CHAPTER VII
CONCLUSION

Any objective analysis of the predominant factors prevailing in the sphere of higher education in Kerala will invariably indicate the existence of a very delicate and precarious process involved in the reforms attempted to improve the educational situation in the state. It will also evidently establish that in Kerala any exercise of reform in the sphere of learning either through a legislative process or by any administrative device has always had some political connotations or communal undercurrents. This was so even in the pre-independence period since in Kerala the balancing exercise of the various religio-communal groupings in the society have always been a very delicately woven fabric which no government normally dared to handle without necessary caution. Whenever there had been any attempt otherwise, it had caused the upsetting of the balance, undermining the very peace and tranquillity in the society, leading to social tensions and political feuds, landing government in trouble or creating confusions in the society.
The politics of education has remained more subtle during the pre-independence period but it proved apparently noisy and controversial in the post-freedom days. The growth and expansion of education was logically gradual and historically slow paced in Kerala though it looked enviably speedy compared to its growth in other parts of India. Kerala’s record of literacy rate and the availability of facilities for college education even in comparatively remote areas makes, indeed, a pleasant surprise. But the efforts made by the government, private educational agencies, particularly the Christian church and missionaries make for this achievement. The services rendered by the government and private educational agencies, the initiative and vision shown by them and the commitment they had kept for the cause and the sacrifices they all have willingly done -- all will have to go on record whenever an objective study is undertaken as part of an academic enquiry.

In Kerala, any analysis of the political process will have to take into account the working of a number of factors that contribute to it. Education remains, and always have been so, an undeniably decisive factor in the political processes in the state. But unfortunately the
state has failed in making the necessary output from education, given the importance and the investment on that score. While in traditional societies education was a closed preserve of a privileged few, in Kerala it was always a matter of proven difference that it remained a policy of the government and a priority of the society that education should be within the reach of everyone, not as a privilege but almost as a right. Even in the days of the princely set up in Travancore and Cochin the rulers were by and large very progressive to extent educational facilities to the underprivileged in the society with an earnest desire of bringing them too on an equal par with the so-called forward sections of the society. The special care and concern shown by the rulers or the government in providing possible opportunities for learning to people of different social shades certainly had gone a long way in contributing to the making of a system of education in Kerala which for all practical purposes proved wonderfully practical in the process of emancipation of the downtrodden. Education was generally accepted as the only key to open up the world of knowledge, thus freeing the ordinary man of the mud from the clutches of ignorance and the shackles of social bondage. Almost all social reformers in Kerala invariably remained social educators, always emphasising the need for liberation through education.
The Christian missionaries who might perhaps have had the purpose of promoting conversions while founding schools adjacent to their churches were, in due course, able to effect a dichotomy of their religious mission and that of their social mission. By offering opportunities for education to people of all denominations and social strata they rightly upheld the principle that education is everyone's privilege and no one ever has any right of denying that to one's fellow humans on whatever excuse.

Education was a device which accelerated the access of the non-Brahmin sections to public service as in Travancore and Cochin, during the early decades, the government service practically remained an exclusive domain of the Brahmins and other upper castes. A position in the civil service was, in those days, a prestigious status symbol and the entry of the non-Brahmin sections to the administrative echelons was invariably a pace setter for the social emancipation of the hitherto underprivileged communities. The social renaissance of the major communities including the minority groups -- the Nairs, the Christians, the Ezhavas and the Muslims -- which also happily coincided with the expansion of educational horizon in Kerala made a marked improvement in the social and political development in the southern most part of India.
The social and educational advancement of the various sections of the society, including those belonging to the backward shades, eventually propelled their political prominence also. Hence it was a simultaneous process that most of the religio-communal groups in Kerala assumed their own significant roles in public service and political movements, asserting their place of prominence in the society. They realised, acknowledged and admitted the undeniable fact that politics and education constituted the two sides of the same coin, each side complementing the other and making its worth.

The expansion of education also provided better employment opportunities in that field itself and those sections better placed in the matter of running schools and colleges found themselves in comfortable and convenient situations to distribute patronage and thus wield comparatively greater social and political clout. The identity of interests gradually established between those in administration (government) and the powers that had been in the field of education resulted in forging an alliance whenever possible and convenient, and to clash each other whenever it was found unavoidable due to conflicts of interest.
If it was the politics of cooperation between the government and educational power centres that more or less existed during the pre-independence days, it was more or less the politics of confrontation between them that was the order of the day in the post-independence period. Consequently the potential of development in the sphere of higher education became the first casualty in the process. Higher learning which should have assumed significant speed and attained meaningful and fruitful changes failed in bringing about the desired goals. The sphere of higher education in Kerala surprisingly remained stale and sterile notwithstanding the good intentions of the government to effect positive changes in the field. Though the government is expending crores of rupees -- more than the lion's share of the annual revenue of the country and in cost perhaps second only to that of defence -- the results produced come no way near the target. The overall picture of higher education in India in general and that of Kerala in particular portrays a very dismal state of affairs. A sustainable level of growth in education still remains something much to be desired.

The agenda prepared for free India and the priorities fixed therein did not carry conviction as regards the sphere of higher education was concerned. The agenda was
often recast and the priorities refixed to accommodate the new pattern of development prescribed by the planners to reemphasise the inter-relationship of education and development. Within the broad frame work of the national plans, Kerala has followed a path of development with greater thrust on the spread of education and health services, on infrastructural facilities and on welfare measures than on the productive sectors of agriculture or industry.

In Kerala, despite the changes in governments -- changes which were surprisingly frequent than in other states -- the pattern of development did not undergo basic or fundamental change as it seems to have been determined by historical, cultural and social factors. It was as a result of this course of development followed, Kerala occupies a preeminent position among the states in India in literacy including female literacy, spread of education, enrolment of children in schools and life expectancy, low infant mortality, lower level of birth rate, spread of health, medical and communication facilities.¹

¹ V. Ramachandran, Education and Development: The Kerala Scene, Keynote address delivered in the Round Table on Education organised by the Gandhiji Study Centre, Trivandrum, 26th August 1989.
On the other side, Kerala marks a very high level of unemployment (especially among the educated) and underemployment (especially among the rural poor) and the inability of the government to improve the quality of infrastructure and services due to lack of resources.  

What seems to be happening in the state is that the educated unemployed either try to increase general educational qualifications and postpone getting employed with the hope of finally entering into the Government -- Industry modern sector, or if the economic conditions of the family so dictate, get part time or casual employment and keep oneself registered in the employment exchange until full time employment in the government -- modern industry sector is hopefully obtained. But in the absence of adequate growth of industry and industry related services and with government employment having reached saturation levels the 'wait' in the employment register proves indefinite. Kerala can be pulled out of the high unemployment, low investment and lack of resources trap only by sharply increasing the rate of growth of the productive sectors of agriculture and industry and consequent growth in related services. This will call for major changes in policies and priorities and in the

2. Ibid.
attitudes of all concerned -- government, society and the people.

One of the important objectives of educational reforms was stated to be the need to inculcate respect for manual work and learning skills. Their implementation has been mostly in name only and education has remained for all practical purposes, book based, information imparting and examination oriented. Even in these respects quality has become a casualty.

Though in the field of general collegiate education in Kerala, there was a phenomenal increase in the number of colleges and courses and in the enrolment of students, it has to be conceded that most of the colleges do not have even minimum facilities. The politics of 'accommodation' among the ruling coalition partners which pressurises the government to sanction colleges or courses to those who asserts their political clout is causing unimaginably disastrous consequences in the sphere of higher education in the state. The affiliating universities are overburdened with routine administrative tasks. The conduct of examinations has become complicated and thoroughly confusing. Higher education and high quality research are more conspicuous by its absence than otherwise.
In the State Planning Board Document (1984)

Dr. V.R. Pillai observed:

.... The state of higher education in Kerala in fact presents a dismal picture. Colleges are overcrowded and without the needed physical infrastructure, laboratory equipment or library facilities. High standards of academic excellence have considerably deteriorated with the introduction of other criteria than merit for the selection of staff in government colleges and the system of purchasing posts with donations in private colleges .... Non-teaching by teachers is countered by non-attendance by students. Frequent strikes make heavy loss of working days ....[3]

In the high technology era when human resources are becoming more important and more valuable, it seems, indeed, unfortunate that Kerala finds it hardly possible to produce trained knowledgeable man power in a quantity and quality corresponding to the apparent level of facilities ascribed to it in the sphere of higher learning. The educational apparatus in the state badly needs a revamping and a thorough overhauling to make up for the deficiencies. The most glaring discrepancy may be said to be that there is a mismatch between educational

preparation and the man power needs of the economy. The unplanned expansion and ad hoc decisions in the sphere of higher learning and the fact that the academic community has practically no role to play in policy formulation or decision making processes make matters worse in both the academic and administrative aspects of higher education. The lack of academic leadership and appropriate management structure makes for a major deficiency in the educational set up as such. 4

Many educationists have complained that the higher education system itself, in Kerala, has become a low level business proposition involving the students, parents, teachers, different categories of non-teaching employees and management. Appointments of teachers are largely decided on caste or graft or on both. 5

An examination of the functioning of the working mechanism in the sphere of higher education in Kerala makes one convinced of the presence of the forces that


enjoy a say in the matter of the policy making process in education. Sometimes the area of education in Kerala looks like a playground of those forces which have practically become interest groups and which converts themselves into pressure groups as and when the situation requires so. It is the organised groups of teachers, university and government employees, student organisations which are, for all practical purposes, tributary wings of political parties and the educational agencies (private managements) which are holding the sphere of higher education in the state to ransom, resorting to all kinds of techniques to safeguard their interests -- organised militancy and threats, agitations, blackmail and any wrong or corrupt practice provided it serves their purpose. The disastrous situation that exists in the sphere of higher learning in Kerala at present is that no one ever has a prick even in overstepping the frontiers of propriety if it is found convenient to preserve and protect their 'interests'. Everyone who has a role to play in the various processes in education always has a stake and hence unwilling to take any risk whatsoever which, he feels, might perhaps endanger his privileges. All such forces try to ensure their 'interests' by resisting whatever reform that is attempted to improve the educational situation in Kerala.
When the government contemplated the delinking of the Pre-degree from the university in 1986, the organised force of university employees successfully thwarted that move by organising an agitation, paralysing the working of the university, throwing out of gear even the conduct of university examinations harming the future of thousands of students. The ugly face of that agitation made everyone understand that organised militancy of employees could go to any extent for the single purpose of safeguarding their promotion prospects in their service. The government had ultimately to yield to this 'organised' pressure and retrace its step.

The implementation of the UGC Scheme in Kerala proved how 'smart' the organised teaching community could be in pressurising the government to dilute the scheme at the implementation stage. The qualification stipulations of the scheme were conveniently given a go by at the machinations of the 'brain' of the top leadership of the service organisations of the university/college teachers. The very purpose of the 'scheme' was sabotaged by the organised force of teachers but they cleverly ensured the implementation of the 'scale' by the government. The enhancement of the quality of teaching in higher education with which purpose the very UGC Scheme was mooted was nobody's concern. The 'quality' became a casualty again.
The proposal for experimenting with the system of autonomous colleges also met with the same fate in the face of opposition to the scheme by the teachers. The very fact that the teachers' organisations in Kerala are by and large 'service' organisations and not professional associations interested in promoting the skills or enhancing the quality well explains the reason for the sad state of affairs in the sphere of higher learning in the state.

The private managements who enjoy a clout are in a happier position since they retain the privilege of appointment to themselves while they don't have the burden of paying their employees -- teaching or non-teaching -- in their colleges.

The political parties and their tributary student organisations are least worried about the issues that confront higher education so long as they don't hurt or harm their 'vote banks'. Their 'politics' is always to safeguard their 'power' either in the government or in the University bodies or in the University Unions.

This academic enquiry unfolds the painful truth that the educational situation in Kerala in the sphere of
higher learning remains much to be desired. It is to be conceded that no bold attempt to restructure higher education hasn't been resorted to with the necessary vision or conviction by no government to this day. Isolated and occasional attempts had been made, of course, by different governments at different periods, but either their intentions were questionable or their reform attempts betrayed some political motivations behind, which ultimately harmed itself in the process.

The politics of higher education in Kerala has always been a by-product of the politics of the parties, interest groups and pressure groups that partake in the political process in the state, making their presence felt at all levels in the society. Every reform attempted -- legislative or administrative -- in the sphere of education also had its political moorings. In a democracy it is no sin that politics has a bearing on social, economic or educational reforms in that society. In the sphere of higher learning in Kerala in the articulation of policy formulations the say of the interest groups had never remained minimal. But it will be equally wrong to make any sweeping judgement that the role played by these forces had always been negative. On many an occasion
these same forces had brilliantly applied restrains which proved prudent in the given situations. The politics of higher education in Kerala has been a combined contribution of a number of factors that retained their stakes in the existing educational situation in the state. The policies of reform formulated and attempted to by almost all governments in Kerala, since the independence, had their political backdrops since no reform in a democratic society can ever be free of its political pulls.