RESEARCH SETTING
In order to test the role of political ideology in shaping working class images of society, two states (provinces), dominated by two different political ideologies, in India were chosen. While Tamil Nadu is predominantly marked by rightist ideology and regionalism Kerala is marked by the leftist tradition.

The success of the communist movement in Kerala lies in the continual agitations of the Ezhavas. The Ezhavas were a part of the Nairs converted to Buddhism between the 1st century BC and the 3rd century AD by the Buddhist monks specially deputed by the kings of Ceylon (Sadasivan 1977:200) The Ezhavas are even today referred to as 'Karayaottalukal' (the people spread all over the land) which is a pointer to their numerical superiority. The victory of Brahminism over Buddhism in later years led to the gradual absorption of the Ezhavas into Hindu society and attempts were made to push the Ezhavas as a whole behind the Nairs. (Sadasivan 1977:203).

The economic difficulties and social disabilities inflicted on the Ezhavas could not keep them in a reconciled position. Behind them was the history of a hard and ceaseless fight for their rights. They were determined to see whether they also could rule. They were prepared to take upon themselves the burden
of being communists and pro-communists because they were desperately in need of an effective means to secure political power and to assert their social position. Though a CPI (Communist Party of India) branch was opened in Kerala as long ago as 1937, it remained a trivial affair confined to certain small pockets. But as the Ezhavas extended their support, it became a massive political movement. The untouchables of Kerala also stood behind the Ezhavas in all their social and political ventures and when the Ezhavas moved towards communism, they followed suit. The underlying humanism and equality of communism conveyed to them by the well-trained cadres of the CPI reinforced their faith in Marxism.

The agitational history of the Ezhavas reaffirms that any issue they take up is bound to assume a mass character. They occupy such a social position in Kerala that when they move, the various backward communities move with them. Never a community of oppressors, the Ezhavas have always stood for the oppressed. "They (the Ezhavas) became the champions of the struggle against untouchability and other forms of social irregularity. Being socially and culturally more advanced than the scheduled castes, they could, more easily than the latter, create those forms of agitation and organization
which would prove useful in the struggle for social equality. They, therefore, became the source of inspiration to, and the virtual leaders of, all the oppressed and untouchable castes. (Namboodiripad 1952:101).

Kerala was marked by the communist revolts in the areas of Vayalar and Punnappura in 1946 and the Malabar Peasant Revolt in 1947-48. However, unable to break away entirely from the 'capitalist political culture', the Communist Party of India came into the mainstream of representative democracy. There was a remarkable achievement for it in 1957. The CPI in Kerala formed a ministry in that year. With a declared communist ideology, the CPI could come to power in Kerala through popular voting. Since then, the Communist Party of India (Marxist), a party split away from the CPI in the mid 1960s, popularly known as the Left Communist Party could manage popular support in Kerala. Despite a few falls, the CPI (M) has been enjoying people's verdict to form a government.

In communism is the political way out that the Ezhavas sought in Kerala, it is regionalism that has predominated the Tamil Nadu politics since Independence. Tamil Nadu is one of the southern states where the various non-Brahmin communities in their opposition
to the Brahmins, have narrowed down their distances and developed a social homogeneity to achieve political unity. The Tamils, proud of a culture extending over 5000 years, are a people strongly conscious of a statehood. Their rich classical heritage and the unique political and administrative traditions built upon by the Chera, Chola, Pandiya and Pallava rulers in spite them to think in terms of a distinct political identity.

After Independence, the Tamils started complaining that the southern people have been increasingly become victims of discrimination. The famous slogan, 'Vadakku Vaazhkiráthu, Therku Theikiráthu (North prospers, South declines)', by the charismatic leader of the Dravidian movement, Annadurai, has caught the hearts of Tamils. The proposal in the congress circles to adopt Hindi as the national language was also disturbing the Tamils. In the 1960s, Tamil Nadu witnessed great anti-Hindi agitations. The Dravidian Movement could have a strong foothold in Tamil Nadu with its anti-Hindi, anti-North and anti-Brahminism sentiments. Even today, they accuse of the central government with such notions as 'internal colonialism', 'Delhi imperialism' and 'Hindi imperialism'.
Initially, the Dravidian movement sought for a separate sovereign state of Tamil Nadu. But the 16th amendment to the Constitution making the demand for secession a criminal offense, made the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam give up its secessionist ideology in 1963 and its leader, Annadurai, announced that the DMK would function within the framework of the Constitution. The political success of the DMK, after its breakaway from the DK (Dravida Kazhagam) in 1949 was steady and gradual. The DMK contested the elections in 1957 and won 14 seats in the State Assembly and 2 in the House of the People. In 1959 it took control of the Madras Municipal Corporation breaking the 22 year stronghold of the Congress over it. In the elections of 1962, the DMK captured 50 seats and emerged as the largest opposition in the Legislature. The first DMK Ministry was formed in 1967 with an absolute majority in the State Legislature. Since then, either the DMK or the AIADMK (All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam—a party split away from the DMK in 1972) has been ruling Tamil Nadu.

A study of working class images of society in Tamil Nadu and Kerala, which have two different political traditions,
may reveal the influence of political ideology in shaping the workers' images. In this endeavour to know the role of ideology, it is necessary to make sure that the differences in the images are attributable to the differences in ideology and not to other differences. Virtually, it is very difficult to control these other differences. The more conducive approach is to, at least, minimize these differences in order to minimize their influence. In this effort, the samples have to be drawn from workers of both the states who have more or less similar structural positions.

If different kinds of industry or management or geographical location are selected, then there is every chance that the differential images can be attributed to these differences. Finding suitable factories is, indeed, a difficult task. However, a textile organization having its manufacturing units in both Tamil Nadu and Kerala was found suitable for the study. Both the plants share some common characteristics. First, both are administered by the same management. Second, both are textile plants. Third, the technologies followed in both the plants are more or less similar. Fourth, the wage system is almost the same. Fifth, both the plants have the same policies in certain respects, such as labour market;
for example, priority in recruitment is given to the sons of the workers. Sixth, these two plants are located in two small towns in the interior packets of both the states; both the towns have no other large scale industry and they are surrounded by agricultural areas.

Although the two plants are similar in terms of the above said characteristics, they differ in certain respects. The plant in Tamil Nadu has a history of more than two hundred years and that in Kerala has nearly forty years. The size of the work force differs for both the plants: the Tamil Nadu plant had 5714 workers and the Kerala plant had 2396 workers as on 31.5.1988. Though both are textile units, the Tamilnadu Plant has a wider coverage; certain departments—Weaving preparation, loom shed, grey warehouse are found only in the Tamil Nadu plant and not in the Kerala plant. While the Tamil Nadu plant has no female workers, the Kerala plant has 449 female workers.