One of the first attempts of the KSU was to set right the misrepresentation of facts about India in some High School text books. These books had actually extolled the virtues of the Communist political systems of China and Russia. This type of indoctrination was vehemently resisted by the students.

But it was the Orana Samaram (one anna strike) which helped the growth of KSU. It was a memorable demonstration of student power and had shattered the foundations of the Communist Ministry in Kerala. The issue at stake was the charge hike on the ferry boats in Kuttanad. The government had nationalised the water
transport and the Water Transport Corporation was established. The ferry service charge which was one anna (6 paisa) was made 10 paisa. The students wanted it to be retained as 6 paisa itself. But government refused.

The strike started on 15th July 1958. The government appealed to the striking students to withdraw the strike. The student demonstrators who violated prohibitory orders were confronted by the police at Ernakulam, Alleppey and Kottayam. It is to be specially stated that even girl students participated in the strike and no mercy was shown to them by the government.

The leader of the agitating students was M.K. Ravindran, who came to be later called as Vayalar Ravi. While leaders like Kelappan condemned the students' agitations, there were others like Mathai Manjooran who encouraged the students. The strike was withdrawn on 3rd August since most of the students' demands were met. The Orana Samaram was a morale booster for the students of Kerala and the KSU.

The Students Federation had controlled the college unions in a few colleges in Kerala in the 1950's. The Students Federation however had to face erosion of its bases, even though it conducted agitations for reforms in
the education field. The agitations were for retaining the part system and also for restoring the Travancore University Union which was dismissed earlier. The Federation also led strikes for allowing the students to form students unions. There were a few private management colleges like the M.G. College, Mar Ivanios College, the Fathima College, etc. which opposed the activities of student organisations. Such students were also suspended. Thus in a nutshell the Federation during the 1950's clamoured for organisational freedom for students. This is clear proof of the fact that students were getting more and more politically conscious in Kerala during this period.

The students' strike which was against the charge increase on ferry boats finally merged with the liberation struggle in Kerala in 1959 which was against the Communist government of EMS. Even though the schools were closed students took part in the liberation struggle.

In 1967 the EMS Ministry had come to power for a second term. It declared a government sponsored bandh against the Central Government's policies. On the bandh day two students died in Kasargod as a result of police firing -- Shenoy and Sudhakar Aggithai. The KSU observed a 'black day' in protest. It is from then on that
students and police began a series of clashes in Kerala. Murali of Ernakulam (S.H. College, Thevara) died on 30th September during a student demonstration. This incident provoked the student community all over Kerala. The colleges in the state were closed indefinitely since the students demanded public enquiry about the death of Murali. The Communist leaders this time alleged that the KSU was getting money from the USA through the PL480 Fund.

Thus during the 1960's students' voice came to be heard very distinctively in Kerala politics. They had already become conscious of their power and influence. The growth and the clout of the Kerala Students Union and the Kerala Students Federation were possible with the support and the encouragement given by the Congress and the Communist parties respectively. From now on student organisations, the KSU and the KSF began upholding political interests above student interests. A strike by any one organisation was opposed and condemned by the other. 9

The KSU considers the 1960's to be a period of remarkable achievements. The statements issued by its leaders were given enough importance by the media. Student power came to be an accepted phenomenon in Kerala.

9. Ibid., pp.182-84.
While the Congress Party encouraged the KSU leaders the Communist Party did not give that type of encouragement to the KSF, during the students' strikes of the 1960's. Since the Communist Party was in power in 1967 the KSF leaders could not join the student strikes. It suspended its Secretary Philip M. Prasad, and President Venugopal was expelled. The KSF could not end the monopoly of the KSU in student politics.

In another respect also this period was remarkable. The Kerala Students Union led so many agitations to put an end to the practice of detaining students. The KSF too had led agitation for securing students' rights to get representation for students in the Senate, etc. It was also decided to demand organisation of College Unions and the University Union, the common platform for all the College Unions. The government accepted almost all the demands of the students.

It was on 24th October 1964 that the Kerala Students Congress was born. The political circumstances which led to the formation of the KSC should be noted. The Shankar Ministry which came to power in September 1962 in Kerala had to face a serious crisis when PSP left the Front. The PSP brought a vote of noconfidence motion against the ministry for which a group of 15 MLAs who were Congress
rebels gave their support. The ministry had to resign. The 15 MLAs who left the Congress later formed the Kerala Congress. A meeting of the students who supported the Kerala Congress was held in Changanassery and a new student organisation, the Kerala Students Congress was born.

The 1970's started with the birth of the Students Federation of India. The various student organisations of India which had upheld certain common goals decided to come together under a common banner at the initiative of the Bengal State Students Federation. A meeting for the purpose was held in Calcutta and thus was born the SFI. The first meeting of the Students Federation was held at Trivandrum from 27th to 30th December and this was a morale booster for the students of Kerala who upheld leftist ideas. The SFI began growing in number and stature in Kerala since its inception in 1970.

The year 1970 seems to indicate a memorable date in the history of student activism in Kerala. So far it was the KSU which had dominated the scene and it represented the moderate democratic students. After 1970 the leftists began growing in popularity and leftist students conducted many strikes and demonstrations to highlight student issues. Many camps and seminars were also conducted.
Thus an intellectual approach was adopted by them to attract the able students towards the SFI. Moreover the leftist students were encouraged by international events too. The Vietnamese freedom struggle, Che Guvera's martyrdom, the French Students' Revolt of 1968, all these events had helped Marxism to regain its youth and student ranks. Even the rightist newspapers of Kerala began giving due consideration to the statements of the leftist student leaders.

It was in 1972 that the private college teachers of Kerala went on a memorable strike for allowing direct payment of their salaries by the government. The teachers of private colleges were not getting their salaries in full and on a regular basis. The students supported the strike by the teachers since they found this to be an opportune moment to get some of their demands also accepted. The main demand of the students was to prescribe uniform fees for the students of the private colleges and government colleges. The fees collected from the private college students was a big amount when compared to the same in government colleges. The SFI and the KSU both supported the strike. Since the colleges were closed and it affected the future of about 75,000 students belonging to the SFI it decided to support the strike. The KSU had focussed the strike against the
private managements. Although they differed in their reasonings both the KSU and the SFI, the two leading student organisations, got here an opportunity to cleanse the educational institutions. All attempts made by the government to control the private managements had failed (on the rock of minority rights). The Kerala University Senate passed a resolution calling upon the government to amend Article 30(1) of the Constitution, which gives educational rights for minorities. The resolution was introduced by the student representative in the Senate, M.M. Hassan.

In 1972 the government decided to regularise the tuition fees of students. The KSU had challenged the contention of the managements that introducing uniformity in fees will result in financial loss for them. The student admissions were also subjected to certain norms -- 80% on merit, 10% community and 10% management quota.

The KSC supported the private managements since its parent party the Kerala Congress was on that side.

While the private managers refused to reopen the colleges after the government decision to regularise the fees (they had protested against new government controls)
there were certain leaders in the ruling party who mooted the idea of 'Alternate Colleges'. Such a college, a students' college was inaugurated in the University Students Centre by K. Karunakaran the then Home Minister. This college was the brainchild of the Kerala University Union. Offering felicitations, the then Vice Chancellor of the Kerala University, Dr. George Jacob said: "The first University in Europe was established by students -- the Cologua University -- established 800 years ago was under students' control for 300 years".10

It goes to the credit of the student community of Kerala which possesses strong organisations that they gained representation in the administrative bodies like the Senate and the Syndicate. The Kerala University Act 1974 which was primarily intended to be a check on private managements had provided for giving representation to 15 students in the Senate. While the bill was being introduced in the Assembly students demonstrated outside saying that they wanted representation in the Syndicate too. The Congress Party whose leaders now included former student leaders had supported the move. As a result of pressures from the various sections of the Assembly the Chief Minister after giving a piece of advice

accepted the demand. Thus students proved that they can shoulder administrative responsibilities also. 11

The year 1975 will ever be remembered in Indian history as this is the year in which the Emergency was declared. The students in Kerala did not lose time in registering their protest. It was the SFI which came out first against the Emergency declaration. The Congress party was in power along with the CPI in Kerala. The SFI appealed to the students to boycott the classes on 27th June. Demonstrations were held. The State Secretary Kodiyeri Balakrishnan was arrested. Other leaders like M. Vijayakumar and Thomas Abraham were also arrested.

On 1st July, the SFI, the KSC, and the Independent Students Organisation (ISO) jointly boycotted classes. Students demonstrated in Trivandrum violating prohibitory orders. 24 students were jailed under Defence of India Rules. The demonstration was held under the State President of the SFI, M.A. Baby and the former president G. Sudhakaran. These students who were put behind the bars suffered for 16 days under police custody without bail.

The KSU meanwhile had tried to attract public attention by engaging in constructive activities like cleaning KSRTC buses, rendering service among the adivasis and in farming programmes. Of course they could not revolt against their parent party's responsibility in Emergency declaration in the country.

The Emergency was lifted in 1977 and the student youth wings of the left parties strongly condemned the Emergency excesses and loss of human lives. Thus once again after the Emergency the educational institutions of Kerala echoed with slogan shouting. The student power began to burst forth.

The post Emergency period witnessed the student reaction against the Emergency declaration. The newly formed Vidyarthi Janatha, the student wing of the Janatha party and the SFI demanded the resignation of the Congress Ministry and take to task those leaders responsible for the Emergency excesses. It was during the Emergency that Rajan an engineering college student alleged to be a naxalite was killed in police custody. But the demand for the resignation of the Congress Ministry was countered by the United Students Forum led by the KSU, MSF, AISF, KSC and the PSU. Suresh Babu the KSU President was the convener of the Forum and it was their contention that a
similar demand made in 1967 when Murali a student died in Ernakulam, was rejected by the then EMS Ministry. Why then an enquiry now?

Whatever it is, the KSU suffered badly after the emergency. The reason is obvious. The KSU is a student organisation watered and tendered by the Congress and the Congress was now being attacked by all the other parties. In the 1976 College Union elections the KSU suffered much losses. The KSU haters joined together and they captured the Kerala University Union from the KSU thus ending its monopoly for a decade.

If Murali's martyrdom helped the growth of the KSU, Rajan's martyrdom helped the growth of the leftist student organisations like the SFI. The groupism in the Congress party was reflected in the KSU also. This groupism adversely affected the prospects of the KSU.

The SFI since its inception (1970) has been fighting KSU's domination. In 1969 when the University Union was formed for the first time the Kerala Students Federation had only a few councillors. The Communist Party now on began encouraging the Students Federation leaders. Thus even before the Emergency the Students Federation had become a strong student organisation capable of
challenging the KSU. By 1974 the SFI began establishing its influence even in urban centres too -- the Maharaja's and the University Colleges. In fact the rising influence of the SFI was not confined to Kerala alone. Many of the university campuses in India came to be dominated by it.

The SFI had conducted a signature campaign against the decision of the government to ban College Union elections during the first year of Emergency. The SFI leaders were in jail at that time. In 1977 when College Union elections were held the slogan which the SFI put forth was 'not to give votes to the KSU which, squandered the University funds'. It was also alleged in the audit report that the Calicut University Union leaders had not submitted proper accounts.

In the 1978 election to the Kerala University Union the KSU lost its monopoly. SFI leader Suresh Kurup became the chairman. In the Calicut University also the SFI-AISF-Vidyarthi Janatha combine won.\(^{12}\)

A special fact to be mentioned here is that many former KSU leaders had come to occupy seats of power by now. The KSU boasted that it could supply even a Chief

\(^{12}\) Cherian Philip, op. cit., p.419.
Minister A.K. Antony to Kerala. But the leaders of the SFI never got such a chance. The young leaders were not allowed to contest elections and occupy seats of power by the Communist Party.

The post emergency period also witnessed the strengthening of extremism -- both leftist and rightist. While the All India Democratic Students Organisation (AIDSO) an extreme leftist student organisation spread its activities over more areas the Akhil Bharathia Vidhyarthi Parishath (ABVP) a rightist student organisation began intensifying its activities after the Emergency. They both exploited the antiauthoritarian attitudes and sentiments of the students as much as they could.

Meanwhile the Vidyarthi Janatha was born after the Emergency and it was the student wing of the Janatha Party. Though in existence even today it has not been able to gain much influence among the students. Similarly the rivalries among the Kerala Congress leaders led to split in the KSC also. The organisation was divided into three -- the KSC(J), KSC(M), and the KSC(B).

The student organisations like the MSF and the PSU were also in the forefront of agitations during this period. The MSF born in 1940 became more influential in
the Calicut University. Similarly, the AISF also began leading agitations to gain concessions for the student community. It stands for taking formal education to the common man, for education being imparted in the mother tongue, for better amenities to students, job oriented education, etc. In 1990, the AISF conducted a march to the parliament for declaring 'right to work' as a fundamental right.

The students of Kerala had come together to oppose the Adisheshiah Commission Report. The Commission was appointed with Dr. Malcolm S. Adisheshiah as the chairman in 1984 to review the working of the Kerala University for the last ten years in accordance with the provision Article 71 Clause 1, of the Kerala University Act of 1974. It submitted its report in May 1985. Some of the recommendations of the Commission were strongly opposed by the student community, especially the leftist students. It had expressed serious concern over the annual increase in the number of students joining colleges and recommended certain measures to cut down the number of students joining colleges like increasing fees and selective admission. Yet another recommendation of the commission was the starting of Autonomous Colleges. Such colleges were free to decide the curriculum and conduct of examinations. Of course the degrees would be awarded by
the University. All these were opposed by the students and in their opinion such recommendations went against the aspirations of the poor students and they could only give an elitist bias for our education system.13

The Commission also wanted to reduce the number of members in the Senate and the Syndicate and in so doing the aim was to keep off the politicians from these bodies. The academicians will thus get a prominent role in these decision making bodies. The students were of the opinion that it was a highly objectionable recommendation because education is a process which requires the involvement of all the sections of the people and not only academicians.

Yet another recommendation which was rejected contemptuously by the student community was the delinking of the Pre-degree course from colleges. The Pre-degree course would then form a part of the higher secondary course, though for practical purposes the Pre-degree Board would be constituted.

All the above recommendations were opposed by the students alike and of course the leftist students opposed them tooth and nail. They feared that if restrictions

were put on Pre-degree admission that would badly hit the educational prospects of the poor students. The students who come from the financially well off sections will alone get the benefit.

The proposals made by the National Policy on Education, 1986 were also rejected by a section of the students, the leftist students. The NPE tries to destroy the democratic nature of university administration by abolishing the Senate and the Syndicate, it has been alleged. It also attempts to create two types of citizens by establishing two types of schools, one for the rich and the other for the common students. A few 'Centres of Excellence' are also to be established. But students fear that these proposals if implemented will only create more inequalities in the field of higher education. Moreover the new policy plans to increase the cost of higher education thereby adversely affecting the educational prospects of the poor students.

In brief, the students fear loss of opportunities for higher education for them, and the dominating role of private managements in education. Corruption and commercialisation of education will increase. Therefore
students decided to oppose the recommendations of the Adisheshiah Commission and also the National Policy on Education.

One of the important agitations led by the students in the 1980's was the Pre-degree Board agitation. The academic year 1986-87 started with demonstrations and slogan shouting against the Karunakaran Government. It was then that the Education Minister T.M. Jacob proposed the Pre-degree Board. His plan was to bring the Pre-degree course under a separate board. It was also his contention that under such an arrangement which is found in all the other states except in Kerala, higher secondary classes will get more attention, and at the same time the university will be relieved of over work. The NCERT will extend financial help also to tone up higher secondary education.

But the education minister was disappointed by the teachers, students, and the university employees. The Minister had earlier stated that the Pre-degree Board was a must as the M.P. Menon Commission which investigated the examination irregularities of the Kerala University had recommended its constitution. The Adisheshiah Commission on the working of universities in Kerala and the New Education Policy of 1986 both justified the formation of the Pre-degree Board.
The teaching community was concerned about the future of about 7500 teachers who would become surplus once the Pre-degree is brought under a separate Board. The university employees opposed the Pre-degree Board as well as the starting of the open University. They too became anxious about their future; they might be transferred to the Board, they feared. The students objected the move to constitute the Board. Their argument was that there were no facilities in government schools to start the XI and XII classes. As such these classes are likely to be sanctioned in private schools. This means that education will become more expensive for them. Moreover such an arrangement will encourage corruption and nepotism.

Here again the SFI was the first student organisation to oppose the move of the education minister. At the beginning of the academic year 1986 the SFI called for a boycott of classes and threatened stir. They also supported the striking university employees. Without much delay the KSU also joined the agitation. It also alleged that the move will only encourage corruption and called upon the education minister to retrace his steps. The AISF, the MSF, the Vidyarthi Janatha, the ABVP and so many other organisations of students actively supported the agitation. But the government rejected all the allegations. It was unmoved.
Meanwhile the examination work in the university was adversely affected. Already the results were late. The government took two important steps -- (a) it declared the examination work to be an essential service under the Essential Services Maintenance Ordinance, and (b) it also suspended the Syndicates of the Kerala and the Calicut Universities since they had failed to discharge their duties of publishing the Pre-degrees results. The students along with the teachers criticised the suspension. Babu George, student representative in the Kerala University Syndicate defying the suspension order tried to enter the University Office and was arrested. The student leaders also alleged that there were grave errors in the valuation process of the Pre-degree answerbooks.

The SFI expanded the scope of the present agitation by urging the government to accept its 17 point charter of demands already presented to the government. The KSU directed the strike against the Education Minister as its parent organisation the Congress Party was in power. The KSC alone supported the Education Minister who was a Kerala Congress man and it also wanted the Pre-degree Board to be constituted. The MSF joined the agitations only very late. Here it is clear that the various student organisations tried to fall in line with the official stand of the political parties which happened to be their parent political bodies.
The government then convened a conference of the student organisations. The Chief Minister explained its stand. It tried to allay the fears of the student community. He also said that the Pre-degree course will continue in colleges. The committee constituted by the Vice Chancellors of the Kerala, Calicut, and Mahatma Gandhi Universities was to look into the complaints of all concerned. But the conference failed. The students belonging to the SFI, AISF, Vidyarthi Janatha and the KSU(S) were arrested for shouting slogans during the conference. After the conference the KSU(I) backed out of the agitation having been satisfied by the governmental explanations. But the fact remained that a section of the KSU(I) students still supported the Pre-degree Board agitation. The SFI condemned the KSU(I) for pulling out of the agitation.

The seven student organisations which belonged to the opposition political parties had formed the Joint Action Council and the Council decided to intensify the stir. Moreover the agitation took a new turn with the opposition political parties backing it. The Left Democratic Front also appealed to the government to rescind the decision. Thus the Pre-degree Board agitation got wide public support.
An important but unfortunate development which took place at this time was the Pre-degree results muddle. The Pre-degree results published by the Kerala University gave rise to widespread complaints and a lot of controversies. The results of many students who wrote the examination were not even published. It was alleged by the opposition that the results were prepared by policemen and drawing teachers. The student organisations and the teaching community said that the Education Minister had succeeded in taking revenge upon the striking students. The university authorities gave evasive replies to the queries of parents and teachers. The Speaker of the Kerala Assembly V.M. Sudheeran pulled up the Congress led government for the Pre-degree results muddle in the Assembly.

While the SFI called for the resignation of T.M. Jacob, the Education Minister, the KSU demanded the setting up of revaluation camps to set right the mistakes in the Pre-degree examinations. Meanwhile five MLAs from the Opposition -- Mrs. K.R. Gowri [CPI(M)], K.Pankajaksham (RSP), K.E. Ismael (CPI), A.C. Shanmughadas [Congress(S)], and S.R. Thankaraj (Janatha) -- started an indefinite hunger strike at the foyer of the State Assembly in protest against the government's attitude towards the
striking university employees. The SFI decided to conduct a "University March" to highlight the demand for revaluation of the answer books.

On 17th July 1986 the Vice Chancellors' Committee ascertained the views of the student organisations regarding the Pre-degree Board. Eleven of them met the committee -- the KSU(I), SFI, KSC, Vidyarthi Janatha, AISF, KSU(S), PSU, MSF, DSU, SFD and the SSU. All but one of the organisations were opposed to the Board. The KSC of which the Education Minister himself was once the President, wanted to set up the Board. It also put forward a "30 point suggestion" which included free education for the Pre-degree course and uniform syllabus for all the universities of the state. The Vidyarthi Janatha appealed to the government to drop the proposal unconditionally as it was unwise to shift the Pre-degree course to schools. The DSU, student wing of the National Democratic Party was of the opinion that the Board should be set up for conducting the examinations alone, but the course must continue in colleges.

But the government and especially the Education Minister reiterated its resolve to implement the educational reforms.
The SFI and the AISF called for the resignation of the Education Minister. The SFI said so about the Pre-degree results muddle: "No university in the world has presented such a deplorable picture and thousands of students are still to get their results in a proper manner. The results of over 15,000 students have been corrected by now. Many more are awaiting a final decision. There is no doubt that the minister is responsible for this muddle and it is an accepted fact that the Chief Minister too is responsible as he had backed the minister to the hilt in all his actions. What has happened is outright malpractice and manipulation. Any attempt to extricate the minister from this will be resisted". The Left Democratic Front too demanded the resignation of the Education Minister.

The government however was keen to constitute the Pre-degree Board. In pursuance of this objective it published the Pre-degree Board Bill in the gazette on 1st January 1987.

But the government led by Karunakaran did not last long. It had come to power in 1982. After completing five years it had to face the electorate once again. Thus elections were declared to the Kerala Assembly.

During the elections the educational reforms of the Karunakaran Government were ridiculed by the Left Democratic Front. It was an important issue on which the election was fought. Due to the infighting in the Congress and the Kerala Congress too, the ruling United Democratic Front lost the elections.

After the elections the Left Democratic Front came to power. One of the first measures adopted by the E.K. Nayanar led LDF government was to cancel the proposal to constitute Pre-degree Board. But it is the same government which allowed the plus two course in government schools.

Political Instability and Student Activism

It is important to examine the organisational activities of students in the light of the political realities presented by Kerala. Kerala is known for its political instability and has been characterised as the most troubled state of India having highly fractionalised party system. This political instability has been the main reason behind the failure to develop a unified student movement. The student organisations have been merely the feeder organisations of the various political parties and they have been even controlled by the parties.
After the 1960 elections, coalition governments started their experiment because no party had the required majority to come to power. Elections held during 1957-1987 period show that in Kerala no political party could gain an absolute majority of its own. Thus coalitions became inevitable. The state has also been brought under President's Rule 5 times since 1957.15

It is a widely acknowledged fact that in a parliamentary system stable and institutionalised political parties are necessary for political stability and political stability is looked upon as the absence of violence, making way for peaceful changes in government. When a political party is not institutionalised personality cult will take its place. Personal rivalries tend to produce groupism and leadership struggle. This 'see saw politics' will in turn encourage the factional leaders to seek the support of feeder organisations. The leaders of these organisations will also be keen to express their sympathy for a particular leader.

When one examines the political activities of the students of Kerala it becomes evident that it started from

the days of the Freedom Movement. Then students were active during the liberation struggle of 1959 which sought to dismiss the EMS Ministry. Again, when the Kerala Congress was born in 1964, the Kerala Students Union (KSU) was split and a new organisation the Kerala Students Congress (KSC) was born. The KSC again split into three each led by faction of the Kerala Congress. Later when the Congress was again split into the Karunakaran and Antony groups the KSU(I) and the KSU(A) were formed. When compared to this it is to be said that the leftist student organisations have not shown such a tendency to split very often. Student movement in Kerala had an inauspicious beginning since the birth and growth of student organisations was synchronised with the inauguration of political instability from the 1960's.

In the year 1975 the Emergency was declared by the Congress in the country and after the lifting of the same in 1977 Opposition student organisations became popular. The KSU which was popular among the students lost its influence and the SFI began extending its area of influence. They began controlling the University Unions even.
The student struggles of the 1970's and the 1980's in Kerala exhibit a definite pattern. That is, whenever one particular party or the coalition led by it was in power, the student organisations nurtured by the opposition political parties had engaged in strikes and demonstrations. Such strikes and demonstrations had the aim of even toppling the government in power. The 'Pre-degree Board agitation' was such a one especially during its last phase.

All these reinforce the conclusion that the high level of political instability in the state has adversely affected the student movement. In a study of student politics in the Scandinavian countries Richard F. Tomasson and Erick Allardt point out that in Finland and Sweden where the society is characterised by a broad consensus and stability student politics is characterised by "a high degree of organisation, differentiation and interest articulation" and until 1968, by a virtual absence of confrontation politics".16

If political instability has affected adversely the birth of a unified student movement and has been the main

reason behind the large number of student agitations, it is equally true that student agitations were also for reasons peculiar to a developing country. Students clamour for more educational facilities, more concessions, education for all sections, etc. These claims are made on the scarce resources of a developing society. Ours is a developing society which witnesses social and economic transformation. Educational institutions are looked upon as centres of social change and not selective institutions in a world of scarcity. In this regard Edward Shils says, "Attendance at university, which was once regarded as a stroke of good fortune of birth or the result of exertion and offered its beneficiaries a chance to diminish to some extent the rigors of the regime of scarcity, is now however regarded by student radicals as itself part of an actual realm of plenitude. Anyone should have it for the asking". 17

The students are conscious of the fact that they have a role to play in the process of social change. Certain student organisations therefore believe that they must conduct agitations in cooperation with other sections of the society, and political parties.

It is an ironical fact of Kerala's history that the very same section of the society which tried to capitalise on student power in 1957-59 to oppose the educational policies of the first Communist Ministry are now compelled to speak against it. In 1972 in the wake of the long strike of college teachers and also during the Emergency attempts were made to ban student organisations, but did not succeed completely.

Features of the Student Movement

The student movement in Kerala as in other parts of India underwent a change after independence. During the independence struggle its goals were state oriented -- internal unity, social transformation, national freedom and modernisation. The students can be proud of the fact that they have fought against colonial suppression. They were active participants in the freedom struggle even at the risk of losing their classes and career. They had maintained contacts with national leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and C. Rajagopalachari.

One important factor which is to be specially noted is that only peaceful methods were adopted by the students before independence drawing inspiration from the exhortations of Mahatma Gandhi. Moreover the students had imbibed a social democratic tradition. They were
influenced by the social reform movements of the earlier period led by great men like Sree Narayana Guru.

Even though the student movement has a nationalist and social democratic tradition it has been characterised by changes also. Political circumstances altered the course and contents of the movement. If during the 1950's emphasis was on educational reforms after the 1960's partisan politics made its intrusion into every sphere of student activity. Student politics during this period came to be characterised by violence and bloodshed. Student organisations have multiplied and in this sense the student movement has grown.

Student movement in Kerala underwent a dramatic transformation in its aims also. The nationalist fervour of the preindependence period has been replaced by generally ill organised and sporadic agitations aimed to redress specific grievances of students.

The changes which were effected in the field of higher education -- education for all sections -- destroyed the homogeneity of the student population and ensued a 'dual culture' on the campus. In the earlier days education was confined to the upper middle class family members. But later students from the lower middle
and working class families were also admitted to higher education. These new sections of students were willing to join sporadic and illorganised student demonstrations. The transformation of the student movement in Kerala has altered campus life too. Today there are many student groups and organisations and student agitations have increased.

The students who have opted for science subjects have shown lesser interest in political affairs. Those who belong to the science faculties do not have the time for political activities because such activities are time consuming. This factor has reduced the number of students available for political activity in the campus. The quality of student leadership has also declined. Student leadership, generally speaking, is of two varieties. The respectable, non-political, cultural and social oriented students are led by students from upper class families. These students can be called the "academic leadership" of the student community. Students from social groups without a long tradition of education, often from illiterate families have frequently led strikes and demonstrations. These students have been led by the politically active student leaders. Thus there is a dichotomy in student leadership in the special circumstances of Kerala.
In a situation where neither the government nor teachers, nor educational administrators protect student interests, student organisations perform this function. This is the reason why even politically passive students do not or cannot object to the student leaders playing politics outside the college or university. But then there is competition among the student organisations to be the leader organisation. One tries to outmanoeuvre the other. There is unending agitations disrupting the educational function of the university. Student union elections become a general election in microcosm in Kerala. This is why leaders of political parties very often say that the university election result is a verdict against or supporting the government.

In a developing country like India the university performs an unofficial function like providing leaders for the nation building process. The students want to play a part in politics too. Here it becomes clear that this is a compelling reason for students to play a political role in the educational institutions. Nation building implies reforming society.

But the political parties have developed an ambivalent attitude towards student politics in Kerala.
Before independence the Congress leaders had encouraged students to boycott classes and take part in the freedom struggle. After independence they advice students to keep off politics which they find to be out of tune with the new social and political realities. Similarly, the political parties while encouraging youth and student organisations do not allow open discussions. They simply serve as front organisations for aspiring politicians. On the other hand, the left parties have made some attempts to cultivate the students. They openly admit that the students must play an active role in society and politics along with the other sections of the society. The result is that there is no more a unified student movement in Kerala and only a small fraction of the student population is involved in student politics. Student political groups have multiplied and the annual number of demonstrations has been quite high. In general the emphasis of the student movement has shifted from societal concerns to campus ones. A general observation which can be made in this connection regarding student political attitudes is that as long as tension prevails in the social and economic fields their political involvement is likely to continue.

In Kerala student power has come into the open during crisis situations. This fact is very well illustrated by
the involvement of students in the liberation struggle of 1959, their attitude during the private college teachers' strike of 1972 and the Pre-degree Board agitation in 1986. Students do not operate in a political vacuum and their activities are influenced by the social, political, and economic conditions. They have also shown their power to organise people and mobilise public opinion during crisis situations.

Very often political parties and student organisations work in close collaboration in Kerala. Sometimes a political party completely dominates a student organisation. Many a time students become so radical and independent that the sponsoring political parties cannot discipline them and often get embarrassed by them.

Student unrest has also very often resulted in mass violence. They have destroyed physical property as well as social and moral values, thus corroborating the fact that they lack a positive approach towards their problems. Student movement in Kerala has gone to the extent of neglecting studies and this is something peculiar to the state.

Factionalism is another important feature of the student movement here. Of course, this is inevitable in
any social movement. It is most common in student movements because student movements tend to be idealistic and puritanical and cling to ideological principles. It is an established fact that strong organisations require professional leaders and an element of formalism. But this is likely to create a distance between the leader and the followers. This is one of the important reasons effecting splits in student organisations.

Student political culture in Kerala embraces both leftists and rightists. The College Unions and the University Unions of Kerala are not monopolised by either the left or the right. Although students generally use legitimate means for their political activities violence has increasingly marked their strikes and demonstrations. Usually they make use of press conferences, declarations, letters or pamphlets. But mass demonstrations have become more frequent in the recent past and student groups have clashed violently.

Kerala's educational system is also another important factor which contributes towards political activism of the students. The student community is drawn from the diverse sections of the society. Education is no more having an elitist bias. There is high rate of unemployment. High student faculty ratios, an archaic examination system,
generally inadequate facilities, financial difficulties all cause student unrest. The overall levels of student political activity are affected by the general level of literacy, the encouragement and sponsorship of political parties and the socio-economic conditions.

The socio-economic conditions (category) seem like a good indication of potential political activism because the students coming from the middle and lower strata of the society seem more inclined to challenge the status quo. They claim education as a privilege for all classes and oppose the elitist system of education which creates two types of citizens. Similarly students studying in certain faculties like Arts and Commerce are more prone to political activism than those who study in the faculties of Medicine, Engineering, and Applied Sciences.

Here again student politics is simply an extension of the politics of the adult world and therefore one must say that there is no student subculture as can be said about a subculture in the Latin American countries. Student leaders do not try to dislodge traditional power elements and try to restructure the political process. The students cannot offer constructive and alternate solutions to solve the problems facing the educational arena. Students though at times violent do not resort to direct
action as a means of getting their problems solved. They prefer to adhere to the established norms of domestic politics. In Latin America students do not attach themselves to the established political parties and they consider themselves to be "agents of change". The students there play an influential role in the university inspite of disrupting its educational function.

Membership in high school organisations of all sorts appears to contribute to a student's subsequent political interests. Apart from this, student organisations recruit students from schools onwards. At the school level itself there are elections to the 'School Parliament'. To what extent does membership in a student organisation politicise the students? This is highly significant because student organisations are very much active in the state of Kerala. Many student activists consider their membership in a student organisation as a training for a career in politics. The close relationship between these organisations and political parties suggest that the former could be avenues of leadership for the latter. The organisational membership also politicise the student and encourages his political ambitions more than any other university experience. The membership enables students to

acquire greater political skills than those who remain aloof from organisations. As such student organisations perform the twin functions of political recruitment and political training of the future politicians. A large number of the present day leaders of Kerala politics have made it through the student organisations. Youth representation is there in the Kerala ministry too. In the recently held District Council elections in the state the youth who have had their training in student organisations have been allotted seats by all the political parties, both of the left and the right.

Since the 1960's student movements have prospered in Kerala. The reasons are the emergence of coalition politics during this period, the increased enrollment of students, economic difficulties and high unemployment rate. There is interlocking relationship between student organisations and political parties with its consequences in the field of higher education. These organisations have secured many concessions from the succeeding governments -- school and college education till Pre-degree is free, travelling facilities and concession rates are there and they have gained representation on the various university bodies.
Student political activism seems to have suffered a setback only during the national Emergency during 1975-77. The students like others lost their freedom to carry on their political activities freely. The leftist student leaders went to the jail while the student organisations owing allegiance to the rightist political parties thought it fit to engage in social welfare programmes. When the Emergency was finally lifted in 1977 leftist student organisations began extending their influence over the student community since these organisations and their leaders were the victims of the Emergency.

The various student organisations have got a feeling that there is a motivated attempt to disorient the student movement by organising anarchy and the disruption of the academic schedule. A large number of students have been coming under the influence of several obscurantist revivalist and backward ideas. Unorganised students were getting entangled in caste and communal movements. The unprecedented growth of drug addiction is a real problem for organised student movement.

The student organisations are aware of the difficult conditions in which they have to operate and therefore they give great importance to choosing appropriate slogans, selecting forms of struggle as would commensurate
with the phase and content of the struggle, imparting political education to student activists as well as radicalising the student masses, conducting the ideological struggle, displaying the capacity of immediate reaction, etc. All organisations as often as possible conduct seminars, symposiums, study classes, etc. at the district level and at the state level for dissemination of information and giving political education to the activists. Thus inspite of the differences in ideologies programmes and policies among the various student organisations there are certain common features for the student movement in the state.

Aims and Purposes of the Student Organisations

There are ten major student organisations in Kerala and they are the student wings of political parties. As a result whenever a political party splits its student wing also splits. Excepting the major student organisations others are influential only in some particular places. The following are the important student organisations.

1. Students Federation of India (SFI), supporting the Communist Party of India (Marxist).

2. The All India Students Federation (AISF), supporting the Communist Party of India.
3. The Kerala Students Union (KSU), supporting the Indian National Congress.

4. The Akhila Bharathiya Vidyarathi Parishath (ABVP), supporting the Old Jana Sangh and now the Bharathiya Janatha Party. Most of the members are also members of the RSS.

5. The Muslim Students Federation (MSF), supporting the Muslim League.

6. The Kerala Students Congress (KSC), supporting the Kerala Congress. The KSC(M) supports the Mani faction, the KSC(J) supports the Joseph faction, and the KSC(B) supports the Balakrishna Pillai faction.

7. All India Democratic Students Organisation (AIDSO), supporting the Socialist Unity Centre of India who claim that they are the real communists.

8. Kerala Vidyarathi Janatha (KVJ), supporting the Janatha Party.

9. Democratic Students Organisation (DSO), supporting the National Democratic Party, a strong supporter of Nair Service Society.

10. Progressive Students Union (PSU), supporting the Revolutionary Socialist Party.
There are other minor student organisations also. Some of them originate during college elections and disappear after the elections.

Structure of Student Organisations

The organisational structure of the student organisations are almost the same and therefore the set up of any one of them only need be examined. Each organisation is hierarchically organised. At the primary level there is a primary unit (college unit in colleges and school unit in schools). At the Taluk level there is a Taluk Committee. Then at the District level the District Committee and at the State level there is the General Council and a Central Committee.\(^\text{19}\)

The constitution of the KSU says that the Union members of each educational institution shall constitute the primary unit of that institution. The primary unit elects the primary committee including the President, Vice President, Joint Secretary and Treasurer.\(^\text{20}\)

Again, the members of the Taluk Committee is elected by the primary units which come under the

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20. Ibid., pp.2-3.
particular Taluk. Taluk Committee elects its office bearers and send members to the District Committee. District Committee elects the President, Vice Presidents, Secretary, two Joint Secretaries and a Treasurer. 21

The State General Council members are the representatives from various district level committees. The General Council elects an executive committee or central committee including President, two Vice Presidents and one Treasurer. The President nominates Secretaries from the members of the General Council. 22

It must be said that AISF and SFI has got two additional organs -- the Secretariat and the State Conference. The Secretariat is responsible for the day-to-day administration of the organisation. It has a President, Vice President and General Secretary and Joint Secretaries. The General Secretary and Joint Secretaries are elected by the State Committee.

It is also important now to examine the aims and objectives of the various student organisations.

21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
Aims and Purposes

The Students Federation of India's membership is open to anyone above the age of 12. Annual membership fee is 25 paise. All members shall read the official publications of the organisation and propagate them. Its units are found in all schools and colleges.

The SFI has as its aims the following.23

1. To organise students for crusading for a democratic, progressive and scientific system of education.
2. Strive to build up a free, socialist society.
3. To achieve the democratic rights of students.
4. Free education upto the secondary level, to make available to all students facilities for hostel, sports, cultural and educational activities.
5. Guarantee employment to all or else unemployment allowance.
6. To oppose all sorts of suppressions and discriminations and also uphold secularism, equality, and communal unity.
7. To receive support from sections like labourers, agriculturists and also support them to secure day-to-day rights and common aims.

23. SFI Programme and Constitution, Deshabhimani Book House, Kottayam.
8. Express solidarity with all movements in the world which fight for freedom, national independence and socialism.

9. To join hands with other likeminded student organisations to secure common goals.

The organisation thus actively supports the idea of student participation in politics and condemns any attempt to keep off students from politics. It is to be borne in mind that policies regarding education and the expenditure for educational programmes are all the result of administrative and political decisions. The organisation is very well aware of the realities of India's political, social and educational fields. It takes note of the fact that adequate educational facilities are not available to the children of labourers and agriculturists.

The SFI demands an overhauling of the present educational system. It stands for ending all sorts of discriminations, fighting communalism and securing the cooperation of all other student organisations for promoting the welfare of the entire student community. The record of the organisation amply proves that it has fought for civil rights, educational reforms, and student rights in educational institutions.
Regarding the state of the student movement in the country it claims that it is the most reliable student organisation in India. Its flag conveys the spirit of democracy, independence, and socialism. The SFI Conference at Vijayawada had observed thus: "the student movement however continues to be fragmented with the emergence and fading out of various groups and organisations which is a direct reflection of numerous political groups and parties in our country. The task of forging united actions with democratic minded organisations and thus uniting the student movement in the struggle on the basic issues confronting us remains the task to be fully realized". The conference also observed that a major problem was that a large number of students remained outside the fold of the student movement.

The SFI emphasises the importance of political education of its activists. Its campaigns are essentially aggressive and appealing. It takes into account the level of political consciousness among the students. The SFI document for the 7th All India Conference at Calcutta 1989, "Work Report of the States" says that in Kerala its membership is 4,74,381. For the first time all the University Unions in Kerala also came under SFI leadership.

It opposes the New Education Policy of 1986 which advocated Navodaya Vidyalayas. The organisation is against restricting education to the few meritorious students. Similarly all centralising tendencies in education are also opposed. What is advocated is democratisation of education at all levels.\(^{25}\)

The All India Students Federation was born in 1936. In fact this is the oldest student organisation in the country. Its slogans were then, 'freedom, peace and progress'. After independence it has been upholding values like secularism, democracy and socialism. The organisation has led a series of strikes and demonstrations before and after independence. It has also fostered internationalism. For instance, in 1947 about 50,000 students together sang "Amarnam, thumaranam, Vietnam Vietnam". The support given to the liberation struggles in South Africa, Namibia, etc., the expression of solidarity with the people of Palestine and the demand made for letting free Nelson Mandela all prove this international outlook of the AISF.\(^{26}\)

After 1947 the AISF demanded the removal of illiteracy and solving the unemployment problem. It has opposed communalism and secessionist tendencies. The overhauling of the educational system by giving all sorts of facilities to students and removing all types of discriminations are the other important demands of the organisation. It is in alliance with the organisations of the various sections of the people that it conducts agitations.

In 1981 the AISF volunteers marched to the Raj Bhavan shouting 'job or jail' slogans. It was the AISF which introduced a new type of agitation called 'Rastha Roko' in Kerala during the 'job or jail' agitation, borrowed from the sugarcane growers agitation in Uttar Pradesh. The organisation also claims to have contributed towards positive decisions of the government regarding fees regularisation, ending the practice of detention, ending the practice of capitation fee, etc. It also agitated for the introduction of the Kumara Pillai Commission Report which recommended scholarship for the poor students.

Whenever the Government of Kerala, whichever party it belonged to, tried to encourage commercialisation of education, the AISF has opposed all such attempts.
Thus it opposed the privatisation of medical education, privatisation of technical education, and the introduction of the Pre-degree Board. The organisation has also successfully led agitations for getting concessions for students in buses.

The AISF regrets the fragmentation of the student movement. The organisation itself was subjected to a split in 1969-70-71 when the Students Federation was born out of it. As the original and the first organisation of the students, it also disliked the birth of the Muslim Students Federation and the Akhil Bharathiya Vidhayarthi Parishad and the National Students Union of India. While the organisation condemns all propaganda against student organisations, it is ready for a change in its style of functioning.

The AISF celebrated its golden jubilee on 12th January 1987 in Kerala.

The Kerala Students Union born in 1957 aims to organise students on a broad nationalist secular and democratic platform consistent with the goals of the Indian National Congress. It stands for reforms in the field of education and securing the rights and privileges of students. It upholds the policies pursued by the
Congress Party. It observes contemporary politics from close quarters and reacts to them. The KSU leaders have made it clear that 'power is not their ultimate aim'. George Tharakan, A.C. Jose, Vayalar Ravi and A.K. Antony were the early leaders of the KSU.

Of late the organisation has been making the students conscious of the dangers of drug addiction. The KSU while upholding freedom for student organisations on the campus, has made it clear that there must be a change in the style of operation of these organisations. It emphasises discipline among students. During elections the KSU demands student representations in the Congress Party's list of candidates.

The KSU has units all over Kerala including schools and colleges.

The Akhil Bharathiya Vidhyarthi Parishad (ABVP) was founded on 9th July 1949 for channelising student power towards the important task of national reconstruction. It is seriously concerned with the development of education and has given a blueprint of an Indian pattern of education. It is an all India student organisation. Its major activities include "conducting a monthly magazine, the 'Rashtriya Chatrashakti', study and art circles,"
seminars and symposia on important subjects, organising picnics and social gatherings, sports, essays, debates and competition, all India students meet, students' health bureau and mobilising students for rural reconstruction, social participation schemes, and action programmes to seek solution to students' problems". 27

The objectives of the Parishad is to unite the student community for national reconstruction. It professes to be a non-political organisation working for reform of educational system, all round development of the students, and international friendship. Its special interests are to foster the national and cultural values and oppose antinational thinking and actions. It claims to be not a service organisation but a movement of students.

The ABVP has been in the forefront of many agitations in Kerala. Although it is not the leading student organisation, it is still a force to be reckoned with. It has opposed the privatisation of medical education, demonstrated recently demanding the resignation of the Calicut University Syndicate members, etc.

27. S. Saraswathi, Youth in India, Indian Council of Social Science Research, New Delhi, 1988, pp.349-51.
The Muslim Students Federation came into being in 1940. It has put forth the idea of a 'politics free campus' in recent years. It is the only student organisation which has welcomed the Common Universities Act meant for the universities of Kerala. Last year (1990) the organisation had organised marches to all collectorates demanding the implementation of the plus two system, improvement of students travelling facilities, free supply of text books and note books for primary classes, etc.

The Kerala Students Congress was born in 1964 under the initiative of Usman Kangazha and others and is now split into three, each under the guidance of a particular group of the Kerala Congress. The KSC has pledged to make the campuses peaceful. It had prepared the document 'Education -- a blue print' in August 1990 and submitted it to the Kerala government.

Besides these organisations the Vidyarthi Janatha, the Vidyarthi Janatha Dal, Progressive Students Union and so many other organisations are also in the field.

Of late there has taken place a debate in Kerala whether campus politics ought to be abolished or not. While the Education Minister has made it clear that campus politics will not and cannot be banned, two former chief
ministers have said that student politics is desirable. The leaders of the various student organisations have also opposed the move to do away with campus politics. The SFI and the KSU claim that student organisations have guided the students properly or else they would have fallen a prey to the criminal practices prevailing in our society. The poor students would have been at the mercy of the rich students. But almost all of them agree that there must be a change in the style of operation of the student organisations, that is, unnecessary strikes must be avoided and criminal tendencies must be curbed.

In this context S. Saraswathi in her book, "Youth in India" observes: "Student wings of political organisations, even when engaged in purely academic or social service activities are in a way different from the nonpartisan and non-governmental organisations engaged in youth service. And when they are involved in issues over which antagonistic opinions prevail and when they are engaged in a struggle for power, the significance of youth power in India comes to be felt in the larger society. Student organisations in the form of student unions in colleges and universities have grown as centres of power wielding power themselves and are important pressure groups which other centres of power in society like to capture". 28

28. Ibid., p.351.
Political parties have been using student political movements for building public opposition to the government and for covertly recruiting political leadership. These political parties have been involving students in agitations mainly with a view to improving their own organisational strength and embarrassing the government and maximising their political resources, influence and power. Thus student movement in our country is "essentially political and intensely party oriented".29 It has no relation to student movements in the West.

Because of the rivalries among the student organisations Kerala has failed to evolve a unified student movement. The student organisations which belong to the opposition parties try to embarrass the government in power always. It is very seldom that the various organisations join hands to protect student interests. In protecting the rights of all the students including parallel college students, the KSU and the SFI had come together in 1979.30 A 'Samara Samithi' was born and there were eleven student organisations in it. The KSU President Benny Behanan and the SFI State Secretary A.K. Balan were the conveners. The student leaders held a sathyagraha in front of the Secretariat.

29. Ibid.
30. Interview with Suresh Kurup Ex. M.P.
Earlier to this in 1969 during the Fathima College strike when the college management expelled four teachers then also all the student organisations had come together. Even the Kerala Students Federation ignoring the fact that a Communist government was in power joined the strike.

From the above analysis it becomes clear that student organisations became prominent in Kerala only after 1967. They have become in a way the recruiting centres of political parties. If in the former days political leadership evolved through labour union activities today it mainly comes into being through student organisational activities. Student organisations were once considered to be a corrective force in society. But with the emergence of College Unions and the University Unions these organisations courted the evils of party politics. It is interesting to note that there are "professional" student leaders who continue to be students even after discontinuing studies.

Almost all student organisations in Kerala toady agree that their style of operation need to be changed. But they do not find anything wrong with the present day organisational set up. They have wrongly copied the
operational style of trade unions. They need not also involve themselves in all sorts of political activities. Political parties must not try to control them. The attitude of the government towards student problems shall also change. The government must try to solve student problems without losing much time. Teachers must not play politics in the campus. Such were the opinions expressed by the student leaders and public men in a recently conducted debate by a leading Malayalam Daily.\textsuperscript{31}

The above survey of the course of student political activism in Kerala bring into focus certain factors. Firstly, student activism has got a long tradition. Students have been active even from the latter half of the nineteenth century. Secondly, they have clamoured for changes in the educational field and for this they have simultaneously conducted negotiations with the authorities and agitations against them. Thirdly, violence, especially during elections, has been a marked feature of student activism. Finally, student activism has exhibited certain features. The political instability prevailing in the state has adversely affected the student community.

\textsuperscript{31} Madhyamam, Cochin, July 20th to July 30th, 1991.
Section II

In order to get an idea about the orientations and attitudes of students towards political issues this questionnaire was supplied to the students studying in the various colleges all over Kerala. The method adopted for selecting students was random sampling. The questionnaire contains totally 14 questions. For answering the last three questions included in this section (those relating to ideological commitments) students were selected from colleges which were affiliated to the Mahatma Gandhi University alone. But the other questions were supplied to students studying under the other universities of Kerala also.

Only 10 questions are included in this section. The other questions in the form of Tables are made use of in the other chapters of this thesis.

The first question related to the formulation of political opinion by students. The question was, do your friends influence you in formulating political opinions? Table 1 says that 70 per cent of them are influenced by their friends, while 30 per cent said they are not.
Table 1
Formulation of political opinion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of students who are</th>
<th>Influenced by friends</th>
<th>Not influenced by friends</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>70</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Total number of students = 50

The students were also asked to testify to the frequency of their political discussion. Political discussion among friends helps the students to develop an awareness about politics. Such discussions have a socialising effect on students. The students will acquire certain skills and values which are necessary for political participation. Political discussion is a form of political participation. The following table helps us to understand this aspect.
Table 2

Frequency of political discussion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Students' response in percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Regularly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. How often do you discuss politics with your friends</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Total number of students = 50

The above data conveys to us that excepting 2 per cent the rest 98 per cent of students discuss politics (32% Regularly and 66% Occasionally).

Again to know the topical interest of the students they were asked to mark their preferences for more than one topic. The following table will help to make the point clear.
Table 3
Discussion items among friends

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Percentage of students**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Films</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love affairs</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Total number of students = 50
** More than one choice

Six topics were given and 68 per cent of the students discuss politics. This means that a majority of the students are politically conscious. The above three tables are intended to drive home the point that student political activity -- participatory and organisational -- has got a peer group basis, that is, one's peers influence one's political perceptions.

All over the world student politics is drawing much attention. There are scholars who remark that Indian students are less politicised and more conservative.
in their political orientation. While Lipset has characterised Indian students as "headache" for government, Gaudino considers them problematic. Therefore a few questions were put to the students to understand their political participation pattern.

The following table helps us to understand students' opinion about politics.

Table 4
Students' opinion about politics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>Percentage of students' opinions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Students must take an active part in politics</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Students must take part in campus politics only, not in outside politics</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Must take part in politics sometime in one's life</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Students shall concentrate on studies alone</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Total number of students = 50
The above data shows that majority of the students prefer students participating in politics. We have together 76 per cent (50 per cent plus 26 per cent) who say so. Only a very low percentage wants students to confine to studies. Here we find justification for the government's decision to reduce the voting age to 18 years so that the student youth can also exercise his right of choosing the government.

It has also been discovered that the students are opposed to radical politics. They were asked to answer the question as to the method which they preferred to secure their goals. See the following table for the answer.

Table 5
Methods to be adopted

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students' response</th>
<th>Strike</th>
<th>Hunger</th>
<th>Demonstration</th>
<th>Gherao</th>
<th>Negotiation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of students who preferred</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of preference</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Total number of students = 50
A great majority prefers to settle a problem through negotiations, none preferred hunger strike. This means that the students are averse to radical and adventuristic politics. The students who join demonstrations and hunger strikes do so for other reasons.

The students were asked whether they thought student organisations are the leading agents of political socialisation. The question is central to this thesis because the hypothesis is that 'student organisations are the leading agents of political socialisation'. A great majority of them supported the hypothesis. The table given below corroborates the fact. They were required to write either 'Yes' or 'No'.

Table 6

Student organisations and political socialisation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Students response in percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Do you think student organisations are the leading agents of political</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>socialisation</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Total number of students = 50
Here it becomes very clear that student organisations create political awareness among the students. They also try to canvass the support of the freshers in the college campus since they constitute a vote bank. The new students are a 'vulnerable' lot. The student organisations, the leaders tell them, shall protect the interests of the students and these interests include academic, physical, and political. Syllabus revision, travel facilities, fee concessions, elected student unions are all there in the charter of demands.

When asked about the functions of student organisations specifically 48 per cent said it is the protection of student interests, and 40 per cent said they create political awareness. Together they constitute 88 per cent. Only 12 per cent said that the organisations help the authorities in the administration of colleges and universities. None of them believed that student organisations recruit students into political parties directly. See the table given below.
Table 7
Functions of student organisations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Create political awareness</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Protect student interests</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Recruit students into political parties directly</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Help the administration authorities</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Total number of students = 50.

So student organisations are not the direct recruiting agencies of political parties. Even though political parties keep their student wings, student organisations have a credibility and individuality of their own. The history of student movement in Kerala shows that at least on a few occasions student organisations have come together, irrespective of party considerations, to protect student interests. Similarly many of the demands of the various student organisations are almost the same.

However, it must be borne in mind that even though students do not openly admit the fact that student organisations are the direct recruiting agencies of
political parties, they work in close collaboration with them.

An attempt was made to bring out the ideological preferences of the students of the Mahatma Gandhi University. Ideology and its political impact are of decisive importance even among students. Therefore three questions were asked and the students responded in the following way. In the first question a five point scale was given and the students were asked to indicate their preference in any scale. The leftists were given a choice more in order to include radical politics.

Table 8
Ideological preference

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students preference in percentage</th>
<th>Radically left</th>
<th>Far left</th>
<th>Moderate left</th>
<th>Moderate Right</th>
<th>Far Right</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Total number of students = 80

It is evident that the leftists, including the radicals, form 49 per cent (6 + 4 + 39) while the rightists constitute 51 per cent (41 + 10). The conclusion is that in the Mahatma Gandhi University the students with
rightist orientation dominate although by a thin margin of 2%. The radicals constitute only a meagre 6 per cent. All the others, leftists and rightists, prefer to go by the established political practices.

The next question was asked with a special purpose, that is, to know whether the students of this University are politicised or not. It was asked whether they will cross vote when they feel that their own organisation's candidates are weak. A student who is politicised will never cross vote. He will be a panel voter. See the table.

Table 9
Cross voting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Number of students in percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Will you cross vote for a candidate even if he does not belong to your party/panel</td>
<td>Yes 56  No 44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Total number of students = 80

Here it is clear that a majority of students, 56 per cent will vote for other more capable candidates if their own organisation's candidate is incapable. In other
words, these 56 per cent of students are not politicised. On the other hand, 44 per cent are politically committed voters, or panel voters. They never vote for the candidates of other panels. When the majority of students are politicised in a university that will create problems like disruption of studies and violent behaviour.

Finally, in order to recheck the ideological preferences of the students one more question was asked. The question was whether left parties alone can bring about social and economic changes. The students were asked to answer 'Yes' or 'No'. Here an additional option was given, 'Don't know' since the question was an absolute and tight one whereas we had given a 5 point scale earlier.

Table 10
Ideology and social change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Numbers in percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Left parties alone can bring about social and economic changes</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Total number of students = 80
The question has received only a cold response. Only 27 per cent believe that socio-economic changes can be brought about by left parties. A great majority of 69 per cent has opined that other parties also can do so. Here also the leftists have been overcome by the others, or rightists, we may say. Those who said 'do not know' came to only 4 per cent.

Conclusion

The above findings give an idea about the pattern and characteristics of student political activism in Kerala. Student participation in politics has received much attention. The students are considered a problem and a headache by governments. But in spite of this we see here that the majority are not politicised. Radical politics is not widely supported. In the opinion of Lipset "... most students in most countries are not so politicised, and in so far as they have political beliefs these are conservative, moderate, or liberal".32 Thus it is generally admitted that students in India, when compared with those of other countries are less politicised and more conservative in their political orientation.