From a historical survey of student activism in Kerala it becomes amply clear that students here had been politically conscious even during the second half of the nineteenth century. They played a memorable and equally creditable role in the anticolonial struggle. Though the period after independence witnessed student movement losing its cohesiveness, students succeeded in forming several student organisations and the organisational activities of students in turn secured for them several benefits. The government accepted the idea of constituting student unions in colleges and universities and also giving representation to students on the various university bodies. The elections to the student unions attract much attention today, of the entire society, because it brings forth a set of leaders who are likely to play the role of decision makers later.

Kerala is the first state in India where students were given representation in the Senate of the University.
Representation was given to them in the Syndicate, the highest administrative body, only after much protracted negotiations. Though the government opposed the proposal, it was compelled to accede to the wishes of the members of the legislature, especially the youngsters from the Congress Party. Finally the Kerala University Act of 1974 granted Syndicate representation to the students.¹

General Trends

The impact of mass society and mass culture must also be duly considered when students' participation in university administration is analytically studied. Ours is a mass society and it leads not only to popular government but also to populist oriented institutions as well. Here all cultural institutions including schools, colleges, and universities will respond to popular taste and as a result their formative influence is likely to get diluted. No wonder the traditional values of university life are replaced in this age of mass culture.

Again, mass education stimulates social changes. As John Stuart Mill says, reading is power since it enables

the individual to gain knowledge and also the capacity to communicate. It is very interesting to see how reformers from Plato down to Sir Thomas Moore and John Kenneth Galbraith have put their faith for improved society in the increase of an educational class but the spread of education in turn demanding changes in society too.²

Population expansion with its emphasis on a strong middle class has placed its impress on society's institutions. Thus the students have come to occupy a share in the administration of universities. Their demand is for a more representative form of government of the university just as corporate management is challenged by its workers and the authority of the church superiors is subjected to questioning by the lesser clergy and some of the laity.³

Social movements as stated at the very beginning, have become an accepted part of mass politics, not only in the West but also in developing societies like India. Since the 1960's a large number of social movements including student movement became extremely active in

³. Ibid., p.150.
political life. In fact the student movement was the most important element of this social upheaval. While the students of America gave the lead their counterparts in France enacted the thrilling climax in 1968. The students of Kerala also began to assert their rights including a share in the administration of universities, emboldened by their organisational strength, though they did not have geographic or cultural relations with the students of the West.

Organised movements like those of students and their demand for a share in the administration reminds us of the fact that in analysing political action (struggle for power) we need to look primarily at the activities of social groups rather than the action of individuals. A social movement in broad terms is 'a collective endeavour to promote or resist change in the society of which it forms part'.

The above reasoning in favour of student participation in university administration makes it clear that such participation is in tune with present day realities of social life. Thus in India also the Education Commission (1964-66) recommended encouragement

of student unions for providing a healthy outlet for students' energies and useful training in the use of democratic methods. The recommendation was widely appreciated and properly organised unions were said to promote self government and self discipline. Outside the classroom students could participate in the affairs of the university. Over the years student organisations in the form of student unions in colleges and universities have grown as centres of power.

Case for Student Participation

Is there a case for students' participation in university administration? The answer is two-fold, first, it is the result of political socialisation, and second, for positive reasons which make such participation necessary. Further explanations will make matters more explicit.

Firstly, political socialisation instils in the students' minds certain values which compel them to be critical of authorities. They also feel that they are qualified enough to participate in the decision making process. The student community which is a politically conscious set of persons will not remain neutral when the public system of education, as it prevails in our country,
is brought under political strain. Such education is both a product of and a producer of political consciousness of a democratic polity. Policy decisions regarding the university are taken with public involvement and their implementation also is the result of a process of public discussion and mobilisation.  

However it is the negative, power centred, manipulative politics that has exerted much pressure on higher education. Political corruption has polluted the sources of power and authority and consequently the quality of the decisions taken by the concerned authorities have been adversely affected. The strains generated by such politics will eat into the vitals of an organic system like the university. In the light of these experiences, it is only natural that the elective and representative character of universities is made use of by interested parties. Here the students too feel that they can protect their interests only if they get representation in university bodies. But in the process they too get caught in a vicious circle due to the patronage they receive from political parties and leaders.

Students oppose the bureaucratisation in the field of higher education. Bureaucratisation leads to impersonalisation, rigidity, and dehumanisation. This happens when higher education falls a prey to various pulls and pressures of society. In the words of M.R. Rao, "the traditional authorities are not able to cope with changing environment of a university. The traditional authorities should be redesigned, restructured and new authorities should be created whenever necessary, in the management of universities".6

Secondly, the other reasons for student participation in university administration are making students responsible citizens, curriculum planning and better student services. As M.R. Rao says: "The new mission of the university is achieving an ideal democratic community within the institution. The major segments of the university community are faculty and students. Both faculty and students as members of the university community should participate in the decisions that affect them. The participation of students and teachers in the management of a university is consistent with democratic

values of university community". Therefore it is clear that since the university is meant for the students they must participate in its administration also.

The students, though they are young and not experienced enough, can be given a chance to take part in university administration. The Kothari Commission says: "As one positive step to encourage students to take part in university government and to make them to realise their responsibilities in the day-to-day functioning of the university, we recommend that representatives of the students community (including undergraduate students) should be associated with the Academic councils and courts of universities". The commission thus favoured student participation in the two highest authorities -- Senate and Academic Council. The Faculty Council and the Board of Studies are the two subsidiary bodies of the Academic Council. The committee appointed by the UGC on the

7. Ibid., p.9.
8. The desirability of student membership on various academic bodies has been accepted in all the universities of developed countries. The two important benefits of student participation in university government are, firstly, student members in different bodies will assist these bodies and, secondly, student membership in such bodies involve students in the responsibility for decisions taken. This is the opinion of S. Santhana Gopalan, "Student Participation in University government in Australia", Journal of Higher Education, UGC, New Delhi.
management of universities also favours students' participation in the Senate/Court, but not in bodies like Syndicate, Academic Council and the Board of Studies.

Education is no more the prerogative of the privileged, but it is the right of everybody. It is the means for upward mobility and gainful employment. At the same time it is the essence of democracy that no person has a right to make decisions that affect the lives of others. Therefore it is only natural that students are allowed to participate in the bodies which decide the curriculum. There are instances when curriculum changes are made to suit the teachers instead of the students. Obsolete specialisation subjects are forced upon students. Teachers today concentrate on the development of their own careers rather than the growth of students.

Student participation in academic management has replaced academic autocracy with academic democracy. In the words of James A Perkins, "The academic process is now viewed as one in which teacher and learner are equally involved, both in the selection of topics and in the manner in which these can be taught. As students insist on the right to participate at the point where decisions are made about the content of their instruction they are
focussing on the department". The mere presence of students on the various authoritative bodies has compelled these bodies to desist from taking decisions which are unpopular with students.

It is a widely acknowledged fact that the most important cause of student unrest is the inadequate student services. The students are demanding a greater voice in the management of student services. The important student services are living facilities, counselling and guidance services, student activities, health services, financial aid etc. The committee on the Management of Universities appointed by the UGC has recommended student participation in all bodies constituted for the promotion of student services. The Committee has said that Student Councils must be created for the purpose of providing better student services in every university.

A question worthy of consideration here is whether organisational weaknesses of educational institutions have contributed towards student activism. The answer is an emphatic 'Yes' -- student activism in its present form

10. Ibid.
is a by-product of the weaknesses in the organisational set up of institutions of higher education. In the context of our country we can definitely say that there are conflicts and contradictions between the social system and organisations working within it. At the national level we have accepted the democratic pattern of government, but at the institutional level there is the bureaucratic domination. The administrative machinery at all levels of education has remained unchanged in content and character after independence. The decision making process is slow and highly technical. The administrative machinery has been forced to assume more responsibilities and the channels of communications have become inordinately longer. Most of the problems that are logically raised are not properly cared and very often decisions are taken on an adhoc basis. In other words "Adhocism, provisionalism, and specifism have taken place of normalism, definiteness and long range solutions". 11

The absence of an 'institutional culture' is another important reason cited for student unrest when administrative inefficiency is analysed. After independence the enthusiasm for expansion was so strong

that educational institutions were established without any traditional base in our country. Colleges and universities were started purely on political considerations. This is true somewhat about Kerala also. For starting a new college or course political influence is sought by those who apply for it. This political base has contributed in politicising these institutions and imparting them the traditions of political culture rather than the academic culture. The contemporary activism in our colleges and universities can be considered as an extension of the initial political tradition. The students who have been brought up in this tradition thus "fail to accept any academic norm or any academic programme which comes in conflict with the political culture". 12

The educational institutions are generally speaking, incapable of handling any immanent crisis. In other words, they have assumed a posture of indifference towards the habitual miscreants in the campus. The techniques and provisions for maintaining discipline in the campus are fraught with logical and legal weaknesses.

12. Ibid., p.189.
Student Views

The students argue that elected student unions are a right of theirs. They oppose the nomination process for constituting student bodies. They consider depoliticisation of the college and the university as an attack on the rights guaranteed by the constitution to the university community. Depoliticisation in effect would lead to the curtailment of the right to form associations, and the right to protest, they say.

The various student organisations are conscious of the need for elected student unions. In their opinion they are needed for (a) protecting their democratic rights, and (b) initiating debates and discussions to clear doubts regarding important issues. The issues which concern the student community can be taken to them directly. If depoliticisation takes place it will paralyse the student movement, they fear. Thus depoliticisation is not considered as the solution to the ills faced by the field of higher education.

The Charter of Demands adopted by the various student organisations include;

1. democratisation of university administration by filling up University Senates, Syndicates, Academic
Councils, etc., mainly by elected representatives of different sections of the university community.

2. the rights to decision making, related to university education, should be concentrated in the hands of the elected bodies governing the universities.

3. the arbitrary powers of the UGC should be immediately withdrawn.

4. all important policy decisions at the All India level should involve the national level student and teachers organisations and suitable mechanism should be evolved for this purpose.

5. all attempts of tampering with the university autonomy through Governors like the arbitrary dismissals of University Vice Chancellors must come to a stop.

6. the directly elected Students Union should be allowed and the elections should take place annually.

7. the trend of appointing IAS or IPS officers to key posts in the university should be discouraged. Only academicians should be appointed to such positions.
8. the proposal regarding the central educational tribunal and raising of the university security force should be immediately withdrawn.

9. admission of students, recruitment and promotion of teachers and Karmacharis should not be used to settle political vendettas.

Students Unions

It was in 1968 that the Kerala Education Minister promised that students would be given representation in the Senate. But nothing was said about the nature of representation. Therefore students began a programme of indefinite agitation and finally three seats were allotted for them in the Senate. Student representation in the Senate became a reality in 1969. The Kerala and the Calicut University Unions were also reconstituted during this time. It was the University Act of 1967 which recognised the University Union. In the Kerala University Union so far only those colleges which were situated within the limits of the Trivandrum city alone were allowed to participate. But after reconstitution all the colleges were brought under the Kerala University Union for the sake of participation in union activities. Thalekunnil Basheer became the first chairman of the

Kerala University Union and C.H. IAS became the first chairman of the Calicut University Union.

The objectives of the Kerala University Union are to promote corporate social and cultural life of the students of the university and to train them in the duties and rights of citizenship. In order to achieve this the Union may endeavour to promote opportunities for the development of character, discipline, efficiency, knowledge, democratic outlook and the spirit of service among its members; to organise youth centres, clubs or groups, training camps, work camps, debates, seminars, to impart training in leadership and in the conduct of public works in collaboration with voluntary organisations; to organise arts festivals to promote and develop artistic talents of students; to organise sports, cultural, and recreational clubs, to organise work squads and operate in urban and rural areas, to encourage students and teachers to cooperate with farm and factory workers, to organise programmes encouraging students in various constructive activities in the context of national development, and to encourage other activities which would advance the general objectives of the union.¹⁴

¹⁴. Constitution of the Kerala University Union as quoted by N. Subend, Student Politics in Kerala with Special Reference to Trivandrum District, M.A. Dissertation, Department of Politics, University of Kerala, 1982, Trivandrum.
The General Council of the University Union consists of the councillors elected from the various colleges. The Executive Committee is elected by the General Council for a period of one year, and it manages the affairs of the Union.

However the shortage of time and lack of funds prevent them from fulfilling the aims and objectives of the Union. Regarding the College Unions the main allegation is that they are politicised.

The Mahatma Gandhi University Act of 1985 has provided for the working of the College Unions and the University Union. Each college affiliated to the university shall have a College Union for students duly constituted as prescribed by the bylaws. The objectives of the Union shall be:

(a) to train the students of the colleges in the duties, responsibilities and rights of citizenship;

(b) to promote opportunities for the development of character, leadership, efficiency, knowledge and spirit of service among students.

(c) to organise debates, seminars, work squads, touring parties and such other functions, and
(d) to encourage sports, arts and other cultural, educational, social and recreational activities that are incidental and conducive to the above subjects.

It is also said that all students shall be members of the Union and shall have the right to vote. The term of the College Union shall be one year, from 1st June to 31st May. From the students fees are collected towards the College Union Fund. Subordinate to the College Union are the Associations for subjects and languages.

The College Union will have an executive committee. The Union Chairman will preside over the meetings of the Union. He is elected from among the students. Normally there are two councillors who will go to the University Union.

Regarding election rules, there is an annexure to the bylaws. Here it is important to note that election campaign and propaganda in the college campus shall be limited to the issue of pamphlets and bit notices, display of banners and posters and conducting group meetings to present the candidates. During working hours students shall not organise propaganda or campaign meetings except with the sanction of the principal. It is also specially stated that students shall not use loudspeakers or
amplifiers in connection with College Union election campaign or propaganda. Again it is said students shall desist from disfiguring classrooms and compound walls by pasting wall posts.

The Returning Officer (either the principal or a senior member of the staff) shall under direction of the University notify the election, simultaneously causing it to be displayed in the college notice board. The notification shall be issued within ten clear days before the date of the poll. The notification will contain the programme of the election giving the details.

The Mahatma Gandhi University bylaws establishes a University Union for students with the following aims and purposes;

(a) to promote corporate social and cultural life of the university and to train them in the duties and rights of citizenship;

(b) to promote opportunities for the development of character, discipline, efficiency, knowledge, democratic, secular, scientific, and socialist outlook and the spirit of service among its members;
(c) to organise youth centres, clubs or groups like student writer's club, student farmers' forum, study circles, training camps, work camps, debates, seminars, state and inter state tours, to undertake such other activities and programmes;

(d) to impart training in leadership and in the conduct of public works in collaboration with voluntary organisations;

(e) to organise arts festivals, to promote and develop the artistic talents of students;

(f) to organise sports, physical culture clubs and recreation clubs;

(g) to organise work squads and operate in urban and rural areas, to encourage students and teachers to cooperate with farm and factory workers;

(h) to organise programmes encouraging students in various constructive activities in the context of national development; and

(i) to encourage such other activities as would be in keeping with the general objectives of the Union.

All the students of the university and all the teachers of the college and university departments are ex-officio members of the Union. The students shall
contribute Rs.5/- towards University Union fee (3 rupees for the expenses of the University Union and 2 rupees for activities in colleges like clubs and associations).

Regarding the tenure of office, the members of the General Council, the Executive Committee and the Accounts Committee will hold office for a period of twelve months. A college will be represented by two councillors. The General Council consists of all the councillors. The Chairman who is elected from and among the General Council shall preside over the meetings of the Executive Committee, General Council and all other functions of the Union.

The Vice Chancellor is the ex-officio patron. He shall be informed of all the activities of the Union well in advance.

The University Union Accounts Committee shall consist of 5 members elected by and from among the General Council and 3 members elected by the members of the Senate from among themselves. It shall review the accounts of the Union and the review report shall be presented to the executive committee every six months.

There shall also be a Student Services Committee constituted by the University for the effective
functioning of the University Union. The Vice Chancellor is the Chairman and the Director of Student Services is the secretary.

Regarding the funds of the Union it is said that a separate head of account may be opened in the Mahatma Gandhi University Budget to accommodate all funds of the Union including the annual grant in Mahatma Gandhi University. The Director of Student Services can disburse an amount up to Rs.5000 for programmes approved by the Executive Committee. For programmes above Rs.5000 the previous approval should be obtained from the Student Services Committee.

The Mahatma Gandhi University Act of 1985 also makes provision for the representation of students in the Senate of the University. The Chairman of the University Union is a member of the Senate. Fifteen members are to be elected by the members of the General Council of the Union from among full-time students, of whom one shall be a postgraduate student, one shall be a research scholar, one shall be the student of a professional college, five shall be lady students, one shall be a member of Scheduled Caste and one shall be a member of the Scheduled Tribe.

The students are represented in the Academic Council of the University. In the Council there shall be one
member representing each faculty elected by the full time postgraduate students of the faculty from among themselves.

Clause 29 of the Act says that there shall be a Students' Council in the University. The members of the Students Council other than ex-officio members hold office for a period of one year. The powers and functions of the Students Council include (1) to make recommendation to the Syndicate and the Academic Council in matters affecting the academic work of the students, (2) to make suggestions to the Syndicate and the Academic council in respect of all rules relating to discipline or welfare of students, (3) to communicate to university authorities its views and recommendations in any matter which concern students, and (4) to take steps for the welfare of students.

The elections to the University Unions are hotly contested. Very often violent clashes occur between the various student organisations. This is because student unions are power centres which students would like to capture. In Kerala, the Students Federation of India and the Kerala Students Union are the leading student organisations which try to capture the University Unions. These organisations have been forming alignments with other student organisations like the Kerala Students Congress and the Muslim Students Federation to come to
power in the University Union in the Kerala, Mahatma Gandhi, and Calicut Universities. In 1986 the Kerala Students Union(I) aligned with the Akhil Bharathiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), the Kerala Students Congress (KSC), and the Muslim Students Federation (MSF). The contest was held on a party basis and the analysis of the results made by interested parties show the intensity of competition for capturing student unions. The SFI which came out successful has furnished an interesting analysis presented in the table. 15

(Table Reproduced)

University Student Union Elections in Kerala 1986

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Union</th>
<th>Kerala</th>
<th>Gandhiji</th>
<th>Calicut</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SFI</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KSU(I)</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSF</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KSC</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AISF</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABVP</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>87</strong></td>
<td><strong>103</strong></td>
<td><strong>127</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

15. S. Saraswathi, *Youth in India*, Indian Council of Social Science Research, New Delhi, 1988, p.353.
The student union election campaigning is often mixed with violence, turbulence and politicking. The student organisations spend a lot of money to canvass votes. The whole process creates much excitement and publicity in the student world. The elections in short resemble the elections to the state Legislative Assembly which are political contests.

Several criticisms are levelled against student unions which were originally formed with the aim of promoting social, cultural and intellectual development of the students. It provides a forum for debate and free expression of views and thereby inculcates democratic traditions, and develop a sense of social service and national consciousness. The student resources are mobilised for the purpose. But in reality these student unions have grown as important pressure groups. Many educationists and committees have emphasised the fact that student unions can play a constructive role and can help in cultivating democratic values. They have condemned the interference of the politicians on the campus and in the election activities of student organisations. The Committee that enquired into the working of the Central Universities has remarked that the constitutions of the student unions are largely undemocratic and their activities are not directed towards either improving the
tenor of academic life or the corporate life of the institutions.\textsuperscript{16} The Committee is concerned about the enormous expenditure made in student union elections and also about the type of leadership of the unions. It said: "what is a matter of great concern is that in times of crisis, the leadership is taken by those who stay behind the scene, who may be either political figures, or others who have had disciplinary action taken against them on one occasion or another. A feature of equally great concern is that the unions often act in such a manner that the law of the university is violated and the orders passed by relevant authorities are not respected".\textsuperscript{17} The Committee has also expressed concern about the fact that those who get into the leadership of the unions are not persons of academic merit, but those who have either a long stay on the campus or have an eye on a political career for themselves. They like to establish their leadership on the campus and get recognition for themselves through newspaper columns or by meeting distinguished state or national leaders. The students' union and its activities are thus considered as a stepping stone for their own careers in the outside world.\textsuperscript{18}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., p.354. \\
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
\end{flushleft}
It must be pointed out here that membership in the union is not compulsory in all places. The issue of membership led to a serious situation in Uttar Pradesh. An ordinance amending the Uttar Pradesh State Universities Act issued in 1970 struck down the compulsory membership of students for the student unions in higher educational institutions. This weakened the financial power and the legitimacy of the student unions to claim to speak on behalf of all the students. The ordinance led to prolonged student agitations that spread to many universities in the state. However, no such attempt has been made in Kerala so far to take away the compulsory membership of students in student unions.

The Education Commission (1964-66) recommended the encouragement of student unions for providing a healthy outlet for student energies and useful training in the use of democratic methods. There was a view that if properly organised the unions could help in self-government and self-discipline. It was believed at that time that the unions would constitute a suitable mechanism for providing for student participation in the affairs of the university outside the classroom. But this hope has been belied. 19

19. Ibid., p. 351.
The College Unions have also been formed with aim of giving training to the students in self-government and also to give encouragement to the students for the development of their faculties. But here again the process of election politics in colleges has vitiated the academic atmosphere. The Union is simply a forum to test the organisational strength of the different student organisations. These unions do not help to provide a suitable atmosphere or facilities for the encouragement of talented students. The college year starts with the pre-planned programmes of the student organisations to attract students and by doing these they hope to win the elections which are due in a few months from the opening of the college. They put up banners welcoming the new students. These new students are not in the know of the campus trends and the leaders attempt to project themselves and their organisations before the freshers with the aim of catching them young. It is indeed surprising to see that how many of these student leaders are ready to give up their classes and waste their money and energy for the sake of getting elected to the College Union and they have got the firm belief that it is a stepping stone into the world of adult politics.

The various student organisations start their campaign from the very beginning of the academic year.
itself. Their leaders develop close contacts with the newcomers and try to win as many friends as possible on the campus. They explain to the students the achievements made by their organisation like fee concession, bus concession etc. At the time of college elections state level leaders visit the colleges and make election speeches and appeal to students to vote for their candidates.

The student organisations have the state president, secretary and other office bearers. The state committee or the state secretariat assists the president. There are district level committees and district level presidents and secretaries. Below the district level, there are area or block level set up. At the bottom there are organisational units in schools and colleges. It is important to note that the student organisational elections are conducted in party offices under the supervision of parent party's official functionaries. There is sometimes unhealthy competition between these student organisations. Every year they submit memoranda to the Education Minister or the Chief Minister which is almost a charter of demands. They relate to travel facilities, fee concession, stipends, examination reforms etc. It has also become a practice now in kerala for the Chief Minister or the Education Minister to invite the
representatives of the various student organisations for talks regarding student issues during the beginning of the academic year. Normally such meetings fail for want of definite assurances by the ministers concerned.

The tendency now is to measure the organisational strength among the students by conducting strikes and demonstrations. So naturally student leaders pick up even silly causes for declaring a strike or conducting a demonstration which have no bearing upon students' problems. Such strikes provide opportunities for student leaders to project themselves, and also for trumpeting their organisations' policies and programmes.

All these activities are warming up exercises for the elections. Elections in colleges are fought individually or by forging alliances. These alliances are often a replica of the parent party's alliances and preferences. Election time may witness violent conflicts between the rival student organisations. The issues may relate to banner or board destruction, mutual jealousies, old rivalries etc. There are occasions when even teachers are dragged into the rivalries of students for reasons like observations made on student issues as a member of the discipline committee of the college or taking a particular stand during counting of votes which in their view has
resulted in favouring a particular student organisation. It is to be specially stated here that students spent a lot of money to win the elections. To put up banners, cutouts, name boards, and for announcement, and printing pamphlets much money is needed. They get some money from the parent political parties and the rest is spent from the pockets of the candidates. Money is collected from the members of the organisation also.

Thus student politics in Kerala has grown out of proportion so much so that the public is becoming increasingly concerned about it. Newspapers write editorials, periodicals carry features of students' atrocities, and public men condemn the erratic behaviour of the student leaders who conduct strikes and demonstrations which result in loss of working days in schools and colleges. In Kerala even in schools there are elections to create the School Parliament and elect the School Prime Minister which means that political socialisation starts from the school level onwards. It is the impression which a student gathers about political leaders and political issues from his school days which influence him throughout his life.

One witnesses vigorous election campaign days for over a week before the College Union elections. While the
leaders make hot speeches, the pamphlets describe their special qualities for which they must be elected. But above all personal friendship can earn them many votes because in reality a majority of the students are not ideologically committed to any of the student organisations. When the students were asked about the relative effects of the various campaign methods they replied in the following manner.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Considerable effect</th>
<th>Little effect</th>
<th>No effect</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Election Manifesto</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Election Meetings</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rallies</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Campaign</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the above table it is evident that election meetings and personal campaigns are the most effective methods.

In an Article "25 years of Change in an Indian University" written in the "Journal of Higher Education" Joseph Di Bona says that the values of the students have
changed over a period of 25 years. The new value system is reflective of the middle class character of the students. Again, the author while studying about the attitude of students towards politics in a Uttar Pradesh University, says that more students now say that they must participate in politics. The table may be reproduced here.

### Table Reproduced

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students take part in politics</th>
<th>1964</th>
<th>1989</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>27.2</td>
<td>50.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>54.4</td>
<td>32.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't Know</td>
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<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't Care</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>4.2</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

This attitudinal shift is not something particular to the students of a University in Uttar Pradesh, it might equally be true of the students of Kerala. The field of higher education has seen a quantitative expansion. In India enrolments grew approximately from one hundred thousand at the time of independence in 1947 to over three and a half million in 1986. As a consequence students
began demanding change and reform and also more representation in university administration.

When the students of the Mahatma Gandhi University were asked whether student representation in various capacities in the University has been helpful to protect student interests a majority of them said 'Yes'. (See the following table).

Table 12
Student representation in University bodies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students' opinion</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Helpful</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not helpful</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While the student community is represented in the Syndicate in the Kerala and Calicut Universities they are not given representation in the Mahatma Gandhi University Syndicate. This is because the new norms laid down by the UGC for universities do not make room for student representation in the Syndicate. However 72 per cent of the students feel that student representation in University bodies is helpful. Only 28 per cent has disagreed.
But there are those who doubt the utility and the need for student representation in the administrative bodies of the university. They hold that "even though students were given representation in the Senate and the Syndicate so that they could play a constructive role in the democratic process and to bring to the notice of the authorities students' problems, unfortunately they have been looked upon as forums for trial of strength among the various student organisations. The various political interests have made use of them. The students have got a feeling that since they are enfranchised now the authorities must bow to their wishes and if this does not happen they will use pressure tactics to make the authorities yield". In this regard a former Vice Chancellor of Kerala University says: "Since Independence what has taken place is politicisation. Every political party has its student wing. Elections to College Unions and University Unions are fought on a party basis and occasionally lives are lost in violence during election campaigns. Strikes are too frequent, reducing the number of working days of colleges to less than half of what is prescribed by regulations. In an atmosphere of confrontation in the campus, for the majority of students"

the education imparted in the colleges is of very little benefit. They are thus driven to Tutorial colleges which coach students for examination." The politicisation of the students when combined with the politicisation of the teachers and the university employees pose the greatest threat to higher education in Kerala. He further argues that the University Acts are so framed that the university bodies such as the Syndicate and the Senate are controlled by political groups. The main purpose of these Acts is to make the university a "democratic" institution by including elected representatives in the various bodies. But it is a plain fact based upon experience that almost all the members of the Senate including the student representative can get elected only with the help of political parties.

Another Ex-Vice Chancellor also has almost the same opinion about campus politics and party-based elections. He comments: "Perhaps the most serious problem that confronts the campuses in Kerala is politicisation. The students, teachers, and the non-teaching employees are all victims of politicisation. A state like Kerala which has

a dozen or more political parties is bound to be a hotbed of partisan politics. Every political party is interested in making the educational institutions its recruiting ground and this goes on in the schools, colleges and universities. The result is that partisan campus politics breed the worst forms of political activity, leading to party based elections, unhealthy rivalries, loss of working days, unrest and violence".\textsuperscript{22} These words also point towards the negative influence of election politics in the colleges and the universities of Kerala.

But then there are so many others who believe that elections are necessary in colleges. Any attempt to put an end to elections in colleges is considered as an attack on democracy. In their opinion violent conflicts are natural during election times and therefore efforts must be made to prevent such conflicts instead of trying to put an end to elections which will be considered as an encouragement to the growth of fascism. It is also pointed out that right to form unions through elections in schools and colleges is a right secured by the student community through a hard struggle.\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{22} Dr. M.V. Pylee, 'Not So Rosy in Education Sphere', Ibid., p.20.

\textsuperscript{23} EMS Namboodiripad, Kunkumum, Quilon, Vol.5, September 27, 1992.
The student organisations in Kerala are also against replacing the present election system by any other system. They believe that the students must have a share in the administration at various levels in the colleges and the university. They also content that representation for students in the administrative bodies has done much good. These forums have been made use of by them to protect their interests.

As a result of the politicisation of the student community colleges in Kerala have become the recruiting centres of the various political parties. Each political party is keen to attract students to its particular student wing and once a student joins a student organisation naturally he will be a follower of its parent political party later on in his life.

Whatever it is, College Union elections and University elections are important because political parties look forward to capturing the control of elected bodies which are the actual leaders in the field of higher education in Kerala. This is why campus politics has become a part of party politics and it is also not characterised by ideological issues but that of practical politics.
Student political activity and elections to the College Unions assume significance when the political instability prevailing in the politics of the state is taken into account. The political parties are keen to come to power and therefore there is sometimes unhealthy competition among the political parties. They make use of the student groups which are politically active and easily available. It must be recalled here that Kerala is the first state in India which experimented with the coalition system of government.

The experience gained by the students in College Union elections are made use of by political parties. It is easy to appeal to the students because they are all educated and they understand the election issues. They have been thus very much active during elections to the State Assembly and the Parliament by doing squad work, organising rallies and corner meetings, making public speeches and announcing the names of the candidates over the microphone. The student leaders are duly considered by the various parties and they are given party tickets to contest elections to the State Assembly and the Parliament. Many of them have successfully contested elections and their performance in the state legislature has also been good. A large number of the present day leaders of all the political parties have come to occupy such positions through student political activities.
One of the important problems being faced by our universities is that of finance. The financial crisis has adversely affected the activities of the students' union too. The central government has been in recent years informing the University Grants Commission about its inability to advance more money for academic purposes. The state governments play a key role with regard to plan grants for the state universities. For several projects the UGC allocates development grants only on a "matching basis". That is, 50 per cent of the requirements has to be provided by the state government. Often state governments resist the development of infrastructure in state universities since they have to provide funds for its maintenance. As a result UGC grants sometimes 'lapse' for want of support from the state governments. It is also alleged that state universities for which the state government provides the entire 'approved expenditure' divert the funds to meet the "unapproved" component of maintenance expenditure. 24

The universities and colleges have different problems regarding finance. The universities cannot generate resources beyond a point while colleges with their much

24. Documentation on Education, 'Crisis in Universities', All India Association for Christian Higher Education, New Delhi, No.1, June 1993
larger enrollment can do so. In a paper presented by the University Grants Commission several suggestions have been put forth to increase the resources of colleges and universities and thereby preserve their independence too. They are,

(a) increasing the tuition fees
(b) reducing government subsidy
(c) introducing a differential fee structure depending upon courses and levels, students family income, etc.
(d) student loan scholarship
(e) getting community contribution
(f) educational cess
(g) getting exemption from taxes for donations made to universities, and
(h) making those private industries pay for making use of the research facilities of the university.25

As a result university authorities have been planning to increase the tuition fees for higher education. Recently the Bombay University effected a rise in tuition fees and the students protested against it.26

25. Ibid.
The University Union is a set up which is meant to give encouragement to students to develop their faculties and also to promote cultural progress among students. Thus the University Union budget runs into lakhs of rupees. For example, in 1991-92 the Kerala University Union budget was for Rs.6,25,000 (revenue and expenditure) and the budget of the Mahatma Gandhi University Union during the same period spent Rs.9 lakhs for student welfare programmes.27 There has also been allegations about the University Union misappropriating university funds. The Union officials make unnecessary travels and conduct programmes which do not have a direct impact on the student community. Similarly, the University Youth Festivals conducted by the Universities of Kerala very often end up in a mess giving opportunities for the various student organisations to raise charges of corruption and malpractice against the office bearers of the Union. The University Union is actually the greatest platform available to the students in the universities of Kerala for conducting cultural activities. Therefore it is very important that the Union give the leadership in promoting cultural activities among students thus paving the way for effecting a cultural renaissance in our society.

Another strange revelation made by the newspapers of Kerala is that student representatives in the various university bodies who are supposed to fight injustice and maladministration in university affairs are found to be siding with erring officials and Syndicate members. To put it plainly the Senate and the Syndicate of which students are members have become centres of corruption and battlefields of political interests.


Student representation on the various university bodies was allowed for the first time in the state of Kerala in order to enable students to play a creative role in a democracy. Moreover this was also a part of the attempt made to democratise university administration. The students shall make representation before the concerned authorities regarding the needs of the student community. But this does not take place there. Instead, these student representatives play politics there and even threaten administrative authorities. These frontline soldiers of the various political parties uphold party interests and forget their duties towards those who elected them.
The case of the College Unions are not different in any manner. For the last several years elections to the College Unions were being conducted without any regard for the academic activities in colleges. There is complaint that the College Union Fund is being mismanaged by the union office bearers even though they are given direction by the principal and a senior teacher who acts as the union advisor. It is a naked truth that many of the College Unions do not conduct any useful programme for the students, partly for the lack of adequate funds, and partly for fear of noncooperation by the student organisations which do not have enough representation in the College Union.

Election Violence

Any discussion on elections will lead to election violence and campus conflicts. There are so many reasons behind campus conflicts. Factionalism, groupism, leadership rivalry, election disputes, etc., are some of the important reasons for election violence. For instance, groupism in the parent political party will surely be reflected during College Union elections. Each faction will put up its own candidates. Similarly, the multiplicity of leaders who are eager to contest elections also create problems. Some of them may not get seats and they are potential threats to peace on the campus. Yet
another reason for violence related to elections is the loss of control over the College Union by a particular student organisation. This will create a situation to which they cannot easily reconcile. Still another reason is the misuse of the College Union Fund. Very often it is found that the money allotted for Union activities are misused or not adequately utilised. In some instances the elected unions are not allowed to function properly by the other student organisations. As a result many of the College Unions do not conduct intellectual or cultural activities.

Campus conflicts related to elections have destroyed so many lives. These dead persons do serve 'a useful purpose' because it is these martyrs who are very much needed in politics, who canvass votes for the various organisations. These martyrs may be either those who were politically committed or innocent and impartial onlookers. A survey of election violence and campus politics conducted recently by a leading Malayalam Daily points towards the need to put an end to the cruelties on the campus. A code of conduct for elections in colleges is to be created with the concurrence of all the political parties and it must be strictly observed. This seems to be the only way to overcome election violence, according
to a former Chief Minister of Kerala.\textsuperscript{29} Of course party based elections cannot be done away with unless the political parties also agree to it. Another suggestion is to evolve a mechanism in all colleges to regulate the political activities of students in the campus.

Since the educational institutions form part of our society the evils prevailing in the society are reflected in the campus also and the election process provides an opportunity for it. For example, the influence of money has been felt in college elections also as is seen in the general elections. Corrupt practices, violent demonstrations, dharnas, gheraos all have been copied by the students from the adult world.

Elections to student unions are closely watched by all the political parties. This is because in campus elections also public issues like communalism, political violence, rise in prices of essential commodities etc., are raised and naturally the election verdict becomes significant. Such verdicts might influence elections to the State Assembly. Similarly, the party or parties in power would like to see their student wings capture power

\textsuperscript{29} C. Achutha Menon, Malayala Manorama, August 8, 1990.
in the university and various colleges. Again, the newspapers play a good role in highlighting the election prospects of the various student organisations. Most of them have political leanings. Thus when the parent political parties help the students with money, men, and even prepare them to face physical challenges from the enemy, and newspapers and periodicals highlight election prospects, student union elections acquire much significance not only among students, but also in the whole political world.

The questionnaire points towards the fact that most of the students feel that the student organisations' style of operation must change. The following table illustrates this fact.

Table 13
Style of operation of student organisations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of students who</th>
<th>Want change</th>
<th>Do not want change</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>90</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

So while 90 per cent has demanded change, only 10 per cent feel that there need be no change.
Recently the problem of college elections and campus violence came for close scrutiny in a seminar organised by a few organisations in Trivandrum. The seminar expressed deep concern about student violence. It called upon all concerned to help ban politics in schools and evolve a code of conduct for student politics in colleges. It said: "statistics for the last five years depict an alarming increase in the number of stabbings and other poll related violence in schools. Those who advocate nurturing political consciousness and democratic principles in school children should take this into account. There are even those who are concerned that democracy would be endangered if the children were initiated early into the lofty ideals, but flourishing democracies in the world actually discourage school politics. In fact what was happening in the schools was the destruction of democracy and the resort to violence. The spate of editorials and the sagacity of intellectuals on the subject have been much publicised. If there was divergence on the need for campus politics there was unanimity that it should be divested of violence".  

The seminar also suggested certain measures to put an end to the gory phenomenon of campus violence like propaganda against violence, long term policies for ending violence, putting an end to commercialisation of education, stop exploitation of students for political gains, and evolving a code of conduct.

Thus to conclude, students' participation in university administration is now a widely accepted fact. The Kerala University has given the lead in accepting student representatives in university bodies. Students consider such representation as important to protect their interests. The politically socialised student groups consider themselves to be mature enough to participate in university administration. Their education helps them to be critical of authorities. Moreover, in a democracy all sections of the people must be allowed to participate in the decision making process.

Administrative inadequacies have led to student unrest. The university unions and the College Unions were started with the good intention of giving some initiative to the students. But this hope has not been fully justified. Election violence in college campuses has attracted public criticism. The lack of time and paucity of funds have prevented student unions from operating effectively.