CHAPTER XI

Political Participation

Synopsis:

Introduction: Caste and Politics.

The Latins and Syrians in the Political Field.

The Common Meeting Ground.

Reservation - Its impact on the Latin-Syrian Relations.

Newspapers - Their Role in the Political Participation of

Syrians and Latins.

Conclusion.
CHAPTER XI

Political Participation

Introduction - Caste and Politics:

"Although most scholars would agree that caste and politics are closely related, in certain parts of contemporary India, their assessment of the significance of this is likely to vary. Some like Srinivas argue that the political process tends to strengthen the loyalties of caste, at least in the short run: 'One of the short-term effects of universal adult franchise is to strengthen caste' (1962, p.65). Others like Gough believe that politics in the modern sense tends to be disruptive of caste. (1960, pp.58-59)."

The scholars differ on this issue because their definitions of caste and politics are different. "Politics is a competitive enterprise, its purpose is the acquisition of power for the realisation of certain goals, and its process is one of identifying and manipulating existing and emerging allegiance in order to mobilise and consolidate positions". Influence can be exerted through articulation of support through the organisations in which the masses are found. If the caste structure provides one of the principal organisational clusters


along which the bulk of the population is found to live, politics must strive to organise through such structures.

In making politics their sphere of activity caste and kin groups on the other hand get a chance to assert their identity and to strive for positions. The scholars who hold this view consider politics as an instrument wielded by a particular stratum in society to consolidate or raise its position. "Among all the scheduled castes in India, the Mahars of Maharashtra have used political means most consistently and unitedly in their attempt to better their condition."³

Though this is an interesting theoretical discussion, while facing a concrete situation this is a sterile controversy. "Where caste itself becomes a political category, it is futile to argue as to whether caste uses politics or politics uses caste."⁴

Political participation:

Political participation may be defined as those acts by citizens which are aimed at influencing the choice of the government personnel, and choice made by the government personnel.⁵ Participation is ideal in a community where all the

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⁴ Rajni Kothari, op.cit., p.5.
groups have equal chances in the decision making process. This may not be present in certain societies where the most important criteria of social stratification are some ascriptive characteristics, and where certain groups are traditionally deprived of any elite positions on the basis of birth. It is in such societies that reservation for the scheduled and backward groups is justified so that the high caste leaders may not sit in judgment on the needs and problems of the depressed groups.

If democracy stands for a more open and equalitarian society, then political participation should not only be legally accessible to all sections of the society, but also create such conditions in practice that enable everyone to participate. In a society where caste still prevails, we must see to what extent one's position in the caste hierarchy becomes an important resource for political participation. In spite of the practice of universal adult franchise in our society, certain low status groups may find it difficult to participate because their low socio-economic position may not give them access to more difficult forms of political participation. It may be that resources like education, knowledge, confidence, organisational and other skills and money needed for effective participation are all accumulated in the hands of the privileged castes. If higher castes have all the resources needed to participate, then they may control positions of power and influence.6

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6 Ibid, p.14
Equal participation has a psychological function of raising the self esteem of low status groups and making them feel that for once they are on a par with the high born. "This feeling of self esteem is more important than it may apparently seem for hereditarily and habitually subordinated people. Much ethnographic literature in India has shown that the feeling that they are inherently unimportant people, without any potentialities to do anything better than to serve the high castes, has been deep-rooted and chronic among the low castes in India. To be able to realise that they are on a par with the high status people at least in the political sphere may help to increase their self esteem." 7

The Latins and Syrians in the Political Field:

The Syrian Catholics with a higher economic position, a higher standard in education and better confidence in their organisational capacity and other skills could exert greater pressure especially with their numerical strength in the political field, than the Latin Catholics. Thus the superior-inferior feelings between these communities manifested in other fields like marriage, family, worship, education and social activities are a reality in the political field also. Still they were not strictly organised as two political groups according to our respondents. First of all, we do not find two different political ideologies for them to remain two distinct groups. The caste feeling and the consequent inter-communal

relations in other fields, motivated them to some extent to think of communal groupings. The majority of our respondents felt that Kerala Congress was mostly supported by the Syrians and the National Congress by the Latins. It is to be specially remembered that this generalisation is very much limited especially after a series of splits in the Congress party. Moreover, the presence of Catholics in other political parties like, the Left and the Right Communists, R.S.P., P.S.P., etc., further limits the degree of this generalisation.

In spite of all these limitations, we find that the caste label is profitably used in Kerala politics and the Catholic group is no exception to it. A survey of the caste affiliation of the candidates nominated from each constituency for the elections indicates that caste was a tool used by the politicians to arouse the public feeling for gaining support. So all the parties, regardless of their ideologies, took care to see that the nominated candidate belonged to the major local caste group. Where the Syrian Catholics have majority, Congress and the Communists and other parties fighting each other will see that their candidates are Syrian Catholics, if it were possible and similarly with other communities too. The leaders who approach the public for votes, exaggerate the caste differences in practice and try to convince the people that their particular community was a victim of discrimination by other caste groups and the only remedy for this was to unite themselves caste-wise to fight out the election, so that they may have their own representatives in the government to voice
the community's needs. So even if the Latins and Syrians do not have perfectly organised political parties of their own, they are not free from the influence of caste in the political field.

At present there are M.P.s. and M.L.As. from both communities though many of them are not strictly representatives of the communities. The elected leaders, occasionally present their community's problems before the government and fight the community's cause. Certain policies and programmes are objected to without considering their worth, if most of the beneficiaries are from caste groups other than that of the Ego. Thus caste segregation is alive in the Kerala politics though in a limited sense.

The Kerala Congress:

The formation of a new party - the Kerala Congress - as a communal party of the Syrian Christians deserves our attention. In the elections of 1960, the alliance of Congress, P.S.P. and Muslim League secured 94 of the 125 seats. Pattam A.Thanu Pillai (Congress) became the Chief Minister. But sooner or later, communal dissension was crystalising around the Syrian Catholic Home Minister, P.T. Chacko, and the Ezhava Deputy Chief Minister, R. Sankar. Sankar aimed the guns of the Congress organisation at the open communalism of the P.S.P. and the Muslim League. Chacko as the leader of the Legislative party, stood for the alliance. Under pressures from the All India Congress Committee in New Delhi, Chacko gave away and
the Muslim League was pushed out of the alliance. New Delhi then kicked Pillai upstairs as the Governor of Punjab. Sankar became the Chief Minister of the Congress Ministry.

With the departure of Pillai from the arena of politics of Kerala, the Nair community felt its interests threatened by the ascendancy of the Ezhavas in the Congress. Chacko himself was none too happy about the prospects of the Ezhavas supplanting Christian influence in the Congress and became increasingly antagonistic towards the Chief Minister. With the Government's attempt to evict Catholic peasants from certain temple lands, Chacko threw his support with the peasants in opposition to the Government, of which he was Home Minister. With the backing of the AICC in New Delhi, Sankar forced Chacko's resignation.

From within the Congress, Chacko attacked the privileged position of the Ezhavas as "backward" class and accused Sankar of persecuting the Church. Chacko joined hands with the leader of the Nair Service Society, Mannath Padmanabhan, and the leaders of the Muslim League. Thus it became an alignment of Christians, Nairs and Muslims against the Ezhavas. With the death of Chacko, Sankar purged the Kerala Congress Committee of the Chacko supporters, for the most part, Christians. This issue was forced and under the leadership of K.M.George, 15 Congress Assembly members withdrew their support from the Government. Under charges of corruption, totally discredited in the eyes of the people, in September 1964 the Sankar
Government fell. On the defeat of the Ministry, the Congress rebels formed the Kerala Congress as an opposition party. It claims to be a party that stands for the defence of the minority rights. It has been a forum for the Catholic farmers especially for expressing their grievances. Its Chairman, late Mr. K.M. George, was a true spokesman of the Syrian community. Some of our respondents think that the emergence of this new party was due to the community consciousness of the Syrian Christians and their attempt to establish their identity in the political field.

The Latin Catholics, as a community segregated from the Syrians, do not support Kerala Congress. Kerala Congress is more popular in Changanacherry, Kottayam, Palai, etc., which are predominantly the centres of Syrian Christians. When these Syrians tried to develop their own party, the Latins showed more attachment to the Organisation Congress which was formed during 1969 when Mrs. Indira Gandhi formed a group against the Congress High Command. Thus today there is popular feeling that Kerala Congress is of the Syrian community and Organisation Congress is that of the Latins.

When we trace back the political history of these communities, we find that there was unity and common ideal for both communities as they joined hands to fight against Communism. But later, the division of the Congress Party became a cause for communal segregation in the political field. In spite of all these differences we find that these communities had to
stand together at certain occasions when they had a common enemy. There are three such events worth mentioning at this juncture. They are the Kerala Liberation Struggle of 1957 against the first Communist Ministry in Kerala, agitation against the Communist Ministry of 1967 and the private college struggle against the University Act in 1972.

The Common Meeting Ground:

Legislation under the Communist Ministry led by E.M.S. Namboodiripad, aroused widespread agitation in the State. The agrarian bills were attacked bitterly by the land owning elements of the Christian and Nair communities. "The opposition to the Education Bill gave an opportunity to the people to organise a united front against the Communists." The Syrians and Latins who had a number of educational institutions of their own considered the bill endangering the very existence of religious minority. On 13th July 1957, the Christian Bishops of Kerala published a declaration in which they stated "We see in this Bill an attempt to infringe the democratic rights of the citizens, to liquidate the private agencies from the field of education and to regiment the educational system on a communistic pattern."

The Bill, after it was published (in a special Gazette on 7th July 1957), aroused widespread opposition and assumed all-India importance. Many protest meetings were held, demonstrations staged, amendments and modifications proposed,

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resolutions protesting some of the provisions passed and evidence tendered before the select committee ... but the Bill was passed on 2-9-1957. Memoranda and deputations were were made to the Chief Minister requesting him to withdraw the Bill. Thus the Kerala Education Action Committee which was formed in the meantime, to defend the rights and interests of the Christian community in education in their memorandum observed: "The prevailing system of education in the State was started by private agencies, to be more precise by Christian missionaries at considerable sacrifice."

The Christians and Nairs who collectively fought against the Education Bill had something more at the back of their mind. They thought that the land legislation to be implemented by the Government would be a threat against their own established position in society. Anyhow, it was an occasion for the Latin and Syrian Catholics to forget the caste differences and to stand together.

A similar event took place in 1967 when the Communist Ministry was in power. There were serious allegations of corruption against many members of the Ministry. The Catholics, without any difference of rite or caste, joined the opposition and fought against the Government. The Government fell 31 months of its rule.

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Finally in 1972 the Syrians and the Latins had to stand together against the University Act which was mainly intended to be a check over the freedom, the private agencies enjoyed in their education institutions. The major issues were equalisation of fees in Government and private educational institutions, implementation of direct payment for all the teachers and adaptation of a standardised policy on merit in admission of students and appointment of staff. The Catholic Church was the chief whip since it owned the largest number of private educational institutions. The other Christian groups, Nairs and Muslims joined them. A big rally with the participation of more than ten thousand people was organised in Trichur, protesting against the move of the Government and a Catholic Bishop, perhaps for the first time in Kerala, was leading the march. The struggle ended with the formation of new policies on the issue, that were acceptable to both parties.

When there is an external threat, the internal splinter groups join together to fight against the common enemy. Though different political parties were fighting each other in India, whenever India was attacked by an outsider, there was internal unity. The same phenomenon could be observed in the Catholic community also. But the unity arrived at on such occasions was not of any lasting nature and the Catholic community still suffers from problems created by caste feeling.
Reservation:

Reservation as a generally recognised policy, is intended to be a special assistance to the socially and economically backward groups. All the Five-Year Plans have endeavoured to minimise the glaring social and economic disparities between the backward and forward communities and castes by awarding special privileges to the backward groups. They were in the form of monetary incentives to promote literacy, concessionary entries into educational institutions and job situations, special representation on Government Forums etc.

Syrians are counted as forward community and therefore have no special consideration in the form of reservation in employment, admission to educational institutions and seats in political elections without considering the economic position of the individual. But the Latins because of their relative backwardness in the socio-economic matrix, are listed with the backward classes and enjoy the privileges of reservation. In all the selections directly made by the Public Service Commission, 4% of seats are reserved for the Latin Catholics.

According to our respondents, reservation on the basis of caste and community has adversely affected the Syrian-Latin relations. It served to aggravate the communal segregation and social distance between them instead of bringing them closer, by eradicating the socio-economic disparities.

Our study reveals that 100% of the Syrians are against reservation on community basis. They recommend reservation on
economic basis. Economic factor is a criterion by which society is divided into economic classes and caste distinctions become non-existent in such class considerations. Moreover, they justify their stand by saying that it is the poor who deserve reservation and special assistance and not Syrian or Latin. They also pointed out that many rich people who do not deserve any help from others are enjoying the privileges of reservation under the caste and communal label. Finally it is to be expected that a practice by which they are in no way benefited may not be supported by them.

On the contrary, 90% of the Latins supported reservation on community basis. This is to be normally expected. But the 10% who opted reservation on economic factor, deserve special attention and study. What could be its reason? A closer examination of the data reveals that most of those supporting reservation on economic basis hail from economically well off families and hence the presence or absence of reservation does not make a qualitative change in their life. Another possible explanation is the "Sanskritising" tendency found among the Latins. Reservation being special assistance for the backward, those who want to improve their social status may deliberately try to liberate themselves from the label of such concessions, and to associate themselves with the forward class by adopting their ways of life and conditions.
The criteria for Reservation - Responses of Sample A according to their education and income:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income and Education</th>
<th>Reservation and Rite</th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Syrians</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Economic basis</td>
<td>Caste basis</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Economic basis</td>
<td>Caste basis</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSLC</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSLC</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSLC</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSLC</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSLC</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
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<tr>
<td>College</td>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>100</td>
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<td>100</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>64</td>
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<tr>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>31.25%</td>
<td>68.75%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Income-wise</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
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<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>87.5%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. Total</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It is a fact that there were attempts from the Latin Catholics themselves for restricting the reservation to the fishermen community and to liberate the non-fishermen group from the degrading label of reservation. The introductory sentence of a memorandum submitted to the then Revenue Minister of Kerala, Mr. Baby John, requesting him to give reservation to just the Nadar Latin Catholics is as follows:

"It has been understood that you are being approached by certain leaders among Latin Catholics so that you may use your position in the Cabinet to see that the quota of reservation in public services allotted to Latin Catholics may be restricted or specified as reservation for Mukkuvas or Fishermen community alone".10

The following is a typical remark made by some of our respondents on the issue of reservation for the Latins: "The Latins should have fought for reservation on caste basis and got all the privileges like the Scheduled Caste, but the false prestige did not allow our leaders to do that; today the community, therefore, remains in a very low economic position". This remark is important when we examine the caste elements operating in the Catholic community. The attitude of those Latins who consider reservation as a label that lowers their social position and try to get rid of it, to associate themselves with the people of higher social status, is similar to that of the low caste Hindus who tried to improve their social status through the process of Sanskritisation.

At the functional level, we feel that reservation based on

10 Memorandum given by Fr. A. James, Mariapuram, Amaravila, Trivandrum, to Mr. Baby John, Minister for Revenue, Kerala State, 1974, requesting him to give just reservation to the Nadar Latin Catholics.
caste, though intended for the welfare of the relatively backward groups, can be instrumental in preserving and aggravating caste differences.

**Newspapers:**

Newspaper is a powerful communication medium in creating national integration or disintegration. Compared to the other media of communication, this is the means that can easily influence the general public because it is accessible even to the poor. Moreover, in Kerala, where the literacy rate is over 60%, newspapers are playing a vital role in formulating public opinion and shaping attitudes. Hence an examination of its role in the inter-communal relations of Syrians and Latins is relevant.

Both the Syrians and Latins have their own newspapers that highlight the specific communal problems and defend their position, demand their rights and privileges. Which paper is more popular in each community is an important consideration in studying the integration of a community and its relation to other communities.

"Deepika" is a daily paper owned by the Syrian Catholics and it remains a paper of the community according to the respondents' evaluation of its role. Similarly, "Kerala Times" is another daily paper published by the Latin Catholics and which stands for the cause of the community. The news items, the editorials and articles published in these two papers very clearly indicate their communal affiliation. In our study of developmental projects and educational institutions we observed the tendency among Latins and Syrians, of developing their own institutions. A similar competition is found in the field of press also.
The Number and Types of Newspapers popular in Syrian & Latin communities:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age and Education</th>
<th>Manorama</th>
<th>Mathrubhoomi</th>
<th>Deepika</th>
<th>Kerala Times</th>
<th>Indian Express.</th>
<th>Hindu</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>G. Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sy</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>Sy</td>
<td>L</td>
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<tr>
<td>Younger SSLC</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Older</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Younger College</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
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<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Older</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Younger Total</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td>Older</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>8</td>
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<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td>SSLC Total</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>-</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Total</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>32</td>
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<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. Total</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A total of 456 subscriptions are made to six papers by 260 Catholic families. Thus a family has an average of about two newspapers. 70% of the Syrian families and 60% of Latin families are subscribing to newspapers. The higher education and better economic position of the Syrian community is reflected in the number of subscribers to newspapers.

Among the Malayalam papers, 'Manorama' is the most popular among our respondents and 'Kerala Times' is having the lowest circulation. According to the size of circulation, the newspapers may be ranked from largest to the smallest as follows: 'Malayala Manorama', 'Mathrubhoomi', 'Deepika', 'Indian Express', 'Kerala Times', and 'Hindu'.

A comparison of Syrian and Latin communities brings out some more interesting conclusions. The contrast is between 'Deepika' and 'Kerala Times', the papers owned by Syrians and Latins respectively. No Syrian of our sample is subscribing to 'Kerala Times', while at least 8 Latin families subscribe to 'Deepika'. The social distance between the communities is clearly manifested in this. The Latins appear to be a little more liberal in their views on communal relations than the Syrians. The two Christian papers, 'Manorama' and 'Deepika' are more popular among the Syrians, while 'Manorama' and 'Mathrubhoomi' take the lead in the Latin community. While there are 64 subscriptions to English papers among the Syrians, there are only 20 among the Latins. This might be related to their lower educational standard in general.
In short, the communal differences and segregation are manifested in the choice of newspapers also. The non-acceptance of the Latin paper in the Syrian community and the same of the Syrian paper in the Latin community remain an index of caste differentiation.

Conclusion:

The social distance kept between Syrians and Latins in various fields, due to caste feeling is maintained to some extent, in the political field also. Both the communities try to keep their identity in this field by congregating themselves under the banner of different political parties or their coalitions. The feeling of caste difference seems to be more influential than agreement or disagreement with the ideologies of parties, in associating themselves with one or other party. The Kerala Congress is chiefly supported by the Syrians, and this very fact alienates the Latins from that party. The Latins, to a large extent, support the National Congress.

Whenever there was an external threat, the Latins and the Syrians had to stand together. But the sort of unity arrived at on such occasions was not of a lasting nature. As the external threat vanishes, the internal split develops and segregation survives.

The Latin Catholics are entitled to enjoy the privilege
of reservation under the label of backwardness. Since the Syrians, as a forward community by recognition, were deprived of any such privilege, reservation could not bring the intended result. Instead, it aggravated the caste feeling. Some of the Latins wanted to get rid of special privileges like reservation, because they did not want to be associated with the backward classes. A deliberate attempt to improve their social status after the Syrians, their reference model, is clear in this attempt.

The success or failure of the fight for power positions largely depends on the access to the communication media. Therefore, Syrians and Latins have their own newspapers, 'Deepika' and 'Kerala Times', respectively to ventilate their communal issues. The role of such papers reinforces the caste feeling and nurtures it in an active manner.