CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION: SYRIAN CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY AND ITS ROLE IN THE COMMUNITY POLITICS IN KERALA
SYRIAN CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY AND ITS ROLE IN THE COMMUNITY POLITICS IN KERALA

In Kerala there is a concentration of population of different communities at certain locations. This is the basis of community federated socio-economic and political activity. According to 2001 census the Christians are concentrated in the districts of Trichur (24.21%), Eranakulam (38.78%), Kottayam (49.32%), Alleppy (20.94%), Idukki (42.25%), Pathanamthitta (39.03%), Wynad (22.48%). These are the districts dominated by Syrian Christians in population. Alleppy has a large concentration of Latin Catholics. The Hindus are concentrated in the districts of Kannur (61.47%), Calicut (57.97%), Palaghat (68.87%), Trichur (59.24%), Alleppy (69.09%), Quilon (65.18%), and Trivandrum (68.09%). In fifty percent of the districts in the State, the Hindu population is a deciding factor. The Hindu population is divided according to various caste denominations, generally the Northern districts are dominated by the Ezhavas and the Southern districts dominated by the High caste. The Muslim population is dominant in Kasargode (34.31%), Kannur (27.63%), Calicut (37.47%), and Malappuram (68.53%). Though they are dominated only in three districts in Malabar, their presence is strategic with regard to the politics in Kerala. Their support is necessary for any Political party, whether it is right or left, to win the
elections from Malabar. This is also true in the case of Christian community vote in the Central Travancore. Hence the distribution of population in the state is an important factor in the political formation of the State.

The Christian Community's influence in the structural change of the Kerala society and formation of community organisations among different castes

The Syrian Christian Community in Kerala was originated in 52 AD when St. Thomas, the Apostle came to Kerala to preach the good news to the people and converted them to Christianity. Eventually he built seven churches in the Cochin and Travancore regions of Kerala.¹ Those who are converted to Christianity by St. Thomas are called Thomas Christians, The Thomas Christians “of Cochin and Travancore have been all along, and were a very flourishing community ..... They were preferred to the Nairs, and enjoyed the privilege of being called by no other name than that of the sons of King”.² The Christians were directly under the King and were not subjected to the local chiefs. During those days they were allowed to have a military force of their own. They had a King of their own near Udayamperur. The Christians were given a status

² Ibid., p.3.
equal to or next to that of Brahmins. Besides "till the coming of the Portuguese, only those among the high castes were allowed to embrace the Christian faith. These Christian converts from the High Caste Hindus did not change their caste practices even after conversion to Christianity".\(^3\) Christian Community from the very early days formed an important part of the social structure of Kerala. This community got westernized after the arrival of the Portuguese. The Catholic Church split into various denominations and all these denominations formed into communities of their own. These Christian denominations had greater accessibility to the Western Christianity and most cases were administered from the west.

The Christians belonging to different denominations in the State, Catholic, or Marthomite or Jacobite, were members of a Parish controlled by a Parish Priest. Thus Church had effective control over the day to day life and activities of the people. Therefore in the matter of the organizational structure, Christians were more effective than my other communities in Kerala.

**Organisational Structure of the Syrian Christian Community**

Compared to the Hindu and Muslim communities, the Christian community is a highly organised community. It is a

\(^3\) Elamkulam, KunjanPillai, Chila Kerala Charitra Prashnangal (Mal), Kottayam: National Book Stall, 1963, p.130.
monolithic community organised under the Bishop who is the spiritual leader as well as the patron of the community. He is the top authority who decides the welfare of the community. Priests and nuns form the next level of the ladder. The laity (lay people or common folk) forms the basic level of the hierarchy engineered by the Bishop.

The aura of leadership is extended to the laity by the priest through the local Parish, which is the smallest unit of the administration. The Parishes are the socio-cultural, educational and religious venue of the Christian Community. The laity is properly informed, trained on all the matters for their growth in the society. This community solidarity helped them to enter into politics at the earliest and takes a leading role in the Kerala politics at the very time democracy was introduced in the State.

**Organisational structure and the material advancement of the Syrian Christian Community**

In material advancements, Christians were prime movers. They were "in fact, the pioneers of the banking institutions of the region and were also the main participants in large scale agricultural and trading activity....The influx of foreign capital into plantations opened up new opportunities for agricultural and non-agricultural
economic expansion, and these were effectively utilized by the communities which were enterprising enough to do so .... the Christian community on the whole, benefited considerably from the new situation and started opening plantations with their own capital.... For Kayal cultivation (ie. Backwater cultivation).... investment was again generally undertaken by the Christians who, in order to pool their savings, organized themselves in groups.”

Organisational Solidarity of Syrian Christian Community and the pioneering effort in starting educational institutions in the State

Christians took initiative in starting educational institutions in Kerala especially in Cochin and Travancore regions with the support of the missionaries. It is true that traditionally the Namboodiri Brahmins had schools in Kerala for teaching the Vedas (Hindu Scriptures) and other subjects considered as part of higher learning. “Besides these, there were educational facilities within the reach of castes and communities other than Brahmins .... Nurtured essentially by the local initiative, primary schools [known as pallikoodams and kudippallikoodams] were common in Kerala”. Historians suggest that early Buddhist and Jain teachings about the importance of education

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probably account for the success of these schools.\textsuperscript{5} But the spread of education in Kerala in the nineteenth century was the activities of missionaries, particularly protestant missionaries who believed that all potential Christians (as well as believers) needed the basic ability to read so that they may read the word of God, the Bible. Thus Rev. Ringletaube, the first Protestant missionary to evangelise Travancore, started schools in several villages. The missionaries concentrated in their efforts to promote elementary education among the lower castes: "In fact, education of the lower castes-both Ezhava and Shanar as well as of the "slave" castes- was an exclusive preserve of missionary schools till the government came into the field by the end of the nineteenth century. Missionaries promoted girls and women's education in Kerala. Missionaries chose to teach in Malayalam or Tamil. Thus the status of Malayalam has gone high in the hands of the foreign missionaries while the Namoodiri Brahmins still considered Sanskrit as the sacred language and they promoted it. Many of the Syrian Christians worked with the missionaries and they too started educational institutions of higher learning which is in great demand in the State.\textsuperscript{6} Therefore the educational background of the community added to their political


\textsuperscript{6} Ibid. p.29.
status in the State. The Christian community was looked as a reference group in the matter of organisational structure, socio-economic, health care and educational advancement by the Nairs, Ezhavas, Muslims and Dalits. "The breakdown of the caste system accelerated the growth of the Catholic Church .... But very soon Nairs and other sections like Ezhavas emerged as organised groups. ...Very soon, the growth of the Catholic Church in the social, economic and political sphere was checked. A new social structure has emerged replacing the traditional one". The vertical social structure based on the caste system was tilted and parallel social structure emerged in Kerala. Thus in the socio—political sphere, started a rivalry among the various communities. It is interesting to note that this was the base for the political rivalry among the various communities in the State. By analysing the activities of different communities we can prove the role of the Catholic Church expediting the process, structural change brought up in the entire matrix of the State.

**Syrian Christian Community and Publications**

Syrian Christian community is the one which started the first Printing press and publishing dailies which later on, when

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Democracy was introduced, formed a strong basis for the community. The Nasrani Deepika (later on Deepika) and the Malayala Manorama are the two leading newspapers in the State under the control of the Syrian Christians. They became the mouthpiece of the Syrian Community. They supported the party which has a Syrian base. Other communities too started News Papers to support the socio-political, cultural and economic activities of the respective communities. The Chandrika represented Muslim community, the Mathruboomi gave a preferential coverage to High Caste Hindu views and Kerala Kaumudi represented the interests of Ezhavas. This model influenced the political parties later on. Deshabhimani, Veekshanam, Janmaboomi etc represented the political views of CPI (M), Congress and BJP respectively. Thus in the field of publication the Syrian Christians showed the way which was responsible to a large extent helped to create political consciousness in the people of the State.

Formation of the Ezhavas Community organisation in the State:

The Ezhavas under their enlightened leader Shree Narayana Guru Swamy started the Social Reform Movement in 1903. He founded the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (SNDP Yogam) and later on in 1928 it was registered under the name of Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Sangham (SNDP). Sree Narayana
Guru started the movement with the ideology of "One God, One Caste and One religion". The SNDP advocated monogamy. Sanskritization of their religious rites and thrift and independent enterprises. As a result "Ezhavas have been able to lift themselves up from the position of untouchable to the official status of the other backward classes. They have achieved equality of opportunities in several spheres of social life, starting from a position of all round sever deprivation. They attained a higher status in the ritual hierarchy parallel to the Namboodiris by a series of positive and negative measures. They achieved equality of opportunities with regard to English education. Government employments, representation in the legislature and the right to entry into caste Hindu temples, through a series of agitations.... They have also shed their civic disabilities in the matter pertaining to dress, ornaments, house and the general life style". The SNDP gave the infrastructure for the political action when democracy was introduced in Kerala. Influence of Christian community is well seen in their organisational set up, in starting of educational, social service and health care institutions, and other communitarian economic activities. "Now, the Ezhavas are a community which is numerically the strongest, and

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socially and culturally the most advanced among the non-caste Hindus”.

Pulayas (Daliths) and Community Organisation

Inspired by the achievement of SNDP and Christian Missionary activities, Ayyankali (1866-1941), a Pulaya reformer founded the Sadhujana Paripalana yogam in 1907 to uplift the untouchable castes in Kerala. The Pulayas too established their own temples for higher gods, and adopted Brahminic forms of worship. They acquired this organisational skill in association with the Christian community. The Central Travancore Pulayas Samajam, The Cheruman Mahajana Sangham included both Hindu and Christian pulayas and attempted to change the caste name from Pulaya to Cheruma. As a result of all these social reform movements “from a source of pollution, they have through education, greater economic independence, and enactment of laws prohibiting discrimination against them, attained a higher status in society”.

It is also seen that elite Pulayas who have made significant contributions are treated almost on a par with the higher caste

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10 The Legislation on Temple entry was passed by the Princely States in 1936 after prolonged Agitation. This was passed in Madras State only in 1946.

people. Even in the matter of inter-caste marriage with the higher caste, changes have already occurred.¹²

**Nair Community in Kerala**

Organised community movements among the Christians and other lower caste people threatened the security of the upper class people, especially the Nair Caste. Nair Caste had very strong socio-political organizations in olden days. They formed the major share of the population of the High-caste in Kerala. They organized on the basis of “Karas” districts and the State. The Karayogams or Karakuttam was the smallest unit of the organisation. It was usually headed by the Desavashi or the local chief. The main functions of the Karayogam were to settle disputes between families, conduct marriages and other functions, and to see that traditional customs were not violated.¹³ Nattukuttam (District Organisations) consisted of all Nair members of different Karayogams in the Nad (District). The combined Nattukutam could even defy the wishes of the King.¹⁴ But at the end of the eighteenth century the powerful kings of Travancore and Cochin helped by the Portuguese and later on by the

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¹³ Nair Service Society, Suvarna Grantham (Malayalam), Changancherry:1964, p.397 ff.
¹⁴ It was such a body, consisting of all the Nattukuttam of Travancore that demand the removal of Jayatan Namboodiri, who was Travancore Minister. The King had to dismiss his minister and also had to punish them in accordance with the dictates of the Nattukuttam, C. Achutha Menon, Cochin State Manual, Cochin:1911, p.5.
Dutch systematically eradicated the power of the Nattukutams. The Nattukutam disappeared with the rise of the British. Eventually the political supremacy of the Nairs also declined. By the latter half of the nineteenth century there was no semblance of organisation among the Nairs.

A growing awareness among the Nairs about the threat to their position from the organized Christian Community in the society was left. Besides, the organised movements started among the lower castes alarmed the Nairs. The first attempt to organise Nairs on a State level was made by a few Nair leaders who started "Kerala Nair Samajam". This led to the powerful movement which created large scale awareness among Nairs about their declining influence in education, economics, political and social fields. This awareness spread among the various sub-groups among the Nairs. The ascribed status, which individuals got by virtue of their birth as Nair, became a rallying point. In addition to the State wide attempt to organise the Nairs, there were many attempts at the district and Kara levels. Though the Keraliya Nair Sarmajam failed to survive, it elevated the Nairs from the position of a quasi-group to that of a community.

Ignoring the Sib-caste title Nair became the identifying factor to form into the "Community".

A further attempt for the formal organisation of Nairs was made when the Perunnani Karayogam was revived in 1910.\(^\text{16}\) The revival of this Karayogam helped the emergence of a powerful Nair leadership. The Nair Service Society (NSS) was formally inaugurated on 31 October, 1914 with only fourteen members.\(^\text{17}\) The organisation started its first school in 1915 and by 1966 the number of school reached 111 having a student enrolment of about a lakh.\(^\text{18}\) When the Nair Service Society was formed in 1914, there was only one Karayogam, by the time of its golden jubilee celebration it has raised to 4000 under the society.\(^\text{19}\) The revival of Karayogam was mainly to counter the socio-economic and political threat to the Nair community from the Catholic Church.\(^\text{20}\)

In 1914, when the NSS was formed, it had no assets. But in 1947, at the time of independence, it presented a budget of Rs.8 lakhs. The growth of the NSS since Independence was phenomenal. In 1957 the budget shot up to Rs.46 lakhs. The budget for Golden

\(^\text{16}\) Mannath, Padmanabhan, op.citp.21.
\(^\text{17}\) Ibid, p.35.
\(^\text{20}\) Suvarna Grandham, p.382.
Jubilee Year was for two crores of rupees. The NSS has separate department for Agriculture (which includes plantations covering all area of about 29,000 acres), Devasoms (including several temples), Industries (including factories like Mannam Sugar Mills at Pandalam), Educational Institutions (including one of the first engineering colleges in the Private sector) Health (with several hospitals) Co-operatives, press and publications (publishing a daily newspaper). NSS formed a political party, the National Democratic Party which had some success in 1977 elections and minister in the United Democratic Ministry in 1982. NSS is one of the most powerful communities in the State now.

Influence of Christian community brought a chain of changes in the State and by the time India attained independence it was time for these various communities to enter into politics. As different communities in the State gained strength, the traditional social structure in Kerala disintegrated. As achievable aspects took precedence over the ascriptive aspect, ritualism received a jolt, occupational, educational, economic and political aspects became the criterion for judging the position of individual or group. The hierarchical society was replaced by the vertical communities.

\[21\] Nair Service Budget, 1966-67, p.1
At present in Kerala there are innumerable community organisations. Among the caste Hindus, there are the Nair Service Society (NSS), All Kerala Kshatriya Mahasabha, Tamil Brahmin Sangham, All Kerala Vanibha Vhysa Sangam, Yoga Kshamam Sabha of Kerala Brahmins etc. Among Non-Caste Hindu community organisations well known community organisations are, Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalanam (SNDP) of the Ezhavas, The Nadar Mahasabha, All Vellala Masabha, All Kerala Viswakarma Society (of Carpenters), All Kerala Divaara Sabha (fishermen), Velasamudhaya Dharma Sangham (washerman), Kerala Pulaya Mahasabha (DPMS) etc. For Christian there are organisations for different denominations like All Kerala Latin Catholic Association (Latin Catholics), Catholic Congress( Syrian Catholic Church), All Kerala Yakobaya Samookam (Jacobite Christians), All Kerala Cheruman Christian Association for the Christian Converts from Pulayas (Dalits) and All Kerala Avasha Christian Federation (BCF, Backward class Christian Federation). 

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22 Adrian Mayer, Land and Society in Malabar, Connecticut: Green Wood Press 1952, p.51. According to him “Although the caste hierarchy had not disappeared, it is clear that its distinction is lessening”. See also, Babu Lal Fadia, State Politics in India, 1984, Delhi: p.119.
Community formation and change in the structure of Kerala Society

The peculiar community structure of Kerala is an amalgam and a blend of religion and caste. The prevailing hierarchal Caste system underwent change due to the formation of community federations and the existence of these community federations have been the catalysts of political consciousness in Kerala. This led the different communities to involve actively in the political affairs of Kerala. This made two communities to come to the dominant position, the Nairs and the Syrian Christians communities. Though Caste ranking place the Namboodiri Brahmins at the apex in the traditional society, now in the context of politics of number they are a microscopic minority comprising 1.6 per cent of the population, resulting in a reduced ranking in the power politics of Kerala.\(^2^3\) The Nairs, warrior caste who were ranked below the Namboodiries traditionally, because of their number (16\%) and educational and economic advancement rose into a pivotal force in the State politics.\(^2^4\) They have traditionally held the balance making or breaking a government shifting sides.


\(^{24}\) Ibid, p.119.
Syrian Christians, another dominant community in the State after independence, ranked next to or equal to the Nairs. According to the 2001 census the total population of the Christians is 6057427 i.e. they formed 19.02 percent of the total population of Kerala. The Ezhavas, though the largest according to number, they are not a power in the South of Kerala. In the North Kerala they are mainly the followers of leftist ideology and hence they are politically powerful, but economically and educationally they are backward compared to other communities in Kerala.

Community Politics in Kerala

In State polities at the time of elections, community factor play an important role. Political Parities irrespective of their ideological background choose candidates from the community which is numerically large and dominant in the constituency. Even leftist parties, though they claim that they are above communal politics, justify the selection on the communal basis saying that they follow the “Social base” in selection of candidates.\(^{25}\) Although there are elements of each community in all parties (except the Muslim League), the parities in Kerala have come to be associated with a particular community and within each party factionalism expresses the divisions of religion and caste. Indeed, the politics of community

\(^{25}\) Op.cit, p.120.
form a fundamental reality in the State. E.M.S. Namboodiripad, the eminent leader of the Communist Party in India writes the caste organisations were "the first form in which the peasant masses rose in struggle against feudalism". Today however, "it is easy enough to see..... that these caste organisations are not the class organisations of the peasantry; they do, on the contradictory, consolidate the caste separatism of the people in general and of the peasantry in particular, so that the grip of these caste organisations on the peasantry has to be broken if they are to be organised as a class".26

Kathleen Gough holds that most of the poor peasants come from "relatively low or "backward" castes (Kerala, Ezhavas or low-ranking Muslims or Christians). Landless labourers include "almost all members of the Harijan or 'Untouchable' caste of former agriculture slaves: ... Pulayas, Cherumas and Paraya in Kerala".27 At present the functions of these different communities grouped as follows.28

1. **Boundary-maintenance function**: As the existence of social group is threatened by change, the group or its leaders may organise politically to preserve or establish the identity of the group. Then "caste becomes a political division of society, at the same time as it is loosing its position as a ritual division".29

2. The political organisations started by many of the communities in the state are to keep the identity of the group. These political organisations of the community are not to govern "the community, but rather a potential organisation to deal with the outside world".30 The creation of a new community wide association itself serves to strengthen loyalty to the community.

3. **Social Mobility Functions**: Individual leaders of a community may regard politics as a opportunity for social mobility. The community itself may be rising or may attempt to rise through political activity.

4. **Non-political activities**: These community associations also provide scholarships for their members, offer hostel facilities for students from their respective communities, build hospitals etc. Such activities strengthen the identification with the caste

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30 Weiner Myron, op.cit. p.70.
associations and facilitate the carrying on of political activities by the associations.

5. These community organisations besides demand from the government rewards like more seats in the legislative assembly, more posts in administrative services, more seats in the colleges, or in the economic sphere, greater state investment in the locality where the community has greater concentration.

Political Parties

In Kerala political parties have appeared in the past like mushrooms. As many as twenty eight or more are formed in Kerala after independence. Many were short lived. These political parties were organised in various circumstances. Some were representatives of different communities in Kerala. Some were originated under the influences of Marxian revolutionary class ideology. Some others were formed to fight for regional causes. Others emerged when the parties split as a result of personality differences of party leaders. Very few parties had affiliation to National Parties.

Christians and Political Parties

At the time of independence, the present Kerala State was divided into three distinct political units: Travancore, Cochin and Malabar. Travancore and Cochin were ruled by local Kings and
Malabar was part of the Province of the British Administration. Later, on 1 July 1949 Princely State of Travancore and Cochin joined to form Travancore-Cochin State - TC State. On 1 November 1956, when Indian States were reorganised into linguistic states, Malabar portion joined the other two to become the present Kerala State. Therefore the political history of Kerala proper starts only from 1957 onwards.

The participation of Christian community in the Politics in Kerala can be traced back to “Malayalee Memorial Movement” at the turn of the century. The Christians, the Nairs and the Ezhava Communities joined together in 1891 to protest the policy of the princely state of Travancore to appoint Prime Ministers and other high officials from outside the State. All these communities objected to Maharaja, popularly known as the Travancore Memorial (Malayali Memorial). The Christian Community was in the forefront along with other communities during this mass agitation. They submitted a Memorandum to the Maharaja, with the signature of 10,028 citizens of Travancore, demanding that Government jobs should be given only to the “sons of the soil”. This benefited the Nairs and ever since they started dominating the bureaucracy.

Next important political movement in which the Christians played an important role was in the 1932 agitation which Christians, Ezhavas, and Muslims protested the inadequate representation given to their respective communities in the new bicameral legislation constituted in 1932. The legislative Assembly elections which were held in the year 1931, the Nairs had 15 seats as against 4 seats secured by Christians, while the Ezhava community drew a blank. This led to the demand for communal representation in the Legislative Assembly and in the public services. They all untied and organised under the name of the "Samyakta Rasshriya Samsththi" and proclaimed a boycott of the elections to the legislature. This campaign is the Travancore history, known as the "Nivarthana" (abstention) movement, was so successful that the government relented and amended the constitution so as to provide a fairer representation to the Christians, the Ezhavas and the Muslims. This organisation laid the foundation for the State Congress, a wing of the National Congress Party. Thus from the very beginning of Democracy and Party Politics in Kerala, the Christian Community was in the forefront.

The Congress Party was dominated by the Syrians Christians in Travancore, while in Cochin the entire political scenario was totally different from that of Travancore princely state. There was no
community domination in Cochin in party politics. The Prajamandalam party that fought for responsible government in Cochin was controlled by the High Caste Hindus. However, in Malabar the Congress party was led by the High Caste Hindus. Their main aim was to fight for the freedom of India. So there was no tension between communities in Malabar as in Travancore. All throughout Syrian Christians were fighting for their legitimate rights in Travancore.

Role of Christian Community after Independence

Immediately after independence, the main objective of the State Congress was political reform. They formed the constituent assembly of 120 members and fixed a candidate for every 50,000 people. T. M. Varghese represented the Syrian Christian Community

The first election to the Travancore State Assembly was conducted in the year 1948. Congress was elected to form the government. Pattom Thanu Pillai became the first Chief Minister. In that the Syrian Christian T.M. Varghese joined the ministry. Initially the two dominant Communities Nairs and Syrian Christians tried to control the government. Pattom Thanu Pillai, leader of the Nair community had to resign from the congress and crossed the assembly to join the Democratic Socialist Party of India. This was followed by short stint of Chief Ministership for T. K. Narayana
Pillai, C. Kesavan, and A. J. John, all supported by the Syrian Christians. Government stability was at stake. None of these Chief Ministers completed their term as the Chief Minister of the Travancore-Cochin State. The reason attributed to the fact of communal rivalry among the various constituents in the Congress Party. As a result they opted for the Communist Party which was dominated by the Ezhavas and other backward communities, though the leadership was in the hands of the High Caste.

After independence, on the one hand Congress became increasingly a party of Christians dominated just as the Praja Socialist Party (PSP) was regarded as a virtual Nair dominated party and on the other the Muslim League commands allegiance from majority of Muslims in Kerala. The Communist party has drawn its strength mainly from the Ezhava community and the other backward communities. Later on it is seen that the overwhelming support of the Ezhava community to the Communist party from 1957 election had led some analysis to identify the caste and community the "social base" of communism in Kerala. This opposes the argument that in Kerala Communists derive their support base from different classes particularly from urban and rural working class. Kerala shows the reality of caste more than the class as the social base of Communist Party in Kerala.
Politics in Travancore, Travancore-Cochin State before the formation of the Kerala State could be summarised in the following lines:

1. The Christian-Nair rivalry was prominent in the Congress Ministry that took charge in Travancore in 1948, which eventually led to the resignation of Pattom Thanu Pillai.

2. When Cochin State was united to Form Travancore-Cochin State a new dimension was added to this in the form of regionalism. This often created a crisis in Government and Ministries, especially in the initial stages.

3. The personality conflict of the political leaders also played a vital role in the political instability of the State. Pattom-Panapilli conflict is both regional and personality based conflict.

4. When a single party failed to attain majority, they attempted coalitions of community supported parties, under any circumstances.

5. As years went political parties increased in number with limited goals and often localised goals.

The Syrian Christians and the Communist Government

In 1957 elections to the Kerala Legislative Assembly, Kerala created a world record by bringing the first Communist government
to power through ballot paper. The Communists with the support of
the independent candidate succeeded to grab the necessary majority
to form the government.  

Before the election in 1957 there was a shift in policies of both
the Congress and the Communist parties. In the Avadi session of the
Indian National Congress, the Congress declared that the objective
of national policy should be the building of a “Socialist pattern of
society”. This “left-ward” shift was to accommodate the Socialists
in the Congress, and to fight against the Communists. The
Communists on the other hand has a right-ward shift by accepting
the democratic action in order to accommodate the right-ward forces
in the party and to fight against the Congress. Permeation of these
two ideologies created confusion in the minds of voters in Kerala
which is reflected in 1957 elections.

In the campaign for the 1957 elections “The All-Kerala
Catholic Christian Convention Called on all Catholics to oppose
Communist's candidates and to support the Congress. The Kottayam
District went heavily for the Congress, as did the predominantly
Christian Constituencies of Ernakulam, but the force of the Church

32 R. Ramakrishnan Nair, The Constituent Experience in Kerala, Trivandrum: Kerala
  Academy of Political Science, 1964, p. 38.
34 E.M.S.Namboodiripad, Conflict and Crisis, Political India, Madras: 1974, Orient
brought victory to only 43 Candidates for the Assembly's 125 seats".\(^{35}\) The Christians formed 53.49 percentages of the total elected Congress candidates. The Nairs supported PSP secured 9 seats of which 65 per cent were Nair Candidates. Besides, “Nairs, who had become scared of the growing Christian influence over the Congress, cast as many votes for the Communists (2 lakhs) as they did for Congress”\(^{36}\). Among the elected candidates of the Communist Party, there were a great number from the Nairs and many Nair constituencies went to the Communists. The addition of the Malabar constituencies tipped the scale towards CPI.

The two major controversial bills brought during the Communist period were the Educational Bill and the Land Reform Bill. In Kerala in those days about 7000 schools were under private management Lion's share of it was with the Christians, especially Syrian Christians. The government was giving private managed schools financial aid which ran to crores of rupees. It was paying the management the full salary of the teachers but complaints were not infrequent that the teachers were not paid in full. There was no security for the teachers. Teachers had to give sometimes capitation

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fees to get appointment. The provisions in the Bill restricted the Private Management, specialty Christian Management. It said

1. Bill empowered the government to pay the salaries directly to the teachers instead of paying through the Management.

2. All teachers were to be allowed pension, gratuity, insurance, similar to those then enjoyed by teachers of the government schools.

3. The State was to prepare a list of qualified teachers and the appointment had to be made from the panel of names selected from this list by the district educational authorities.

4. Government would have the power to take over the management of any school which is not being properly managed, after paying legitimate compensation.

Later on the High Court upheld the minority's right to establish and run schools of their choice. But made it clear that such rights should not be misused Christians depicted this Bill as "regulation of thought", "poisoning of young minds" by the teachers who me sent from the government list and "lack the freedom to

37 Education in Kerala, Editorial, The Economic and Political Weekly, IX, March 30, 1957. Panampally Govinda Menon tried to introduce a measure in similar lines, but was compelled to give up his Education portfolio under pressure from Catholic Church.

38 Ibid. March 30, 1957.
educate the children". "The main objection from the Christians was against the clause, which stipulated that teachers should be appointed from approved lists and that in the appointment of teachers, communal representation to be observed". 39 "The provision would reserve 50 per cent of teaching position to "back-ward" classes, that is, the Ezhavas and Harijans—the Communist's major supporters". 40 Though Communist Government wanted to bring governmental control over education, the communal goal of the ruling government could not be over-looked.

One of the critical tests in the nature of the relationship between Communist ideology and the need for a community support was the party's effort to drop caste as a test for backwardness, substituting in its steady income. "Immediately a bowl of protest went up from the Ezhavas, who are classified as backward. Fearing for their electoral support, Communist's for once gave in to communal sentiments...". 41 The dominant time of the Ezhavas activity throughout the years has been reform. Today the reform which the Ezhavas want is economic, and they have become convinced of it during the last decade (1952-62) that it is only

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40 Robert Hardgrave (Jr), op.cit, p.683.

41 Ibid, p.716.
through the K.C.P (Kerala Communist Party) that they will secure it. The Ezhavas are a politically conscious group, aware of the issues and not easily swayed by slogans. For this reason they have been willing to support the K.C.P, in spite of the Congress orientation of their caste association leaders... Thus between the Ezhavas and the Communists there have been no fundamental meeting of minds, but rather a fortunate confluence of programme and action .........The Communists, for their part do not really think of the Ezhavas as the "proper" class for their support.42

Through Educational Bill the direct attack was on the Church in Kerala which run the majority of the schools. By bringing that under governmental control, the Communist Party wanted to destroy the dominance of the Catholic Church, particularly Syrian Catholic Church under control.

The education bill was aimed at isolating the Christians from the Hindus. But the Nairs and high class Ezhavas also found that as they owned many schools they would be affected.

Along with Educational Bill, Communists wanted to enact the Land Reform Bill too. They issued an ordinance staying all the eviction from land. This was a prelude to the contemplated

comprehensive land bill. A problem arose immediately. Some people, mostly from the Harijans and other low caste communities, moved to government waste lands and claimed protection under the ordinance. Also the government made it clear that the government waste land would be distributed to the landless of which 25 per cent was earmarked for the Harijans.\(^{43}\) Though they were the communities which most needed protection, it was interpreted by the other communities as favouritism towards party supporters. Land owning communities, Nairs and Syrian Christians criticised the Bill. The Bill targeted at the Dominant communities, Nairs and the Syrian Christians, who were belonging to the land owning class.

**Role of Christians in the Liberation Struggle**

The performance of the Communist government antagonized the Dominant communities like Nairs and Syrian Christians, Muslims and the upper class Ezhavas. Under the leadership of Mannath Padmanaban, Nairs, Christians and Muslims formed the Vimochana Samara Samithi to free Kerala from Communist rule. Catholic Church, especially the Bishops of the Syrian Churches participated in it actively. Nehru described it as a "mass upsurge". Finally on the 31st July, 1959, the President of India, on the advice

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\(^{43}\) Jithendra Singh Diwan, op.cit, p.1623 ff.
of the Central Cabinet intervened in Kerala and imposed President's rule after twenty-eight months of Communist rule.

The curtain fell to the first phase of democratic experiment in Kerala, no single Political Party or Party dominated by single Community succeeded to rule the State for the full term. The fifties could be described as an era of Uni-communal political dominance which met with failures. This led to experiment with Bi-community rule in the State.

"Bi—Community" Domination in the Sixties

In the fifties politics in Kerala was marked by the struggle for domination by a single community. As a result, the longest period a ministry could continue in power was only twenty-eight months. A new phase began from the beginning of the sixties.

After the 1960 mid-term election, Congress was the strongest, which was mainly dominated by the Syrian Christian followed by Class Ezhavas. PSP the other coalition partner was dominated by the Nairs. Muslim League which was a partner during election was not allowed to join the ministry, but had to be satisfied with the post of the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly.

The Congress-PSP coalition did not last very long. Pattom’s domineering ways and the ambition of the Congress leaders was a
great block. Soon the fight started between Nair leadership and the Syrian Christian leadership for dominance in the ministry. Finally Syrian Christian- Ezhava combination succeeded to send out the Nair dominated PSP out of the ministry. Chief Minister Pattom was given a Governor's post in Punjab. Later on PSP was pulled out of the ministry. Meanwhile within the Congress party itself "communal dissension was crystallizing around the Christian Home Minister P.T. Chacko and the Ezhava deputy Chief Minister R. Shankar".44 When Nairs dominated PSP, left the Ministry, the Ezhava domination rose in the Congress. Though the no-confidence motion against the Shankar ministry failed in the Assembly, the gap between the Syrian Christians and the Ezhavas widened. Meanwhile the Communists made a breakthrough in the ruling coalition by isolating the Christians, and forcing Shankar to join the Malabar Nair camp of the organisational Congress. After the political drama, Shanker, Ezhava leader, with the support of the A ICC in Delhi, asked the resignation of P. T. Chacko, the Syrian Christian Leader.

This led to a new alignment. From within the Congress, Chacko attacked the privileged position of the Ezhava as a "backward" class and accused Shankar of persecuting the Church. Chacko found a ready ally in the leader of the Nair Service Society,

Mannath Padmanaban. Padmanaban alleged that 'despite some Namboodiris and Nair renegades, who are at the top of the Communist Party, it is a party of the Ezhavas" and any time they (Shankar and the Communists) could come together. “Hence, the only man to serve Kerala from being ruined by Ezhavas riff-raff is Chacko and the Nairs will stand by him through thick and thin”.45 After the death of Chacko, Shankar purged the Kerala Congress Committee of the Chacko supporters who were mostly Christians. When the Nair dominated socialist party decided to move a no-confidence mention in the Assembly against the Shankar Ministry, the Christian dissidents from the Congress Party, under the leadership of K.M. George, were willing to support them. Shankar Ministry felt leading to Governor's rule and Mid-term elections in Kerala.

Syrian Christians in Travancore and Formation of Kerala Congress

The split in the Congress in Kerala and in the Communist party had political Consequences. A large portion of the Christian and the Nair supporters of the Congress in Travancore overnight transformed into a base for the Kerala Congress. “The Congress

President undermined the strength of the rebels and over calculated the power Shankar in the Ezhava Community. \(^{46}\) "Therefore the 1965 mid-term election in Kerala was fought by the Congress and the Communists to secure the support of the Ezhava Community."\(^{47}\)

Kerala Congress, the newly emerged party, entered politics with an impressive strength and it continued to exercise its power in the following years. The Districts which had formerly been the bastion of the Congress and the Nairs became the base for Kerala Congress. These 23 seats came from the Christian dominated districts of Kottayam (7), Alleppy (6), Quilon (5) and Ernakulam (5).

These elections further proved that the apparent shift which Kerala politics took in the direction of class politics in 1957 suffered a complete set-back. All the parties, including the Communists adopted a communal line in these elections. Besides the "failure of them to secure a majority, however, only emphasizes from the part that while politics in Kerala may be caste bound, no party can rule with support of one community alone."\(^{48}\) Thereafter the coalition ministry came to stay in Kerala politics and the stability of


\(^{47}\) Hardgrave, Robert (Jr), op.cit. p.618.

\(^{48}\) Ibid, p.628.
government depended on the representation of a cross-section of the various communities in the state.

Although the 1965 mid-term election was checked we find that it was a turning point in the post-independent political history of Kerala. More and more communities gained political significance and coalition of communities became inevitable for governmental stability. At the beginning of the decade there was a ‘multi-community’ understanding in coalition formation, but ended most of the time two against the rest. The Ezhava Christian, the Nair-Ezhava, the Christian-Nair combinations were tried but failed. It failed to offer a lasting solution to the democratic politics in Kerala. A need for a new formula rose, and then various parties started working on it, during the several of political uncertainty created by the President's Rule.

The “Multi-Community” Governments in the Seventies

The 1965 election results brought two factions of the Communists closer. It further prepared the ground for a fresh inter-party anti-Congress strategy in Kerala. Given the geographic lay out of the Malabar population the survival of the Muslim League depended on striking an understanding with the Ezhavas and Harijans dominated constituencies. Their experience in 1960 at the
hands of the Congress dominated by the Nairs of the Malabar region taught them that they would not be given my share in power with the Congress if they formed alliance with six other parties. During the 1965 elections they understood that the Communists were their greatest enemies as well as their friends. In spite of his Marxists ideology, E.M.S. had always sought the support of the Muslims League to secure success for his party. All India Council of Muslim League came out with a declaration that the League would be prepared to join my opposition party—whether Swatantra, Jan Sangh or Communists in programmatic united front to defeat the Congress and form a non-Congress Government.49

Christian Community and Marxist alliance, secularisation movement anti-Congress trend in the Christian Community

Disgusted with the Congress performance and inspired by the Marxist-Christian theology, Fr. Vadakken, formed a party for the middle elms peasants of Malabar region. The defeat of the CPI in the 1965 elections and their realisation that the time was not yet ripe to make advances to the Congress camp prompted them to join the United Front of the seven parties. Knowing that the Congress had very little to offer to them, besides they found the newly-formed

Kerala Congress was dominated by Catholics of Travancore. Left without my option the RSP and the KSP too joined the front. According to E. M S. Namboodiripad, founder of the new coalition formula "Communist party called 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” in majority and form a non-Congress coalition government. “This meant that the Party was prepared to have a coalition (and not mere adjustment of seats) with the Muslim League, if the latter was prepared to accept a minimum programme".\(^{50}\)

A meeting was convened by the Congress and the Kerala Congress leaders in the presence of Archbishop of Trivandrum and the Bishop of Palai, in an attempt to come to a common understanding to form a united programme.\(^{51}\) This meeting ended in a failure. The KPCC leaders rejected the offer, insisting instead, on the Kerala Congress merging with it, whereas the Kerala Congress asked for an electoral arrangement. Later on Mannanam and some of the Bishop advised the members of the Kerala Congress to merge with the Congress. But they refused to accept the proposal as they were afraid it would lead towards a loss in their identity. The

\(^{50}\) M.V. Pylee, op.cit.,p.484.

\(^{51}\) Ibid, p.487.
Congress leadership failed to make a political decision in favour of it.

The Bishops Conference of India has asked the Christians all over India to vote for the Congress since it was the only party that could protect the interests the Christians. The Kerala Bishops Conference supported it. Bishop of Palai referring to the conference made a statement asking the faithful to follow the order, "We suffered under Communists role. We easily forget these facts. There was no peace in the state while communists were in power. There was no security for men and property. They took the law and order to their hands and established "cell rule" in Kerala ... They wanted to bring private schools under control. Text books were made use of as a means of Communists propaganda. They are anti-democratic and atheists. Therefore he requested that each every Catholic should vote for the Congress in the coming elections. In a circular Mar Gregorios, Arch-Bishop of Trivandrum condemned the Kerala Congress and extolled the Congress".\(^52\)

The Kerala Congress showed rare courage in ignoring the call of Bishops and the Nair leader. The Executive Committee of the Kerala Congress unanimously decided to contest the elections and thus liberate itself from the dictates of the Church leaders. As the

\(^{52}\) Mathrubhoonmi (Malayalam), January 29, 1967.
campaign progressed, the Kerala Congress leaders gained confidence. Although the Bishops withdrew their support officially, the party leaders found that parish priests were defying the Bishop's official proclamation, and canvassing support for their candidates. At the same time the Nair support slowly drained to the Congress Party, and by the end of the election Kerala Congress was left in the hands of the Syrian Catholic Community of Travancore supported mainly by the Christians of the Travancore region while Syrian Christians in Cochin continued to serve the Congress.

The Left Democratic ministry did not survive long. CPM tried to dominate which was resented by other partners of the Ministry. The Front came to a head-on collision with the Catholic Bishops when they introduced the University Bill. The clauses like, "the private colleges can be taken over for a period of five years on the ground of mismanagement if the government considers that public interest warrants such an action".  
53 "The government may take over a college with or without recommendation to that effect from the University";  
54 and after the take-over the college will be administered by a governing council composed of representatives of the University, the government, the teachers and the management

54 Ibid, 1715
will put the private managed colleges out of gear. The Kerala Bishop's conference, which controlled 64 of the 115 private colleges at that time, issued a statement opposing the Bill, referred to the constitutional provisions regarding the freedom of the minorities to their own educational institutions. They threatened that they would rather do without grant-in-aid from the government than submit to the penal provisions of the Bill.

Eventually the first “multi-community” coalition fell out of its own weight. But the United Front government set new trends in politics in Kerala based on the “multi-community” support in which the Syrian Christians participate with the help of the Kerala Congress. Government was unstable since it harboured many conflicting ideologies and interests. Any opportunity was taken advantage of by the different coalition partners to maximise gains for their respective party and community. The Muslim community and KTP, supported by a section of the Syrian Christians made the maximum gains during this coalition.

Multi coalition trend continued ever after and Majority of the Syrian Christians remained faithful supporters of LJDF, headed by the Congress (1).Minority communities in general remained faithful

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55 'Challenging the Satrapies in Education', The Economic and Political Weekly, III, November 9, op.cit, 1721.
to UDF whereas the Leftists remained a party of the Hindus mainly dominated in Malabar, especially in North Malabar. Its main vote comes from the Ezhava community and leadership shared by Upper-caste. Their struggle to woo the minority started in the late nineties has shown some visible response in the Muslim bell and marginal success among the Syrian Christians centres.

Syrian Christians were in Kerala politics right from the time democracy was introduced in Kerala. They continue to do their balancing act by strengthening democracy in the State by shocking the Leftists for their undemocratic approaches and the Rightists for their ideological irregularities. At the time India attained independence; the communities placed themselves in place to enter into political arena in the State. Enumerating some of them is of utmost significance for the discussion of the role of Christian communities in Community politics in Kerala.

1. Community solidarity. Community was built on a strong hierarchal structural foundation copied from the western Christianity. Though the community received its original charismas from oriental Christianity during colonial period it underwent changes and adopted the western hierarchal mode of administration. This eventually led them to build communal
solidarity and establish themselves into a strong political power in the State.

2. Leadership: Initially there was Church leadership and they guided the community in forming policies, setting strategies while confronting other communities in the state, and helped to emerge strong lay leadership in politics. The church and the lay leadership in politics parted ways in the seventies, leaving the Church leadership to play only a secondary role in Politics. During Liberation Struggle the Church was very much in the forefront. As days went by more and more leaders came forward to join politics.

3. Education: In order to fight the political battle, the missionaries equipped them with modern education. This opened the window to the world and political happenings in the world influenced them to a large extent. First generation leaders who entered politics were all degree holders. Only later on the quality deteriorated due to many factors affecting our education system in Kerala. Of late this has affected the quality of leadership in the State in general.

4. Modernization and Westernization: Education helped Christian Community to modernize and westernize their community far
ahead of other communities. This further helped them to climb
the social ladder on par with the high caste in Kerala. This also
made them to achieve the status of dominant communities in the
State.

5. Job Diversification: Initially the Syrian Christian Community
was Farmers and Traders. Education granted them opportunities
to take up roles other than agriculture and commerce. They
entered into new avenues like bureaucracy. Banking, Teaching
profession, professional courses and a large number of them
migrated to the middle-east, Europe and America in search of
jobs. Earlier the nursing profession was mainly dominated by the
Syrian Christians in Kerala. The affluence they reaped gave them
a lot of leisure and many entered into politics and took it as a
profession.

Syrian Christian community set a paradigm which was closely
followed by other communities in Kerala. This paradigm is the
greatest contribution of the Syrian Christians in Kerala to the
advancement of Politics and Democracy in Kerala.
District of Kerala

1. KASARGOD
2. KANNUR
3. WAYANAD
4. CALICUT
5. MALAPPURAM
6. PALGHAT
7. TRICHUR
8. ERNAKULAM
9. IDUKKI
10. KOTTAYAM
11. ALLEPPY
12. PATHANAMTHITTA
13. QUILON
14. TRIVANDRUM