CHAPTER 4

DEVELOPMENT OF THE SECULAR AND THE COMMUNAL IN KERALA
Kerala has long been a source of fascination to the social scientists. Notwithstanding the state's small size, there are a number of distinctive socio-economic and political factors, delineating the state of Kerala from the other Indian States. Peter Miller has highlighted this unique characteristic of Kerala when he claimed that, "nothing happens in the morning in Kerala, until everyone from rice worker to university professor takes a quick look at a newspaper carrying the news on the flamboyant politics of Kerala."

Robin Jeffrey has also drawn our attention to this distinctive nature of popular involvement in the public politics of Kerala. Jeffrey even attributes the high level social development in Kerala to this remarkable political culture. However in the heights of an irony, the same state of Kerala, which is the most ideologically rooted political state in India, is described as the most troubled state of India by various

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political observers. The present chapter is an attempt to unfold these dimensions.

PRE-BRITISH KERALA - AN OVERVIEW

The ancient Kerala society had a highly stratified social structure. Before the arrival of the Aryans from the Krishna-Godavari river beds, the society in Kerala was divided according to occupational groups. The Caste System was introduced in Kerala at the time of the second Chera empire. The peaceful Brahmin migration that began around the eighth century gained momentum during the period of a hundred years' war between the Cholas and the Cheras. By the end of the war Kerala society got divided by a Caste System with the Brahmins on the top of the caste-hierarchy. The Brahmins introduced the Aryan chathurvarnya system by attributing the status of Kshatriyas to the ruling chieftains.

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3 E J Thomas has listed out seven such occupational groups. They are Thudiyum (one who beats Thudiyum), Parayan (one who beats Parayan), Pattan (Seller), Kadamban (Farmer), Valayar (Fishermen), Vanikar (Traders) and Uzhavar (Coolie) in his book *Coalition Game Politics in Kerala*, New Delhi, Intellectual Publishing House, 1987.

below their own caste rank. Then came the intermediary castes like the Ambalavasis, followed by the Sudras like the Nairs and finally the polluting-castes like Ezhavas and Thiyas.

This, in fact, is only a broad classification and the real levels of caste hierarchy were much more complex and the system entailed certain spacial restrictions on interaction. An Ezhava, for example, must keep a distance of 36 steps from a Brahmin and a Pulayan must not approach him within 96 steps. There were even groups whose sight alone was considered polluting to the upper castes.

Caste was not just a social institution in Kerala. It had different economic and political implications as well. In other words it was the caste which determined the socio-economic and political status of an individual or a group in the traditional Kerala society. The caste principles divided as well as sustained the society in Kerala before the arrival of the Europeans.
THE BRITISH PERIOD AND IT’S CONSEQUENCES

The coming of the Westerners in the 16th century radically altered these structural and functional mechanisms of Kerala society. The non-competitive and hierarchical aspects of the Kerala society gave way to a mobile and achievement-oriented society. The vertically positioned social groups began to compete with one another. However, one remarkable feature of this mobility was that since the prevailing inequalities were based on the ascriptive values of caste or community, their struggles against these structures were also based on these very same identity. Put differently, since the communities were discriminated on the basis of community characteristics—for instance, religion—the tendency was to unitedly fight on the community (religious) level. Thus as T.K. Oommen puts it “membership in ascriptive groups invariably facilitates the development of primordial collectivism due to the heavy weight of tradition inculcated through the socialisation process”⁶. In this tradition the members of different castes

and sub-castes began to organise themselves into communities, fostering the community feeling above all other positions.

DEVELOPMENT IN THE 20th CENTURY : THE PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

In modern Kerala the new elites of this Europeanised stratum began to organise their respective communities into solidarity groups for articulating and aggregating new demands, to begin with, for socio-economic reforms and subsequently for political participation. A number of interpretations of this process were briefly discussed in Chapter Two. Those analyses, however, appears to be mutually contradicting and a consideration of those ambiguities may help us to develop a better understanding of those dimensions.

Interestingly, while P.M Mammen concluded his analysis with a prospective note on the glimpse of rational secular values with the communal solidarities lying prostrated, E.J Thomas proposed an altogether different conclusion that the emerging multi-community leadership may become the ideal base for
democratic development in Kerala. George Mathew, on the other hand maintains that communalisation in Kerala was only a manifest attempt of the communities in the prevailing agrarian setting to promote their interests while secularisation was the result of subliminal choices. What has happened in Kerala, at present, according to George Mathew is that after secularisation, the manifest use of primordiality for status and power has 'withdrawn to private realm. This is basically because of a loosening grip of religion over the individuals in the wake of a large scale process of secularisation. All these writers share certain common ideas. They have very rightly captured the community or communal overtones in Kerala politics. However the fact remains that, in the end, their conclusions turned out to be a bit subjective. All of them are jumping to the prediction that Kerala is bound to become secular or democratic even though the premises they have relied upon do not appear logically leading to such a conclusion.

A closer look at the most recent of the political developments in Kerala suggests that there is also an emerging problem of an intensification of communalism too, primarily as a
result of the prevailing socio-political practices. What is emerging here is the fact that the claims of democratisation, rationalisation or the agenda of socialistic or communistic transformation have not really brought forth with them any significant turn of events. On the other hand, ironically, what has really happened in Kerala is that the traditionalist loyalties have got further legitimatised under the modern political processes too. The irony here is that the development of the so-called modernist political structures, having taken place without demoralising the structural conditions of the pre-modern times, has resulted in a very serious paradox as a result of which it now appears that the evolution of genuinely modern structures free from the influence of the old, is almost impossible. In this way the communalist parameters are integrated into a 'naturalist' framework giving the impression that communal calculations are a pre-requisite of democracy and development. It is this transformation which is in need of an analysis in the context of Kerala. It is contested that this kind of a transformation is more specifically a political construction rather than a cultural or structural manifestation of Kerala society. It is considered political because the main motivation behind this mobilisation is only
specifically a political construction rather than a cultural or structural manifestation of Kerala society. It is considered political because the main motivation behind this mobilisation is only power, more specifically a means to achieving political power. Also it is argued that the main protagonists of this political culture are again the so-called secular parties like the Communists and the Congress themselves. They are expected to play the twin roles of setting political trends as also of initiating the processes of secularisation and democratic development in Kerala.

Paradoxically, none of the earlier analyses of Kerala politics seems to make any acknowledgement of this reality. On the contrary, most of them present the structure of politics as and how it is maintained by the dominant, politically interested groups.

Undoubtedly religious identity or religion itself continues to be in the centre-stage in Kerala society and politics. The variables like education, employment, social status, political participation and empowerment continue to show a somewhat similar existence even in the most modern times, as they did during the earlier phases. There are even now large scale disparities between castes and communities in all these above mentioned areas. Over the
years, one or two dominant political actors may have grown in strength and influence making an impact on the configurations of political structures. However the emerging equations are still not devoid of the basic societal features and the politics in Kerala continues to be within the same discursive ideologies. The very fact that the political power is even now in the hands of those political parties who have also grown out of the very same communal milieu in itself substantiates the continuing legacies of Kerala politics. There are no substantive changes in the structure and function of politics in Kerala and the so-called secular credentials in modern Kerala are only a discursive formation strategically developed by the political elites. It has reached a point today where ‘being communal’ is the favourite epithet thrown at one’s opponents in society. The constructions on the principle of secularism too have proved to be flexible enough to suit the age-old pattern of communal mobilisation.

In this sense all the earlier analyses have got only a superficial relevance. This is where the analysis of the politics in Kerala requires an altogether new framework. The gradual but steady evolution of the BJP-Hindu Munnani combine in Kerala’s
secular politics in the 1980's cannot be explained without this reorientation. This is not the only distressing development of this kind in modern Kerala. A detailed reconsideration of the political practices in Kerala after 1956 provides us with a number of similar facts.

The foregoing analysis of the historical development of politics in Kerala clearly brings out a number of analytical problems. On the one hand modern Kerala represents the land of public politics, characterised by a variety of progressive socio-political dynamics. It has within it a very strong ideological content, comprising all the so-called revolutionary nationalist and socialist traditions. In fact, all the different interpretations, which were analysed in detail in the previous chapter, have concluded with a very progressive projection of the nature of politics in modern Kerala after 1956. However, at another level, the recent trends in Kerala politics, do not subscribe to such an evaluation. The so-called prostration of community solidarity in the 1970's are, however, followed by another stage of regrouping in the 1980's. The coming together of various factions of the Kerala Congress (the party of the Christian community) the merger of
different factions of the Muslim League (the political wing of the Muslim Community) into one, and the much criticised appearance of a BJP-Hindu Munnani combine as a third front (representing the Hindu Community) are all the unmistakable marks of a continuing legacy of this communal hangover in Kerala politics even in the 80’s. All these, and a number of other historical legacies can be identified throughout Kerala politics during 1957-1991. However, what is even more significantly identifiable here is a much more dangerous trend i.e., a process of communalisation by the secularists themselves. In other words, of late even the so-called secular groups have got communalised, or they have themselves become instrumental in a process of communalisation in Kerala. The large scale communal mobilisation and polarisation under the leadership of the two major political parties in Kerala, the Communists and the Congress party is the next major transformative development, which is more often unaddressed in any analysis.

Our attempt here is to identify this process through a recapturing of the politics in modern Kerala during the 1957-1991
period, from a perspective different from that of the earlier analyses.

THE POLITICAL HISTORY FROM 1957 TO 1991

The political history of modern Kerala necessarily starts with the eventful election of 1957, which brought into power a Communist Ministry led by the Communist Party of India (CPI), through a democratic election, for the first time in the world. The provincial conference of the Communist party held in 1956 had adopted a resolution entitled ‘Communist Proposal for Building a Democratic and Prosperous Kerala’. They promised to build, not to destroy, not just true democracy but prosperity on the platform of a practical ‘minimum program’ aimed at political stability, social justice and economic reconstruction. Commenting on their election manifesto of 1957, T.J Nossiter observes that “It was certainly a far cry from the original Communist manifesto. It bore a decided resemblance to the basic outline of the central government’s second Five Year Plan, more Congress- socialist than Communist”7.

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The State Committee of the Communist party was often a reconciliatory body pondering over unresolved conflict with ambiguous formulae. The then party secretary M.N Govindan Nair rightly described these paradoxes when he said that communism with a democratic constitution was like capitalism without private enterprise. The then chief minister (EMS Namboothiripad) also observed that “we have to work within the frame of a system which includes several regulations and limitations which are not to our liking”. And a minister in the Communist Ministry said “we are, if you want, to put it that way the true Congressmen”.

The substitution of a peculiar type of theology in the place of ideology thus became an essential part of this political culture. The Communists on their part adopted all aspects of these dynamics and at the same time ventured to initiate a number of legislative reform procedures. The most important reform attempted by the Ministry was the Agrarian Relations Bill.

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8 Ibid., p-67.
10 Ibid.
attacking the tenurial relations of Kerala which was the most complex of its kind in the whole country. Though the Bill was not passed during this Ministry, this was a sufficient reason for strong opposition from various vested interest groups. Another similar legislative move was in the area of education, where also the two most powerful groups in Kerala society, the Christians and the Nairs have had a clear dominance of interests. And the Kerala Education Bill introduced by the Communists Ministry evoked mass resistance from the Christian community. ‘In short’, as in the words of T J Nossiter, “in a major tactical blunder the Communists antagonised two dominant vested interests groups in Kerala almost at the same time, the Christians and the Nairs”.

Subsequently the so-called ‘liberation struggle’ was launched. The Vimochana-Samara Samithi, the agency which led this agitation, was essentially an alliance of Nairs, Christians and the Muslims, who were also at the receiving end of the Communist policies, with the only aim of freeing Kerala from the Communist rule. That was the beginning of a kind of civil war having all its accompaniments of a major law and order problem, (a justifiable

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12 TJ Nossiter, op. cit., p-69.
13 Ibid.
ground on which the Central interventions could be invited!) which finally resulted in the dismissal of the Communist Ministry by the Central Government on 31st July 1959. The ministry of the history makers thus had an abrupt ending, the process leaving scope for defining a new culture of coalitions, which was to become the hallmark of all subsequent political formations in Kerala. It resulted in the regrouping of the communal forces and inadvertently helped to create the ‘triple alliance’.

The characteristic feature of this alliance was that, they never developed a political structure in the form of a single political party for political action. Instead, they operated within the parameters of their own communitarian framework, making their religious and community life an ambiguous part of politics. This was also accompanied by a consolidation of the Harijan and other backward caste Hindus, behind the Communist alliance resulting in a great degree of absolute polarisation of the socio-political forces of Kerala.

What is even more significant about the liberation struggle was that it became the foundation of a new culture of political

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alliances with a very strong rhetorical base. The apparent communal overtures of the constituents of the *Vimochana Samara Samiti*, became antithetic to the seemingly ideological existence of the Communists.

The midterm elections in 1960 was fought between these two polarised groups and the triple alliance of the Christians, Nairs, and the Muslims scored an electoral victory over the Communist front. The polarisation of the groups was such that the total number of contesting candidates averaged less than 2.5 per seat, which was a record low in the annals of Indian elections. The triple alliance won 94 seats as against the 29 of the Communist front. But despite all efforts to discredit the Communists, they won 43.9 percent of the votes cast. This shows that more than a political victory, it was the alliance which won the anti-left front the crucial seats.

Quite naturally the composition of the alliance became a matter of controversy from the very beginning itself, as the partners had only one unified stance that they all wanted the

\[\text{source: } \text{ibid. p-111.}\]

\[\text{source: } \text{ibid..}\]
Communists out of office. More than that, they never had any other unity of outlook or even an effective leadership.

Pattom Thuny Pillai, the senior Nair leader of Kerala politics at that time, fought his way into the leadership, edging out R Shanker, a prominent leader of the Ezhava community and the leader of the of Indian National Congress (INC), the leading party of the group. Adding to these complexities "the INC decided to recover its political 'virginity' by opting not to allow the communalist Muslim league (ML) to join the coalition ministry". Thus the Muslim league was forced to swallow the bitter pill and settle for an untouchable position in the coalition immediately after the coalition was formed.

Under Pattom's chief ministership, a new position of deputy chief ministership was created for R Shanker, the leader of the 63 member INC group. Inspite of a number of adjustments like this, the ministry began to experience so many divisions and as a result the coalition continued on uneasy terms. This was followed by a change of leadership from the Nair leader of Praja Socialist Party (PSP) to the Ezhava leader R Shanker of the INC. Shortly after that
the Nair led PSP left the alliance. The Muslim league had already left the alliance, basically because of the INC approach towards it, which has its roots in the national political scenario, or more specifically in the partition of India. The departure of PSP therefore meant the end of the coalition itself, which was formed against the Communists in the 1959 Liberation Movement.

Adding to all this, within the Congress itself serious infighting was going on and the 1962 General Elections clearly revealed these dynamics when the CPI and their supporters got 10 out of 18 parliamentary seats.\(^\text{19}\)

Subsequently in 1964 the Nair and the Christian groups in the Congress came out of the INC to form a new party called the ‘Kerala Congress’ (KC). This is often referred to as a reaction to the emerging leadership of Shanker who was an Ezhava.

It was around this time that the CPI also began to experience some crisis. In the words of Mammen, “it became an ‘omnibus’ like the INC and other open political parties ever greedy for massive electoral support”\(^\text{20}\). And for the sake of that, they mobilised all those who wanted to join them, including some

\(^{19}\) Ibid., p-115.
\(^{20}\) Ibid., p-119.
vested interest groups, making the internal control of the party very difficult.

As a result of this, and a variety of other reasons including ideological schisms within, the CPI was finally split in 1964 marking the emergence of another Left party, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) [CPI(M)], in Kerala. Under these changed circumstances the CPI(M) also prepared themselves to exploit the contradictions within the Congress and even within the CPI, by reaching an electoral understanding with both the Muslim League and the Kerala Congress (KC). Hereafter the political scenario in Kerala was marked by 'a period of electoral fission'. The newly formed rival parties were too antagonistic towards each other, especially with their own parent parties and that resulted in a large-scale division of votes in the election of March 4, 1965. In the process, none of the parties could form a ministry individually or through the coalition as it existed then, in the absence of a clear majority. Without much delay the assembly was dissolved on March 24, 1965, once again bringing back President's rule for the second time after 1959. This time, it lasted for a longer duration.

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22 PM Mammen, *op. cit.*, p-123.
till 1967, and that threw the different political parties of Kerala into what can be called a ‘political wilderness’. Naturally this gave them all a chance for regrouping and the Communist parties came out more successful in this process. They formed a ‘United Front’ which consisted of a number of small parties apart from the CPI(M) and the CPI and fought the elections of 1967 under its banner.

The seven party ‘United Front’ (UF) of the Communists gained 113 out of 133 Assembly seats and for the second time EMS Namboothiripad took over as the Chief Minister of Kerala\(^\text{23}\). However, this time also Namboothiripad’s ministry could not survive for long as his ministry was torn by continuous conflicts. Several communal issues came to the forefront. The creation of a new district in Malabar called ‘Malappuram’ which would have a majority of Muslim population was the most prominent one in this regard. In fact the Muslim League had joined the UF only for this purpose and the UF Ministry met that objective in 1969\(^\text{24}\). This evoked a number of counter movements from several sections of the Hindu community “Namboothiripad tried to counter the

\(^{24}\) PM Mammen, *op. cit.*, p-159.
“Hindu Threat’ by asking what objection there could be to the Muslim majority district in Kerala if the test of India’s secular democracy was the retention of the Muslim majority state of Kashmir”

The Malappuram issue soon got combined with another issue regarding a Hindu temple at Thali, which was being renovated to make it a monument. K. Kelappen, the Sarvodaya leader in Kerala led an agitation to stop the work which was being done by the Archaeological Department and to gain the right to worship there. Then, the ‘Jana Sangh joined the agitation and launched a high powered propaganda campaign to the effect that ‘atheists and Muslims’ were combining to destroy Hinduism in Kerala. Namboothiripad characterised this agitation, conveniently, as a fight between the forces of secularism and forces of Hindu nation theory.

The Thali-Malappuram issues created long-lasting strains for the U.F. ministry. By 1969 the Front was clearly split between two camps one led by the CPI(M) and the other by the CPI.

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25 Ibid.  
26 Ibid.  
Subsequently four out of seven parties of the coalition withdrew themselves from the coalition forcing Namboothiripad to resign as the Chief Minister. A new coalition under the CPI leader C. Achuthamenon formed the ministry, with the support of Muslim League and Kerala Congress. This front is generally known as the ‘Mini Front’. This front was later joined by the break away wing of the Congress, which supported the Ministry from outside. Inspite of the supports, coming from different quarters, the Ministry could not survive for long and Achuthamenon soon got the Assembly dissolved and called for elections. One very significant feature of this election of 1970 was that it was contested between three fronts the CPM-led Left Democratic Front, the CPI-led Centrist Front and the INC-led Rightist Democratic Front.

The centrist front won with a comfortable majority of 68 seats in the 133 member assembly. C. Achuthamenon, once again, became the chief minister and his Ministry consisted of two ministers of the Muslim League, one of the R.S.P, one from P.S.P and four from the C.P.I. Initially the new Congress supported the ministry from outside, and later on, they also joined
the ministry. For the first few years the Ministry functioned in a smooth manner. However, everything turned topsy-turvy, with certain important new socio-economic and political developments in the whole country. In India as a whole, it was a period of severe economic problems. The severe drought, inflation, price rise and, above all the Bangladesh War commuted to give the Kerala Ministry the roughest possible ride. The CPI(M)-led opposition made use of the opportunity and they launched a massive liberation struggle against the Achuthamenon ministry in 1974. They even boycotted the Assembly on the eve of the Budget Session. Soon the Muslim League experienced a split, one segment leaving the Ministry thus reducing the ruling coalition into a minority in the Assembly.

The government was however saved by the declaration of emergency in the country by the then Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi. There were mixed reactions in Kerala towards the emergency. "The middle class were at least delighted, at the prospect of a holiday from agitation, which had otherwise become
the routine of the Marxist front even during the time of their rule\textsuperscript{28}.

In the governing circles the reactions were, however, more complicated as the Congress party, especially with its leader K. Karunakaran as the home minister beginning to dominate the political scene. Still the CPI took a moderate position on this issue, mainly for reasons of the survival of the Ministry. However, in spite of all that and despite the suspension of mass politics for the duration of emergency, ministerial manoeuvring continued\textsuperscript{29}. The general elections in 1977, after the emergency was accompanied by the delayed Assembly elections also. In the election the CPI, Congress alliance once again became victorious. In fact one very commonly sighted reason for this victory was the efficient and all round contributions and reforms brought about by the Achuthamenon ministry. Also it is a fact that the worst excess of the Emergency had been little evident in Kerala. The chief minister of Kerala and AK Antony, the then state youth Congress leader had efficiently vetoed the visit of Sanjay Gandhi, who was a

\textsuperscript{28} TJ Nossiter, \textit{op cit.}, p- 99.

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., p-100.
controversial figure of the emergency, to Kerala. It is also worth noting that the ruling front constituted the most powerful combination of communal and sectional interests ever put together in Kerala.

In the new political scenario of the country as a whole ministerial stability was very much a problem everywhere. Kerala was no exception, despite the huge majority of the ruling front. K Karunakaran the new Chief Minister had to resign his office early, for his alleged acts of omissions and commissions as the home minister of Kerala in the previous Ministry during the period of emergency. The powerful Youth Congress chief AK Antony succeeded him. As in the case of his forerunners, Antony also had to resign soon, this time due to a split in the Congress party, in which Antony sided himself in the anti-Indira Gandhi camp. The leadership of the ministry was taken up by PK Vasudevan Nair of the CPI on whose resignation an year later an interim ministry under the leadership of CH Mohammed Koya, the leader of the Muslim League was tried. This also failed to make any

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31 Reference is to the notorious 'Rajan case', in which K Karunakaran, the erstwhile Home minister was accused of complicity in the fate of an unfortunate young student, P Rajan who was believed to have died under torture during the Emergency.
difference. Finally in 1979 the state came under the Presidents rule for yet another term.

ELECTIONS OF 1980 AND THE NEW MINISTRY

The next general elections were held in 1980, in which the Congress came back to power at the Centre under Indira Gandhi’s leadership. In the Kerala Assembly, however, the CPI(M)-led Left Front came back to power. Ironically this Front consisted of the CPI(M), the CPI, the two factions of the Kerala Congress, one faction of the Muslim League, another faction of the Congress (Urs). In fact none of these allies was qualified for the labels of ‘democratic’ or ‘left’ in the Communist jargon.

The UDF was an even more heterogeneous a collection. However, the consolidation of the left votes and the support of a significant faction of the Congress (under AK Antony) gave the Left Front a clear majority. Inspite of that the Ministry collapsed an year later, when the Antony Congress along with a Kerala Congress (Mani) faction withdrew their support to it. This time also the state came under a brief spell of the Presidents rule before

32 TJ Nossiter, op.cit., p-103.
K Karunakaran was able to form a ministry with the support of the Antony faction of the Congress, enjoying a very narrow majority in the Assembly. As was expected the govt. lost its majority very soon when a single member crossed over to the other side. That was followed by the next elections to the Assembly in 1982.

The United Democratic Front, under the leadership of INC leader K Karunakaran emerged victorious with 77 out of 140 seats. This election was special in the sense that Bharatiya Janata Party, another national political party of India which has an avowed sectarian outlook, contested for 68 seats in Kerala for the first time even though none of them was elected. For the first time in Kerala this ministry lasted a full term.

The political scenario was ready for yet another realignment. The Congress (Antony) faction merged with its parent body. The two factions of the Muslim League came together behind the UDF, along with the KC factions. MV Raghavan a prominent CPI(M) leader was expelled from the party as he mooted the idea of joining Muslim League to defeat the Congress. Subsequently he also

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landed in the UDF camp under the Congress leadership, the very element he encountered all his life as the main enemy.

However, inspite of all these alignments the UDF was defeated in the elections, giving way for a new ministry under the left Leadership. In this election also the BJP contested as a third front, and even though they could not win any seat, they could substantially improve their vote share from 2.75% in 1982 to 6.47% in 1987\textsuperscript{34}. This time also the Left Front Ministry did not complete its full term.

Even when the ministry had one more year in its term, the CPI(M) Ministry called for elections in 1991, along with the Lok Sabha elections in the country. Against the Left Front’s calculations, the UDF emerged successful in the election with a clear majority once again asserting the commonly held belief in Kerala politics that no ruling front can make it for a second consecutive term after an election. In fact looking at the electoral history of Kerala, it can be seen that, in every two years there was a change of government, and between 1957 and 1991, (including 1957 and 1991) there were 10 elections to the Assembly which

\textsuperscript{34} George Mathew, \textit{Communal Road to a Secular Kerala}, New Delhi, Concept Publishing Company, 1989, p-212.
sustained fifteen governments. Interestingly almost all the major, medium and even minor parties of all socio-economic shades had the opportunity to be part of the ruling front at one time or the other\textsuperscript{35}. The only exception is in the case of the \textit{Bharatiya Janata Party} (BJP).

Commenting on this pattern, G.Gopakumar, observes that, "the major trends highlighting the political scene are the indictment of caste factor in the political system, parochial and regional diversities, agitational style of politics acknowledged by the political forces, the inevitability of group politics and the absence of a strong- leadership or consensus, strong political socialisation between the traditional rivals viz. the Congress and the Communists, the exposure of extreme leftism and its failure, the working arrangement of coalitionism, defectional nature among parties and the culmination of the sectarian and regional forces in the polity etc. Conversely it appears to be a conservative working arrangement that has been conducted and accommodated by the political parties as well as groups and electorate in the state"\textsuperscript{36}. The political parties of the state condemn, communalism,

\textsuperscript{35} G. Gopakumar, \textit{op.cit.}, p-17,
\textsuperscript{36} \textit{Ibid.}, p-17,18.
but make use of the support of communal organisations to win elections.\textsuperscript{37}

Since 1960's Kerala has been ruled by coalitions formed by parties not necessarily believing in the same political ideology. The various parties which formed the coalition government in the state have even worked at cross purposes and pulled each other in different directions.\textsuperscript{38} Or in other words what brought them together was the only formula of gaining electoral victory and more often than not those formulas are based on a minimum program.\textsuperscript{39} In fact, always the coalition partners were too busy in manoeuvring individual party interests than the execution of various government policies.

Significantly what comes out of the preceding pages is that the political processes in Kerala have nowhere transformed itself beyond any level. In fact all through these years, it was the same political groups who had been reigning over Kerala and to assume that these parties had experienced any sort of a metamorphosis to appear itself more secular or democratic will be misleading. On the

\textsuperscript{37} A Balakrishnan Nair, \textit{op.cit.}, p-256.
\textsuperscript{39} E.J Thomas, \textit{op.cit.}, p-30.
contrary even the otherwise ideologically strong parties like the Communists have got more and more communalised. Both the Communists as well as the Congress party, who are also the dominant political actors in Kerala, have experienced a process of depletion of ideology as they have themselves played into the hands of communalists. An analysis of this gradual but substantive erosion of their ideological roots will further clarify this aspect.

COMMUNALISATION BY THE SECULAR - AN EMERGING PHASE

Almost all the existing literature on Kerala politics unequivocally maintains that it is the fight between two ideological fronts, one led by the revolutionary Communist party and the other under the leadership of the Indian National Congress that forms the hallmark of Kerala politics. It is also taken for granted that these are the most ideologically polarised groups both representing a number of progressive features. In a normal sense their commitment to secularism and parliamentary democracy is never put under suspicion. Quite naturally, these two political parties have successfully constructed for themselves an exceptional political image, absolutely different from that of the
other minor political parties. This is in spite of the fact that both the Communists as well as the Congress party have joined hands with these minor parties at one time or the other. More significantly, in the day to day political practices, none of these groups are never mutually exclusive. However, in a specific discursive tradition both the Communists and the Congress party retained for themselves a high level of ideological integrity. A detailed analysis of their politics will however bring out an absolutely different side of Kerala politics the understanding of which could help in resolving a number of paradoxes often identified in the context of analysis on Kerala society.

THE COMMUNIST MODEL OF SECULAR POLITICS - THE COMMUNAL BASIS

More than any other political party the Communist Party of India (CPI), enjoyed a very high level of ideological, intellectual and moral status in Kerala politics. Naturally the Communist accession to power in Kerala during the 1957 elections is looked at as a marked acknowledgment of this status. The predominant existence of a number of other outwardly communal
socio-political groups gave them a distinctive identity of secular progressivists.

The secular image of the Communists is sustained even in the modern times, due to the original nature of Communism, more specifically, due to the position they took during their first government, when they were pitted against an openly communalist front of the liberation struggle. However a closer look at the actual situation during the first Communist Ministry in Kerala, reveals that the Communist government was not in any way following strictly secular practices alone. As G.Gopakumar puts it "If the rightists or the centrist political forces do appreciate the communal forces, the leftists too were not an exception, for they too have calculated on the same line of communal arithmetic". The much discussed socio-economic reform projects of the first Communist Ministry of 1957, for example, contained within it a very clear community framework too. It is a widely accepted fact about the origin of the Communist party in Kerala that, they began to grow in Kerala primarily with the support of the socially and economically backward castes and communities there. More

significantly it was the well organised numerically strong Ezhava caste which constitutes the base of the Communist Movement in Kerala. As a result, almost all the reform projects initiated by this Government simultaneously brought into being a necessary communal or communitarian framework too.

The land reforms legislation was one such move which brought into focus severe community overtones. It was almost a centre piece of the programme for social and economic progress of the state. However, the problem arose when within the existing social conditions it was mostly the Harijans and other backward groups who could accumulate the benefits of the scheme. Though they were the communities which most needed protection, it was interpreted by others as favouritism towards party supporters as they were also the chief supporters of Communism in Kerala.

The case of Kerala Education Bill also carried similar dimensions. Soon after coming to power, the government announced that the statutory basis for the improvement of general

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41 Similarly the so-called rightist or centrist front also had a community basis, as their main support came from the communities like the Christians and the Nairs.
education and of the plight of the teachers under private managements was in active preparation. During the discussions on the bill, the education minister categorically stated that the “teachers” dependence on the sweet will of the managers should cease. Quite naturally a number of objections came up from the management side constituted mainly of the Christian Community. They sent an official delegation to the central government with the plea that the bill was anti-constitutional. They also alleged that the Bill was a planned attempt to break the privileges of the minorities which they have enjoyed for long and as such guaranteed by the Constitution.

Adding to all these problems the government introduced a proposal that they will also bring in a policy of caste reservation as that alone could enable the low caste like the Ezhavas to appropriate the benefits of this Bill. The Bill also caused some very serious fall outs in the Congress party. In fact totally divergent opinions came up in the Congress front with the Ezhava

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43 *The Hindu*, 12 April, 1957.
44 Ibid.
group in the party supporting the Bill against the Christian group’s opposition to it.\(^{47}\)

Whatever may have been the reformative dimensions involved in the Bill, what happened in the end was once again an all-round communal polarisation in the Kerala society. Understandably it was the communitarian basis of each of the political groups that necessarily came into the centre stage of political debates.

The toddy tappers co-operative introduced by the Communist government under the workers co-operatives scheme was also seen as a step to appease the *Ezhava* community who were the dominant group involved in this profession and, therefore, ultimately to benefit the party itself.\(^{48}\)

In short almost all the reform attempts resulted in a kind of internal ordering along with an external reordering of the same community structure. In other words none of the commissions and omissions of the Communist Ministry could restructure the communal basis of the state politics. On the contrary, they rather became instrumental in arousing some communal tensions and the

\(^{47}\) Kerala Legislative Assembly debates, 20 July, 1957.

Liberation Struggle was in a way a response to all this. When asked about this, the present State Secretary of the Communist party (Marxist), Chadayan Govindan, also responded that a part of the reason why the Liberation Movement occurred in Kerala was the failure of the Communist party to take into account the deep rooted social basis of the problems of Kerala. In reality, the government was effectively manipulating "one community against the other". When the Christians threatened the ministry in the wake of the Education Bill, the CPI managed to win the support of the Nairs by accommodating the Nair interest in the Agrarian Relations Bill and eventually, to placate the Harijans, they decided not to implement the Administrative reforms Committee report. Thus after having played one community against the other, the CPI finally drove the three communities into a triple alliance which brought to an end the rule of the first CPI Ministry.

It is not in anyway argued here that the Liberation Movement was not having any other communalist implications. However this was more significantly an unavoidable by-product of

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49 Based on the interview with Chadayan Govindan, the present state secretary of the Communist party.
50 P.M. Mammen, op.cit., p-110.
the so-called 'secular' policies of the Communist government, as all those policies were also based on the same communal calculations. Nonetheless, the various studies on this problem have not addressed this aspect as the various ideological rhetorics of Communism have subsumed these ambivalent policies quite successfully.

The Communists came back to power in 1967 after they were thrown out by the liberation struggle of 1959. Their victory in the 1967 election was in itself a product of a further depletion in their ideological integrity. This time the Communists were leading a front comprising parties with whom they shared no ideological affinity. The irony was that the front even consisted of one of the major community-based parties of Kerala, the Muslim League, and their victory in the election was more significantly a result of this new alliance. As George Mathew puts it "the Marxists only got the better of the confused communal groups"51.

Justifying this alliance EMS Namboothiripad stated that "it was only a call for unity of all those opposition parties, whether Left or non-Left, who are prepared to accept a minimum

programme on the basis of which they agree to defeat the Congress. It is, no doubt, the height of irony that the revolutionary progressivist ideologues in Kerala found themselves in need of a new ideology to formulate a political front. It was nothing but anti-Congressism which formed the basis of this front. Obviously it also requires us to pose a very fundamental question that, if anti-Congressism could be the basis of the United Front, how could it be possible for the Communists to term the liberation struggle as communalist?. The constituents of this movement also had only similar unity of anti-communism, as the unifying factor. Whatever be the understandings the alliance between the CPI and the Muslim League did really result in an all-round turn of events in the political history of Kerala. In fact one fundamental aspect of this relationship was that, the alliance appeared unnatural to both the constituents themselves. It was only their sense of dissatisfaction with the Congress party that brought the Muslim League nearer to the CPI(M). In fact one of the most notable by-product of this alliance was that it helped the Muslim League to

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make a bid to establish itself in the Travancore region of Kerala, where it never had any influence\(^5\).

But for these individual interests, there never existed any sort of practical or ideological affinity between the CPI(M) and the Muslim League. The Communists also had to pay heavily for this relationship. Above everything else their image and ideology were the first causality.

In the end even though the CPI(M) party leadership had given a number of practical explanations for this relationship, it was the democratic political structure of Kerala which really paid the price for all these practices of convenience. First of all, it provided the politics of the Muslim League a new boosting and also resulted in a much more intensified communalist framework for political applications in Kerala.

All these contradictions came out in the open sooner than expected. The most unfortunate development was that it was during this time that Kerala witnessed one of the most serious communal regroupings. The much criticised formation of a new district in Kerala called *Malappuram* in June 1969 turned out to be

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\(^5\) John P. John, *op. cit.*, p-118.
a communal issue altogether. It came to be interpreted that this new district was created only to appease the Muslim League and the Muslim community as the region was a Muslim majority one\textsuperscript{55}. It was also widely believed that the Muslim League had, in fact, joined the CPI front for the fulfilment of this particular demand\textsuperscript{56}.

Commenting on this situation, T.J.Nossiter observes that “the Muslim League’s position was, as always in Kerala dictated by practical politics... an uninhibitedly bazaar approach to politics ... business with anyone if the price was right”\textsuperscript{57}.

Understandably this decision evoked a lot of controversy in Kerala politics. A pamphlet published by the ‘Anti-Malappuram District Action Committee’ even alleged that “the League was planning to create a ‘Mappilastan’ which would eventually merge with Pakistan”\textsuperscript{58}. It was also followed by a series of communal responses. The much famous Thali temple issue and the subsequent communal riots in Tellicheri are allegedly an offshoot of this policy. In a special issue of ‘Economic and Political

\textsuperscript{55} Manorama Election Guide 1970, p-36.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{57} T.J Nossiter, \textit{op cit.}, p-204.
\textsuperscript{58} Quoted in Abdul Azeez, \textit{Rise of Muslims in Kerala Politics}, Thiruvananthapuram, CBH Publications, 1992, p-82.
Weekly' it was emphatically stated that ".... the communal riots at Tellicheri in which the minority (Muslim) community faced the brunt of the attack, seems to have been the outcome of the strengthening and consolidation of Hindu communal forces as a reaction to a series of political concessions won by the Muslim League over the last few years".59

However, the Marxist chief minister EMS Namboothiripad had an altogether different explanation for these developments. He characterised the agitation "as a fight between the forces of secularism and forces of Hindu nation theory"60. One very serious implication here was that his argument even amounted to characterising the Muslim League as a secular force in Kerala. Namboothiripad even went on to argue that, ".... how can there be an objection to a Muslim majority district in Kerala if the test of India's secular democracy was the retention of the Muslim majority state of Kashmir".61 Obviously his reference was to the policies of the Indian National Congress.

Whatever be the ideological and administrative explanation of the Communists in power, this alliance with the Muslim League only resulted in a further communalisation of Kerala politics. In fact it was the first time when an overtly communal political party like the Muslim League found some legitimate political status in Kerala. Till then their involvement in politics was only in the nature of an influential pressure group. Now that they have formed an alliance with the most powerful political party in Kerala, they were ready to derive major victories to their communal causes.

Commenting on these aspects, the present State Secretary of the CPI(M), Chadayan Govindan observes that, “this alliance with the Muslim League was also not without its own problems. Even though the alliance was well intentioned to bring up the Muslim Community to the mainstream social structure, the end result was abysmal”. When asked about the reasons for winding up their own alliance with the Muslim League, he candidly admitted that it was because they understood that this alliance had helped the majority communalists to come together.  

Based on the personal interview with Sri. Chadayan Govindan on May 9, 1998 at Thiruvananthapuram.
The subsequent developments in Kerala did really prove this apprehension. First of all, it provided the various Hindu organisations an easy access to the political debate. In her analysis of the causes for the rise and development of RSS in Kerala, Krishna Menon, has claimed that “the sangha (RSS) owes its increased membership in the Malabar to a great extent to its campaign against the creation of the Malappuram district”\textsuperscript{63}. It should be remembered that, prior to these developments, no such major Hindu/Muslim political antagonism was known to exist in Kerala as the Hindus remained an amorphous community here also as elsewhere in the country. Hence any attempt towards the consolidation of a Hindu identity should be considered as an absolutely modern development and as such the developments in the late 1960's and early 1970’s could only be seen as a necessary reaction to the prevalent political culture during this period.

Unlike in the early stages of the Communist movement the Ezhava community had slowly distanced itself from the Communist cadres eventually. The caste and communal regroupings in the state and the advent of the broad based Hindu

front have also exercised their pull on the Communist vote banks. Embittered Marxists have been known to join the ranks of the RSS in some parts of Malabar. All this necessitated a fundamental change in the nature of their ideologies and approaches. They also began to involve in some form of communal calculations even though their own definitions of this alliance were ideologically oriented.

The period between 1970 and 1980 also bears similar communalising trends inspite of the fact that during this period Kerala was ruled by an altogether different mixture of ideological groups. However the fact remains that the dominant political actor in this period was once again a faction of the Communist party under the leadership of C Achuthamenon. Even though this period is also referred to as a period of a major secular and democratic development in Kerala, it was during this period that Kerala witnessed the emergence of two new community based political parties viz. the National Democratic Party (NDP) of the Nair community, in 1974 and the Socialist Republican Party (SRP) of the Ezhavas in 1976. Therefore any projection of a dominant

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65 ibid.
process of secularisation on a democratic and ideological level upon the remnants of the so-called 'prostration of community solidarity', as it is claimed by PM Mammen, can only be seen as simplistic. In fact, a closer look at this period would reveal a still more important fact that this was also the period in which the so-called polarities of ideologies too have got prostrated. The ruling coalitions comprised both the Communists and the Congress along with all the so-called communal parties. What is emerging here is an interesting fact that if the so-called communal solidarities have had lost a part of their influence in politics, the same was true with regard to the so-called secular ideologists too as they were also forced to dilute their ideological antagonism, towards each another. These transformations could be easily identified if one were to look at the political developments in Kerala during the late seventies. Interestingly one can see that, this was also one of the most unstable periods in the political history of Kerala as there were four different Chief Ministers between 1977 and 1980.

In short, it can be seen that, the period of the 1970's in Kerala politics does not in any way stand out as a stage of secular
development and the Communist leadership never really functioned towards this objective either.

The 1980 elections in Kerala once again re-established the same old community polarities, even though it was widely claimed that it was the Congress-led political front which was more communal in nature. The coming together of a number of communal parties like the Kerala Congress, the Muslim league, the NDP, the SRP, under the Congress front naturally appeared more communal. However the Marxist front too comprised a faction each of the Muslim League and the Kerala Congress. Hence to differentiate the two fronts, the one which came out victorious, and the other which was defeated, into a secular/communal dichotomy would be only an exercise in abstraction. Therefore, the political development in the 1980’s also do not absolve the Communists from their share of communalisation in Kerala. On the contrary their accommodative and compromising alliances with a number of communal pressure groups in Kerala was more instrumental in the consolidation and regrouping of these communal solidarities.
It was argued earlier that, by 1956, almost all the communities in Kerala were politically and socially quite well organised on a communal basis. However Kerala was even then free from any major conflict between these various organisations. But modern Kerala witnessed in the late 1960's and early 1970's two clearly communalised problems with all their negative implications, the Thali temple issue and the communal riots in Tellicheri. Ironically, the Communists party of Kerala had a very significant role in both these developments.

In the 1987 elections the CPI(M) tried to initiate a much more major shift in their politics. "They decided to infuse an ideological purity as well as politics of principle among its cadre". Obviously such an exercise evoked a distinctive response from the secular minded people. However the fact of the matter was that "such a strategy was more of a distortion, rather than an expression of the truth ... or that strategy was more in conformity to the dictates of realpolitic as opposed to Namboothiripad's claims of pure politics". Once it was proved that the real politics is quite different from the one that is sought to be projected. Here

66 Ibid., p-30.
it is imperative to analyse the reasons for the reversal of CPI(M) policies. It was because, as V.S. Achuthanandan, the then party Secretary put it, “in the early sixties, especially after the split in the CPI, our existence was of primary importance, so we aligned with the Muslim League. But now the situation is different ... we thought, the fight for secularism would be strengthened by pushing out the Muslim League”68.

Obviously the existential considerations are always there for a political party and the case of the Communist Movement in Kerala is not an exception to this. As noted earlier when communalism is threatening to eat into the vitals of parliamentary democracy the existential concerns of any secular minded parties can only be alarming. It is here that Venu Menon’s observations becomes all the more relevant. In his words “Namboothiripad’s current aversion for communal parties could also be an attempt to lure the Hindu votes in the state”.69 “The Marxist party’s latest analyses of the political trends in the state envisage the possible formation of a third front of communal parties. The declining

relations between the ruling Congress and its coalition partners point to the inevitability of such an event and it was this development which suddenly turned the CPI(M) into a secular front.\(^70\)

Understandably, the evolution of the so-called secular Left in Kerala is not simply the result of a total reversal of their political stance. It was as much a product of the very same pragmatic policy which they had always followed. One of the most significant debates in the newly constituted assembly of 1987, centred around the interpretation of the phrase ‘communal politics’. During this debate, the Marxist were charged with the allegation that they also have selected their candidates on a communal basis. The CPI(M) Front’s response was that it was only a gesture to invite the different communities into a framework of representation to endorse an open secular context.\(^71\)

If one goes by the effect of these practices on the society as such it is difficult to differentiate them from the policy of communal representation introduced by the British during the colonial period. The practices of the Left Front, in fact, contributed

\(^{70}\) Ibid.

\(^{71}\) Venu Menon. ‘Voted out’, *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, April 12, 1987, p-23.
to as much communalisation of the society as did the British policies then.

In short as Tarun Ganguly puts it on the issue of secularism, the CPI(M) seems to have learnt the lesson the hard way, in Kerala, where it had from time to time, formed coalitions with the community based political parties.72

What is even more alarming is that within only a few years of their decision to distance themselves from the communally identified parties, one faction of the Christian dominated Kerala Congress also found its way back into the Left Front. Also it is a fact that the majority communalists are registering their presence still more significantly in Kerala. In other words the situation is such that whatever be the ideological moorings in Kerala’s politics, it is only becoming more and more communalised and one main factor behind this process was nothing but the inconsistent political stance of the so-called ideologues in Kerala, the Communists.

72 Tarun Ganguly, 'Marxism the pragmatic way', Sunday, January 5-11, 1986, p-47.
THE CONGRESS MODEL OF SECULAR POLITICS - COMMUNAL CONTENTS

Secularism in India is very often considered a brainchild of the Indian National Congress Party. However, just as it was revealed in the case of the Communist party, the Congress too have manoeuvred this policy to suit their own regional and short term goals. The political history of the Congress party in the state of Kerala right from the 1957 period very well manifest these ambivalent practices.

Though it was argued that, it was the policies of the then Communist government in 1957, which resulted in an unprecedented regrouping of the communal factions under the framework of Vimochana Samara Samithi, it was the active leadership of the Congress party - the then opposition in Kerala, which gave this movement a very great relevance.

Inevitably, the modern political history of Kerala has inherited several legacies of this Movement. More significantly it was this communal mobilisation which later on became detrimental to a healthy political polarisation in Kerala. According to PM Mammen, this was a movement for community domination.
and in fact, this communal dimension even prevented them from organising themselves as a single political party, like the one during the *Nivarthana Prasthanam*; for political action. In spite of that the Congress also joined the Movement. In fact it was the Indian National Congress which gave this Movement its fundamental political relevance. As H Austin puts it, "the Congress party’s association with the liberation struggle was the telling factor in the success of the movement, although this involved the betrayal of every principle, sacred or secular, which had been inter-woven into the fabric of our national life. Nevertheless, the Congress leaders did not blush to line up with the communalist, because they thought that by ‘stooping’ politically they could ‘conquer’ electorally." In fact, "even Prime Minister Nehru had stated that the agitation in Kerala was prompted by the communal forces of Nair Service Society (NSS), the organisation of the Nair community and Catholic Church. He had also stated that the Congress should keep out of such tie-ups and even condemned communal organisations entering a political conflict. The Congress party in Kerala, however, did not bother in

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73 P.M.Mammen, *op. cit.* p-110.
74 *Congress role in the Kerala Agitation*, Trivandrum, Dept. of Public relations, 1959 p-4.

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any of these golden principles.” They looked at this development as a golden opportunity to bring down the Communist government and in the process the Congress party did not even bother to take into account the fundamentalists or conservative elements involved in this struggle. The Praja Socialist Party, and the Muslim League followed suit giving the alliance a very strong political structure. For the Christians, Nairs and the Muslims the Movement only meant to out manoeuvre the emerging dominance of low caste communities like the Ezhavas, and other Harijans, who were considered instrumental in dethroning the Nairs and the Christians from their earlier privileged position following the Nivarthana Prasthanam and other struggles. Seen in retrospect, it becomes obvious that by the time the Movement was over, the Congress party had developed an affinity to all those elements associated with the struggle, as their objective was above all the capture of power, through whatever means possible.

The Congress even formed an alliance with the Muslim league, whose policies they were opposing all through the later

75 H. Austin, Anatomy of the Kerala Coup, Delhi, Peoples Publishing House, 1959, p-33.
76 Ibid.
77 P.M.Mammen, op.cit., p-109.
part of the Nationalist Movement in India. Hence the Congress party started to consider the Muslim League in Kerala as altogether different from their national patrons. In one of her speeches, Mrs. Indira Gandhi had even stated that the Muslim League in Kerala is not ‘out and out’ communal.\textsuperscript{78} Interestingly the approach of the Congress party towards the other major community-based political groups was also the same. They always used their ideology only as a mask to provide a hiding place for the various community sentiments.

First of all, the Congress ministries were more often a patchwork coalition, that mirrored the state’s religious and caste identities. The formation of the coalition government of 1960, itself was given a communal colour. Even though the prominent \textit{Ezhava} leader, R. Shanker, was elected the leader of the Congress party, he could not become the chief minister due to certain serious infighting between the \textit{Nair} and \textit{Ezhava} factions within the party itself. In fact, as John. P John claimed, “it was the Congress- PSP coalition which finally resolved this communal manoeuvres.”\textsuperscript{79} An interesting fact here is that, these coalitions never had any

\textsuperscript{78} \textit{Indian Express}, 3rd December, 1970.

\textsuperscript{79} John. P John, \textit{op.cit.}, p.91.
ideological affinity or consensus among their different partners. As Venu Menon states “it was confrontation rather than consensus that manifested itself on many a major issue”\textsuperscript{80}. More often than not these alliances were in the name of a minority oriented secular ideology or political stability. The Congress raised the bogey of unity and integrity of India, the need to protect the interests of the various minority identities etc, only to cover up their conservative political practices and their alliances with the various casteist and communalist groups. Obviously this was nothing but a manipulative use of the ideology of secularism initiated by none other than the so-called nationalist Congress party itself. In fact, “the really potent danger of Kerala politics arose from the exploitation of communalism”\textsuperscript{81} by the so-called nationalist or secular political party like the Congress.

What is significant here is that the major alliance partners of the Congress party in Kerala, the Muslim league and the Kerala Congress, are parties which came into being as a result of some very fundamental differences with the Congress party itself. Also it is a fact that both these groups were the arch enemies of the

\textsuperscript{81} \textit{Link}, New Delhi, Vol 22, No 25, Jan 31, 1960, p-12.
Congress party and the Congress had always articulated their differences with the Muslim league and the Kerala Congress more often on a communal basis. The much criticised and widely pronounced stance of the Congress party in 1960 against the Muslim League joining the coalition of PSP Ministry in which the Congress was also a part is a very strong case in this context. Similarly, they insisted on a Muslim League member relinquishing his party membership to contest as the Speaker of the Assembly during the same Ministry. Interestingly, Jawaharlal Nehru, the then Prime Minister of India and the Congress supremo justified the stance of the Congress party by observing that the election manifesto of the Muslim League contained references which were highly objectionable.82

Nonetheless, none of those considerations deterred them from joining hands with Muslim League at a later stage. Hence, what is obvious here is that rather than secularism it was communal calculations that prompted the Congress in their electoral politics. What the Communists did with the Ezhavas as a community, the Congress did the same with all available

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communities. The fact that the Congress party in Kerala has never associated itself with any one community exclusively all through the years like other parties such as the CPI(M), the CPI, the Kerala Congress and the Muslim League, however, does not in any way mean that they are the true secular ideologues in Kerala politics. What is more true is that the Congress party has the credit of launching the most bizarre political permutations under various coalition banners. Most of the Congress led ministries comprised the Kerala Congress (the Christian Community party), the Muslim league (the Muslim community party, the National Democratic Party (the political wing of the Nair community), and the Socialist Republican Party (the political party of the Ezhavas). This is no doubt an impressive line up, as these communities together represent somewhat 70% of the electorate in Kerala.

The objective of this argument is not to claim that a political party should not represent such a variety of community membership. It is true that in a democratic set up it is most natural

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83 E.J Thomas in his study on the nature of the community- party relationship demonstrates that the Congress had a place for all the communities. His study reveals that the Congress has the lowest number of community constituencies, compared to all other groups. [A community constituency is one which elects the member of a single community consecutively in the elections] (E.J Thomas op.cit.).

to give representation to a plurality of identities. The problem here is that such representations only had a rhetorical base in the Congress strategies and, as E.J Thomas has argued, the Congress party was very often dominated by the Christian and Nair communities, except for a short period of Ezhava control in the 1960’s, when the Ezhava leader R Shanker was in the helm of affairs. More significantly it was during this time that the Christian and the Nair leadership came out of the Congress party to form the Kerala Congress.

The very same community basis of the Congress party can again be identified, if one looks into the geographical base of the party in Kerala. More often it is in the regions of Travancore and Cochin that the Congress performs better in the elections. It is not a matter of coincidence that these are also the regions where one finds the concentration of the Christian community.

Similar situations are visible in the case of all other parties. Thus where the low-caste Hindus are concentrated, the CPI(M) comes out victorious, where the upper caste Hindus are located, the CPI are the winners, where the Muslims are concentrated, it is

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86 Ibid.
the Muslim league that has a clear edge and, similarly, in Christian pockets, the Kerala Congress dominates the political scene.

At the policy and administration level also, one can identify similar communal calculations of the Congress party. It has been noted that the Congress had always pursued its policies largely keeping in view the interests of their chief supporters i.e., the Christian and the Nair communities. As E.J Thomas puts it the ‘pay offs’ of the Congress party include new schools and colleges, protection against nationalisation of educational institutions, upgrading of schools and colleges, giving grant to favourable newspaper groups, granting restricted holidays on not so significant religious days, protection extending to the favourable communities under the minority right act, land reform with a stress on small farmers in the Travancore region where there are good many small farmers belonging to the supporting community, creating new districts with particular community domination etc\(^{87}\).

Obviously a close analysis would reveal that all these policies were community oriented as it was the Nairs and the Christians who drew out the maximum of the benefits from all these specific

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\(^{87}\) E.J Thomas. *op cit.*., p-62,63.
policies. To an extent the Muslims have also accumulated a major share through their association with the Congress.

The 1982, Congress Ministry under K. Karunakaran’s chief ministership manifested almost all these aspects. More than being a political structure it was a mere conglomeration of the various vested interest groups in Kerala society. The Kerala Congress and the Muslim League played the maximum possible pressure tactics. The nature of this ministry was very rightly captured in an article that appeared in an Indian weekly during this time. The title of the article ‘The Circus” really meant the character of this coalition.

The coalition fold has served throughout as an arena of duelling interests. The key strategy adopted by the constituents was to put out a demand that the Congress Chief Minister could not refuse, for fear of seeing his ministry collapse. The Muslim League, in particular, wrested concessions like an ordinance to protect Muslim interests in the lucrative timber trade and the allotment of a pension scheme for a section of mosque employees.

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88 Venu Menon, 'The Circus'-op. cit.
As Venu Menon puts it, "The major coalition partners have consistently enjoyed the power of blackmail over the Congress (I). The chief minister K.Karunakaran, swamped by outsized demands from his coalition colleagues, has worked out a political distribution system designed to meet the demands of each party". In fact, the Congress leader was only too willing to give into these demands as he could not see anything unnatural in having a communal basis in political functioning. In an interview he even stated that "communalism exists in Kerala is because Kerala is inhabited by human beings". Such was the stance of the Congress party towards issues of communalism during these periods.

The overall performance of this ministry largely benefited both the Muslims and the Christians which accentuated the grievance, of a number of other caste or community groups especially among the Hindus than by any other Ministry after 1967. Commenting on this situation Abdul Azeez observes that "During the 1980's the Muslim League became a very powerful force and had very great influence in the government along with

90 Based on an interview conducted on 18th May, 1998 at Thiruvananthapuram.
the two groups of Kerala Congress which was mostly representing the Christians. This set in a reaction and there was a feeling that these parties were advancing the cause of the Muslims and the Christians even at the expense of the Hindus, the majority community who had naturally resented the trend. This, in a sense, contributed to the growth of the *Hindu Munnani* in Kerala politics."91 Quite naturally as Venu Menon claims, "The Hindu militancy seems to have arrived with a renewed vigor"92, once again in Kerala. This was fundamentally a by product of this large scale disillusionment that grew among the otherwise unorganised Hindu Community, who began to perceive the situation as one of pampering the minorities in the name of secularism. Hence, as had happened in the late 60’s or early 70’s under the Communist rule, Kerala witnessed yet another major communal tension, this time more specifically, between the majority Hindus and the minority Christians. The *Nilakkal* episode of 1983 was an example of this heightening communal tension in Kerala. It created an explosive situation in the relation between the Hindus and the Christians. A crisis was generated when Mar

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91 Abdul Azeez, *op. cit.*, p-128.
Joseph Powathil, the Bishop of Kanjirapalli, demanded the building of a church at Nilakkal (where a cross was allegedly discovered from the forest area) which fell within the precincts of the Sabarimala Temple. Soon the Hindu leaders represented by a few sanyasis and the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS) formed “the Nilakkal Action Council” and objected to the Bishop’s demand.93

Initially the government appeared to support the Bishop much to the resentment of the Hindus which forced the government to refuse permission to build the church there. This had certain significant political fall outs. Significantly, it was during this time that Kerala witnessed the emergence of the B.J.P-Hindu Munnani as a third powerful front in Kerala politics. This third front has both widened and deepened its support contesting in 126 constituencies in 1987 as against 69 in 1982 and increasing its share of the votes from 2.75 % in 1982 to 6.5 % in 1987. Following tables give a comparative picture of the performance of the various political fronts in the last two assembly elections of Kerala in the 1980’s.

93 Ibid., p-43.
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Including AIML (unadjusted)</td>
<td>45,23,941</td>
<td>47.3 56,27,178</td>
<td>44.82</td>
<td>-2.48</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excluding AIML (adjusted)</td>
<td>42,13,315</td>
<td>44.06 56,27,178</td>
<td>44.82</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>UDF</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excluding AIML (unadjusted)</td>
<td>46,17,498</td>
<td>48.28 54,78,196</td>
<td>43.64</td>
<td>-4.64</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Including AIML (adjusted)</td>
<td>49,25,124</td>
<td>51.53 54,78,196</td>
<td>43.64</td>
<td>-7.89</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BJP-HM</strong></td>
<td>2,63,331</td>
<td>2.75 8,24,921</td>
<td>6.57</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPM</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,41,355</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>1,58,946</td>
<td>1.66 4,82,783</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>95,63,716</td>
<td>100 1,25,153</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The shift of the AIML from the LDF, of which it was a constituent upto 1985, to the UDF requires an adjustment in the number of votes polled by the two Fronts to make the 1982 and 1987 outcomes comparable.

LDF = Left Democratic Front.
UDF = United Democratic Front.
AIML = All India Muslim League.
BJP-HM = Bharatiya Janata Party and Hindu Munnani.

(Source - "Kerala At the Polls. 1987", Frontline, April 18- May1, 1987.)
VOTES POLLED BY DIFFERENT PARTIES, 1982 AND 1987

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Front/Party</th>
<th>1982</th>
<th>1987</th>
<th>Change in percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No. of votes</td>
<td>No. of votes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pollled of</td>
<td>Pollled of</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>votes</td>
<td>total votes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Percent of</td>
<td>Percent of</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>votes polled</td>
<td>votes polled</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>between 1982</td>
<td>and 1987</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPI(M)</td>
<td>17,98,158</td>
<td>18.8 28,05,167</td>
<td>22.34 3.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPI</td>
<td>8,04,869</td>
<td>8.42 10,29,409</td>
<td>8.2 -0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congress</td>
<td>15,25,291</td>
<td>5.49 6,11,673</td>
<td>4.08 -1.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janata</td>
<td>3,86,810</td>
<td>4.04 4,82,408</td>
<td>3.84 -0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSP</td>
<td>2,63,869</td>
<td>2.76 3,09,716</td>
<td>2.47 -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lok Dal</td>
<td>78,389</td>
<td>0.62 -</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIML</td>
<td>3,10,626</td>
<td>3.25 -</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DSP</td>
<td>37,705</td>
<td>0.39 -</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KC(M)</td>
<td>36,164</td>
<td>0.38 -</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ind.</td>
<td>360,449</td>
<td>3.77 4,10,416</td>
<td>3.27 -0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total LDF</td>
<td>45,23,941</td>
<td>47.3 56,27,178</td>
<td>44.82 -2.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unadjusted</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted</td>
<td>42,13,315</td>
<td>44.06 56,27,178</td>
<td>44.82 0.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congress</td>
<td>20,58,110</td>
<td>21.52 30,75,956</td>
<td>24.5 2.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IUML</td>
<td>5,90,255</td>
<td>6.17 9,85,021</td>
<td>7.85 1.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IUML*</td>
<td>9,00,881</td>
<td>9.42 9,85,021</td>
<td>7.85 -1.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KC(J)</td>
<td>4,35,200</td>
<td>4.55 4,50,472</td>
<td>3.59 -0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KC(M)</td>
<td>5,59,930</td>
<td>5.85 4,25,348</td>
<td>3.39 -2.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janata(G)</td>
<td>2,62,595</td>
<td>2.75 -</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DLP</td>
<td>35,821</td>
<td>0.37 -</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NDP</td>
<td>2,55,580</td>
<td>2.67 -</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NDPP</td>
<td>2,83,851</td>
<td>2.26 -</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NRSP</td>
<td>34,359</td>
<td>0.036 -</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSP</td>
<td>29,011</td>
<td>0.3 -</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSPS</td>
<td>1,14,721</td>
<td>1.2 29,795</td>
<td>0.24 -0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SRP</td>
<td>2,05,250</td>
<td>2.15 -</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SRPS</td>
<td>1,54,450</td>
<td>1.23 -</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ind.</td>
<td>36,676</td>
<td>0.38 74,023</td>
<td>0.59 0.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total UDF</td>
<td>46,17,498</td>
<td>48.28 54,78,916</td>
<td>43.64 -4.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unadjusted</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted</td>
<td>49,28,124</td>
<td>51.53 54,78,916</td>
<td>43.64 -7.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BJP-HM</td>
<td>2,63,331</td>
<td>2.75 8,24,921</td>
<td>6.57 3.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPM</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1.41,355</td>
<td>1.13 -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>1,58,946</td>
<td>1.66 4,82,783</td>
<td>3.85 2.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>95,63,716</td>
<td>100 1,25,55,15:</td>
<td>100 -</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

IUML = Indian Union Muslim League.
Note: IUML * refers to (IUML + AIML) in 1982: it represents the adjusted figure.

(Source -"Kerala At the Polls. 1987", Frontline, April 18- May 1, 1987.)
### Table 3

**INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF VOTES POLLED BY THE PARTIES, 1982 AND 1987**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Front/Party Increase(+) / decrease(-) in the number of votes polled between 1982 and 1987</th>
<th>Percentage of the total increase in votes accounted for by the party</th>
<th>Percentage increase in the party's vote over 1982</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CPI(M)</td>
<td>10.07.009</td>
<td>33.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPI</td>
<td>2.24.540</td>
<td>7.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congress</td>
<td>-13.618</td>
<td>-0.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janata</td>
<td>95.598</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSP</td>
<td>45.847</td>
<td>1.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIML</td>
<td>-310.626</td>
<td>-10.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lok Dal</td>
<td>78.389</td>
<td>2.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DSP</td>
<td>-37705</td>
<td>-1.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KCS</td>
<td>-36164</td>
<td>-1.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ind.</td>
<td>49967</td>
<td>1.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LDF (unadjusted)</td>
<td>11.03.237</td>
<td>36.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LDF (adjusted)</td>
<td>14.13.863</td>
<td>47.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congress</td>
<td>10.17.846</td>
<td>34.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IUML</td>
<td>3.64.766</td>
<td>13.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IUML*</td>
<td>34.140</td>
<td>2.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KC(J)</td>
<td>15272</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KC(M)</td>
<td>-134582</td>
<td>-4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other small parties and Independents</td>
<td>4.31.884</td>
<td>-14.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UDF (unadjusted)</td>
<td>6.51.418</td>
<td>28.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UDF (adjusted)</td>
<td>5.53.790</td>
<td>18.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BJP-HM</td>
<td>5.51.590</td>
<td>18.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPM</td>
<td>1.41.355</td>
<td>4.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>3.23.837</td>
<td>10.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>29.91.437</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: IUML* refers to (IUML + AIML) in 1982; it represents the adjusted figure.

(Source: "Kerala At the Polls. 1987", *Frontline*, April 18- May 1, 1987.)
The above tables very well approve of what K.P Nair says, “that the BJP is on the ascent in Kerala”. It also demonstrate that both the LDF and the UDF are slowing down the pace of their growth while the BJP is marching ahead. However, in the subsequent elections the BJP could not repeat their performance. The table below would explain this further.

Table 4

Comparative performance of the major political fronts in the election between 1987 and 1991

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LDF Votes (lakhs)</td>
<td>57.35</td>
<td>60.24</td>
<td>65.42</td>
<td>63.83</td>
<td>64.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share (percentage)</td>
<td>44.97</td>
<td>44.42</td>
<td>47.68</td>
<td>44.78</td>
<td>46.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UDF Votes (lakhs)</td>
<td>56.38</td>
<td>73.51</td>
<td>59.45</td>
<td>70.04</td>
<td>67.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share (percentage)</td>
<td>44.36</td>
<td>49.29</td>
<td>43.33</td>
<td>49.14</td>
<td>48.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BJP Votes (lakhs)</td>
<td>8.26</td>
<td>6.73</td>
<td>10.12</td>
<td>6.57</td>
<td>6.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share (percentage)</td>
<td>6.48</td>
<td>4.51</td>
<td>7.38</td>
<td>4.61</td>
<td>4.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others Votes (lakhs)</td>
<td>5.36</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td>2.21</td>
<td>2.09</td>
<td>1.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share (percentage)</td>
<td>4.19</td>
<td>1.78</td>
<td>1.61</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total valid votes polled (lakhs)</td>
<td>127.55</td>
<td>149.13</td>
<td>137.20</td>
<td>142.53</td>
<td>140.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>percentage of votes polled</td>
<td>80.55</td>
<td>79.10</td>
<td>76.06</td>
<td>73.36</td>
<td>73.38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: 1. The LDF votes for 1987 Assembly elections have been adjusted for the votes received by the two CMP candidates supported by the UDF.

2. Votes of independents supported by parties have been added to their respective fronts.


Their vote share had come down quite significantly in the 1991 elections to the Assembly and the *Lok Sabha*. It is here that another significant turn in the nature of Kerala politics become visible. In fact more than anything else, it is the manipulating approaches and ideologies of the so-called secular Congress party that is coming out in the open.

It was very strongly alleged that, the Congress had reached a secret understanding with the BJP in this election. Accordingly the BJP will shift its committed votes in favour of the Congress front in 40 or so selected constituencies in return for the Congress (I)’s covert help to the BJP candidate in one or two assembly constituencies in the North Kerala. As Thomas Issac writes, this resulted in the creation of some very serious apprehensions in the minds of the various minority communities in Kerala with regard to the bonafide of the Congress.

Whatever be the reliability of this allegation the election results during the 1980’s and the 1990’s only demonstrate that there was some attempts in this direction in the 1991 elections.

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Because this is the only election since 1982, when there was a negative swing in the vote percentage of the BJP.

In short what comes out clearly here is the manipulative nature of the Congress politics in the state. Once again as the records of the recent political history suggests the only beneficiaries was the fundamentalist political groups like the BJP. But the most fundamental question which needs to be answered here is, ‘who should be held responsible for this?’. 

IDENTITY POLITICS AND COMMUALISATION -THE ROLE OF SECULARISTS IN KERALA POLITICS

Analysis, so far very clearly demonstrate that every political party in Kerala has a social base and every major community has a party base. It has also been revealed that on almost all socio-economic issues the dominant political actors of Kerala the Communists and the Congress have resorted to some kind of communal calculations. This would involve aspects of political alliance formations, policy issues and even matter’s of daily administration. Whenever there is a need to choose between the
party ideology and the community support, all the political groups
have opted only for the latter. The ideological mask and the
various philosophical discourses, the different parties hold out,
only provided the communities a hiding place for their communal
sentiments and an opportunity for the political parties to
accommodate various communities without being caught red
handed. As a result of all these, Kerala’s politics appear in the
midst of a number of paradoxes.

On the one hand it is the land of popular politics with large
scale mass participation and on the other, Kerala also witnesses the
slow but gradual emergence of the B.J.P-Hindu Munnani combine
with all the attendant features of majority communalism. The two
very significant steps in this direction, one in the late 1960’s and
the early 1970’s period in the form of the spread of RSS activities
and the next during the 1980’s in the form of a Hindu Munnani or
BJP have also been identified.

What is more significant in this development is that the
immediate factors that led to this situation are the policies of the
so-called secularisers in Kerala politics, the Communists and the
Congress respectively.
In both situations, it was these seculariser's own communal appeasement of the minority communities that actually prompted the otherwise amorphous Hindu community to organise themselves. 'Hindu' community is now politically hurt as their own unorganised existence is largely denying them any role in the prevailing, pressure politics of Kerala. Already all other communities have developed themselves into well organised political entities, and also have found themselves in a number of prospective alliances, with both the rightist and the leftist fronts in Kerala. A close look at the party position of Muslim League in the Kerala Assembly from 1957 to 1991 in itself will substantiate this claim. The following table would clarify that.

Table 5
Party position of the Muslim League in Kerala Assembly from 1957-1991

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>IUML</th>
<th>AIML</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Compiled from Malayala Manorama Election Guide 1996.)

As the above table indicates Muslim League has got substantial improvements in their assembly representation ever since they joined the 1967 CPI(M) front as an alliance partner. The most significant aspect here is that their position was at an all time low in 1965 election in which almost all the parties had gone for election without a formal alliance. Even the six seats that they had won was that of a dissenting faction of the Muslim League who had reached an understanding with the CPI(M). In the very next election, however, they scored a powerful comeback with 14 seats when they were in total alliance with the Communists. This was the kind of benefits that the alliance politicking had brought to the Muslim League. In 1991 when the undivided Muslim League was in alliance with the Congress-led UDF, their position had reached an all-time high of 19 seats.

In the end what is discernible is as Thomas Issac puts it “the three decade long alliance-politicking paid rich dividends to the Muslim League in terms of political clout, patronage, power and mass influence. Its communal influence spread from the districts of the erstwhile Malabar region to even the southern districts. The growth of the Muslim League became a source of inspiration to
other communal and casteist groups. The marginal parties and groups pursued successfully their sectarian interests by bargaining with the two fronts and shifting or threatening to shift their loyalties between the two fronts. The slidedown of politics in Kerala into a distinctively communal and casteist morass was speeded up”.98

He also adds that the prime “loser in the process was the Left. The communal resurgence was undermining the class solidarity and the class base of its movements. As the bipolar front politics got cemented; the possibility of any genuine political realignment also receded. The electoral strength of the Communists that grew by leaps and bounds during the 1950’s and peaked around 35% in the 1960’s had stayed at that level ever since.”99

Almost parallel to this stagnation a rightist backlash against the left also seemed to be getting momentum.100 All this point to prove fact that the communal politics of the minorities can only feed the far more dangerous majority communalism. This is,

99 Ibid.
100 Ibid.
the situation in Kerala today. The communal tensions are brewing up in Kerala mainly out of the tradition of alliances that the Left and Right wing secularists have initiated here.

The expansion of the influence of the Christian dominated Kerala Congress can also be sighted to substantiate this point.

What is most striking is the fact that, in spite of all these manipulative strategies, the so-called hegemonic political actors, still present themselves as the secular progressivists in Kerala. Also, more significantly they have succeeded in attributing an opposite image upon this various minor political groups. The next chapter therefore make an attempt to explain this process and there-by develop a better understanding of this situation also.