Conclusion
CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

The unique characteristics of Kerala - physiological and demographic - characterise its political complexity and social diversity. In the political sphere it was the first state to elect a Communist Party to power through ballot and had pulled down the same government through a political turmoil. The political system has been subjected to continuous instability wherein the party control over the government was exercised by one or more than one party for a lesser period than what the constitution stipulates. This political instability can be traced back to pre-state formation in 1956. There were as many as six governments between the year 1948 - 1956. They collapsed one after another in quick succession. After the formation of the state in 1956, the average span of ministry works out to two and half years. In all it had a total of 15 ministries, seven spells of President's rule and ten elections after 1956. It is this instability that needs explanation.

There have been some attempts to identify the reasons for political instability in Kerala. The attempts remained unmatched to the complexity of the problem. With the result, the macro and micro level data to identify the reasons for political instability needs further refinement and
interpretation. This needs to cover structural and systemic aspect of the problem. In this study, an attempt is made to analyse the causes contributing to political instability by examining the macro and micro level trends.

The study is based on an ex-post-facto analysis of the 1987 Assembly elections. Emphasis is laid on behavioural aspects of the respondents participating in the political process. For the purpose of analytical convenience and space, the focus of the study is confined to three aspects - (a) Communalism (b) Leadership (c) Political participation. The investigation at micro level was confined to two Panchayats of Mavelikara constituency. The sample consisted of 180 respondents selected on the basis of purposive random sampling. The data was collected with the help of a structured interview schedule. In addition informal discussions with candidates/leaders of the area were also held.

For macro level trends, electoral behavioural modes of 140 constituencies has been analysed. This macro level analysis of 140 constituencies has thrown up three major trends (i) Constituencies that have been stable; (ii) Constituencies that have displayed traces of stability and instability and (iii) Constituencies that have been continuously unstable.
In the first category, there are 24 constituencies which returned the same party in almost all the elections. The second category consist of 59 constituencies which showed traces of both stability and instability during certain points of time. In the third category, there are 57 constituencies which had changed their voting pattern with every election.

The fact that there are a very few constituencies in the first category indicates the level of instability in Kerala. Even the few constituencies that fall in stable category are geographically located mostly in the northern part and a few in the central part of Kerala. Among the parties, it is the Muslim League which manages maximum number of 'stable' constituencies. Out of the eight stable seats for it, seven are located only in one district viz, Malappuram. Congress and CPI(M) have six stable constituencies while the other parties like CPI, Kerala Congress (M) and RSP have one each. More than three fourths - 116 - of the constituencies are subjected to political instability at one point or the other.

There are multiple reasons for this political instability. It is difficult to pinpoint the reason. The peculiar demographic composition of Kerala gives the major communities a decisive say in politics of the state. The major communities - Nairs, Christians, Muslims and Ezhavas -
constitute around 80 per cent of the total population. The ministries have been formed and toppled in the interplay of these socio-political forces. Each community joined an alliance to fight the elections through their front organisation in order to contain the dominance of the other communities. The alliances are not formed on the basis of a political ideology or a programme. The major political parties - Congress and Communist Party of India (Marxist) - are largely responsible for this political instability as they entered into opportunistic alliances with other parties or narrow political groups. For the minor parties, the alliance with major parties proved to be beneficial as it gave them a share in the overall political dominance.

The proliferation of parties has also been a result of various communities propping up their own parties to promote their self-interest. Given the individualistic nature of Malayalis, the parties underwent fissions resulting in spawning of new parties. The proliferation of parties led to a situation where coalition governments became indispensable to Kerala politics. Except once in 1957, Kerala was always ruled by coalition governments. Quest for power rather than the desire to implement minimum programme became the over riding concern of all parties which entered into alliances. Thus, coalition governments have been composed of disparate political parties or groups with contradictory aims.
and goals. Even when there was a great deal of ideological homogeneity as was the case in 1967, parties found their interests at conflict with one another. In a situation where the coalition governments are made up of parties of divergent ideological polarity, interest aggregation becomes a difficult task.

An examination of the phenomenon of instability at micro level reveals certain underlying trends which contribute to political instability. The factors examined include communalism tendencies among people, leader-follower interaction and levels of political participation of the voters.

Communalism constitutes almost the essence of the politics of Kerala state. Apart from the unique social structure, communalism got intensified due to the opportunism displayed by the major political parties of the state. Both the fronts, i.e., Left Democratic Front and United Democratic Front entered into alliances with parties that represented varied interest of the communities. Added to it, the peculiar demographic composition gave these communities a decisive say in politics of the state. Coupled with this trend is their geographic concentration which is significant in two ways: first, it creates political boroughs; second, in constituencies where they are in a significant number they could swing the scales in any way that they wanted.
The results from the micro level investigation more or less confirmed the general trend that has been prevailing in rest of the state. The people are found to be simultaneously caste and community conscious and seem to have stakes in continuation of the caste system. This is understandable given the nature of the caste system that prevailed in Kerala wherein the Hindu community was divided vertically into numerous castes. In electoral politics, caste is still an important factor and parties select candidates depending upon caste/community composition of the constituency. The political parties on their part made a compromise with the existing fragmentation. They swim along with the current and not against as benefits flowing from opportunistic politics far outweigh the disadvantages.

Groups representing various communities play a significant role in politics of the state. Some of the well known communal groups include the Nair Service Society, Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam and the Christian Churches. Politically they operate as pressure groups and guard the interests of their respective communities. The sharp division of different communities coupled with the mosaic nature of politics made various community interest groups far more important. They play a crucial role in the making and unmaking of governments.
The high level of caste consciousness is also one of the contributing factors in the shaping of political behaviour. As already pointed out, the Hindus are divided on caste basis and hence cannot take a united stand in the electoral game. As a result their voting preferences changed from election to election. This is in contrast to the Muslims and Christians who are more organised and show a 'solidarity' in electoral exercises. The reasons for Muslims and Christians taking an organised stand could be on account of their minority character and absence of caste factor. It certainly helped them in having greater bargaining capability in securing concessions from the government. It is the claims and counter claims on the bargaining capacity that reinforces the communal polarisation of these communities giving rise to uncertainty and contributes to instability of the political system.

Further analysis of micro level data indicates a significant association between communalism and the educational level of the respondents. The communal orientation is found to be quite high among the least educated and showed a downward trend with those with higher level of education. Among the parties, Congress (I) appeared to be more communal than CPI (M) or the other parties. Congress (I) has been preferred by those respondents who fall in the zone of high communal orientation while CPI (M) was
preferred by those with lesser communal orientation. When the membership was taken into account, it was found that a majority of the respondents with high communal orientation were members of Congress (I) followed by the BJP. This indicates that parties like Congress (I) which claim secular credentials, instead of secularising the society, are found to be becoming a party to the communal processes. Consequently, the communal divide in the society gets reinforced and the possibilities of a consolidated secular base for the political system gets narrowed down.

In the study of political instability, another important factor is the leadership and its relationship with its support base. Political leadership can shift from one class to another or one party to another in the continuous interplay of political forces. The reasons for stability or instability may not lie in leadership alone. But it is in the interaction between the people and leaders that the nature of the political system is determined. In this context perception of people about leaders and their expectations go a long way in determining the stability of the system. Among the perceived traits, it is personality of the leaders and not ideological background that is considered significant.

Since the respondents hold lofty ideals, their expectations from the leaders being quite high, the
limitations and gaps in the leaders results in rejection of the leaders. Data from the micro level study indicated that people expect ideal traits in the leaders. In concrete reality, neither those type of leaders nor those traits are present. The gap between the expectations and the existing reality accounts for the unstable and fractured support to the leaders. This results in instability in political leadership.

Participation of the people and communities is yet another important variable determining the stability of the political system. Through increased participation, people make greater demands on the political system. As long as the political system is capable of meeting the growing demands, the system remains stable. But once the system fails to meet the increased demands, there is a potential possibility of political system becoming unstable. The problem becomes acute in a fragmented society like Kerala where each community strives to mobilise its own voters to take more active participation in the democratic process. In a situation where a 'consensus' approach is missing and political resources are scarce, increased participation puts greater strains particularly on its electoral system.

The micro level analysis corroborate the general supposition that there is growing political participation in
the state. If voting is taken as a parameter, the data indicates that as many as 95 per cent of the respondents had taken part in the elections. This high degree of participation in the elections, which indicates the levels of participation, seem to be giving rise to electoral debacles. This is partly a result of high expectations from the system in general and political leaders and parties in particular.

As against the high participation in elections, the number of respondents who were members of political parties was only 34.4 per cent. Since they are not members of political parties, there is no mechanism to pressurise the party on its political alignments. Political parties act as the medium through which the expectations of the people can be realised. But to a large extent, political parties are mere electoral parties which become active only at the time of elections. They remain unorganised during rest of the time and give least importance to enrolment of members in it. As the people are not members, the parties cannot influence their voting behaviour. An average voter is both a political and a social being. The absence of a strong political base results in the social label becoming more important, i.e., his attachment to the community. The parties and political processes instead of buttressing the secularisation process, are lending support and legitimacy to the communal and caste divide.
Though the people have both ideological and caste/community orientation, 51 per cent did not openly participate in election campaign. These people retained their option of party preference and did not want to get identified with any single party. Thus the voter finds it convenient to vote either on basis of ideology or on communal considerations. This implies that the voter is not indifferent to the political reality of the state. This lends us to a formulation that while the parties indulge in politics of opportunism, voters indulge in politics of convenience.

The micro level data also revealed that the voter is influenced by the ideology of the party at one level. He is influenced by social factors at another level. The overlapping of these two diverse identities and interests gives rise to a lot of ambiguity. This may be the reason why political processes have been becoming complex. This contradiction may be a result of the voter's own machinations to project of an image in which he may not believe. The electoral behaviour constantly changes depending upon the situation. It is quite evident that the voter is not ideologically oriented. When political parties are opportunistic, it is difficult for the people to be ideologically oriented. For orienting the voters to an ideology is essentially the function of the political parties.
The absence of a formal commitment to a political party results in shifting of his voting pattern from election to election. Though a majority of the respondents in the study area showed no shift in their voting behaviour, there was about 31 per cent who shifted their party preference from election to election. In the present system of electoral politics with single transferable vote, even a small group of voters can play a decisive role. This is all the more true in a situation like the one in Kerala where the two fronts are evenly balanced and a slight shift in the voting pattern of the uncommitted voters tilts the scales either way. This shift in voting is noticed among a small section of the poor and particularly of the higher castes.

To conclude, an average voter is more attached to his/her community than to political parties or ideologies. Since there is a social polarisation of people among various communities, the political system is found to be relatively weak. It is not able to form a stable government on account of pressure from the diverse communities. The high degree of expectation of people of their leaders can be explained by their religious background. The religious teachings about high moral values make the people think that there could be persons with extraordinary traits. In reality, the political parties are not able to throw up leaders of this calibre. The high expectations invariably result in quick
dissatisfaction with the leaders. Added to these factors, the average voter is highly participatory. The participatory culture have been exploited by the political parties for the purposes of democratisation and secularisation of the political system. The parties are unorganised and are not ideologically oriented. They are active only at the time of elections. Since they are not well organised, they take advantage of communal groups to improve their prospects of winning the elections. With the result the voters' participation are reduced to a ritualistic exercise. The voters are reluctant to take up membership of political parties. As a result, the people remain primarily as members of their own community. This, in turn, makes voters indulge in politics of convenience. Thus, the communal divide, high expectations from leaders and parties, political participation without alternate ideological orientation and weak political formations largely account for political instability that the state of Kerala has been experiencing during the last four decades.