

# CAMPUS POLITICS AND DEMOCRACY IN HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN POST INDEPENDENT KERALA: A STUDY

**Dr. O. C Promod**

*Assistant Professor, Department of History  
St. Cyril's College, Adoor, Pathanamthitta (Dist), Kerala*

Campus politics is the part and parcel of educational-social setup in Kerala. Most of the prominent leaders of present Kerala scenario are the product of campus politics. These bye-products of campus politics are not only shine in the sphere of politics but also among the sectors of state-central govt., corporate, religion, business, private services etc. That is why it is sure that the democratic sense develops through the campus politics in Kerala compared to other states in India.

During the time of national movement, the students in the princely states of Travancore, Cochin and Calicut states boycotted the class on the call of Gandhiji and activated in freedom struggles. These princely state rulers never supported these students, because they were against the will of these princely states. Student agitations were not allowed in many colleges of these states by the repressive policies of the administrators. Even after independence, the same situation continued in Kerala. But some students were exceptional and courageous and they remained the known champions of noble values. They had agitated against social evils, cruelties from administrators and for getting fee concession to them. The representation of students in Senate and other bodies were also stood for their demands.

Almost all student organizations are the representatives of prominent political parties. The student organization of Indian National Congress is Kerala Students Union<sup>i</sup> (KSU), while Student Federation of India<sup>ii</sup> (SFI) is for Communist Party of India (Marxist), *Akhila Bharateeya Vidyarthi Parishath* (ABVP) stands for *Barateeya Janatha Party* (BJP) and RSS, All India Students Federation (AISF) for Communist party of India (CPI), Kerala Students Congress (KSC) for Kerala Congress party, Muslim Students Federation (MSF) for Indian Union Muslim League and Kerala Vidyarthi Janatha (KVJ) for *Janathadal* party. Some of the students organizations supported by terrorists are also seen in Kerala campus. Even though 'Popular Front' is a Muslim aggressive terrorist party and it was banned by the government in many occasions, but one wing among them can be seen in campus named as 'Student Front'. The organization is popular among some pocket of Muslim majority areas in Kerala.

These types of student organizations can be seen in every educational institution in Kerala irrespective of Arts & Sciences colleges, Engineering colleges, Polytechnics, Industrial Training institutes and even in schools. A student leader is somewhat different from others, at least he has some leadership quality from others and more practical knowledge in political approach as well as general awareness compared to other students. The leadership is a stepping-stone to most of their future life. It is a fact that the true campus politician will

win in his life, but the person used the wrong methods to become a leader may eliminate from scene gradually.

The prominent leaders in Kerala politics are hailed from Kerala campus politics. Some of them are A.K Antony (Former Defence minister of India and Ex-CM of Kerala), Vayalar Ravi (Former Cabinet Minister and former KPCC President), RemeshChennithala (Leader of Opposition, Kerala, Former Home Minister & KPCC President), V.MSudheeran (Former KPCC President), Oommen Chandi (Former CM of Kerala), KodyeriBalakrishnan (State Secretary, CPIM), PinarayiVijayan (Present CM of Kerala), V D Satheesan (Present Opposition Leader), A Sudhakaran (Present KPCC President) etc. More than 90% of total Kerala political leaders (Ministers, MPs, MLAs, Panchayat Presidents, etc. are hailed from campus politics. While considering the officials, somewhat same percentage is also applicable there. When we consider whole community in Kerala, the product of campus politics is seen more than 50%.

College Union/ University Union election is purely based on democratic setup and conducts every year. Student union activities are allotted to all higher education institutions today. Kerala higher education comprised of all arts & science colleges, physical education colleges, music-fine arts colleges, Law colleges, Teacher Education colleges etc. under a university.<sup>iii</sup> Through democratic methods of election, different portfolios are filled with College Union Chairman, Vice Chairman, General Secretary, Arts Club Secretary, Sports Club Secretary, University Union Councillor, Magazine Editor, two lady representatives if it is mixed college, I<sup>st</sup> year UG Representative, II<sup>nd</sup> year UG Representative, III<sup>rd</sup> year UG Representative, I<sup>st</sup> year PG Representative and II<sup>nd</sup> year PG Representative. The University Union Councillor of college has the voting power to elect University Union. The University Union Councillor can get chance to enrol as the member of University Senate and Syndicate.<sup>iv</sup>

There are two types of elections in Kerala Higher Education department. One is Parliamentary model and the other is Presidential level. In Presidential model, every student has the power to cast their vote to all portfolios, while in Parliamentary system, the all students can cast their vote only to their class representatives. The class representatives can cast their vote to their higher portfolios.<sup>v</sup> The main criteria for contesting election are to secure 75% attendance in the particular semester and they should clear all papers in the previous semester examinations. That is why we can assure that a contestee is at least a regular and intelligent among student community. The tenure of college union is one year and another general election will come in the next year.<sup>vi</sup> College Union is the part and parcel of all activities in the college. Moreover almost all college programmes conduct under the banner of college union. They motivate students to participate in arts-festival and sports competitions. Their all potentialities are covered or documented in their college magazine publish in every year by the college union. Student representatives are seen in almost all development committees of the college except Staff Council, Parent Teacher Association etc. By engaging different activities, a student can attain self sufficiency, after the completion of his course.

The student organization was not allowed in most of the colleges before the formation of Kerala state. But the approach had changed gradually. But the managers of powerful communities (Nairs & Christians) never supported the formation of Kerala Students Federation (KSF)<sup>vii</sup> in their campus, but showed soft approach to KSU, because KSU was loyal to the management system. The prominent newspaper owners were also against KSF and given little space in their news columns.<sup>viii</sup>

The era of SFI started in 1970s and even the right-wing newspapers also began to give due consideration to the statement of the leftist student leaders. In 1972, the private college teachers went on strike for allowing direct payment of their salaries by the government.<sup>ix</sup> The SFI supported the strike from the initial stages and gradually KSU also took part in it. At the time the students also demanded the uniform fee for both the government and private colleges.<sup>x</sup> In 1972, the government decided to regularise the tuition fee of students. During the time of emergency in 1975, the SFI appealed the students to boycott the classes and as a result the then State Secretary of SFI Mr. Kodiyeri Balakrishnan, M.A Baby (the then State President of SFI), G. Sudhakaran (founder President of SFI) and Mr. M Vijaya Kumar were arrested and put into jail. During the time, KSU engaged in constructive activities such as cleaning KSRTC buses, rendering services among *adivasis* and in farming programmes. Of course they could not revolt against the parent party in emergency days.<sup>xi</sup>

After lifting emergency, a new organization came to birth named, Vidyathi Janatha, a student wing of Janatha Party and Akhila Bharateeya Vidhyarthi Parishath (ABVP). During the period, KSU, MSF, KSC, AISF, PSU became come under one block and decided to work together as a confederation. In the year 1986-87 Mr. T.M Jacob, the then education minister of Karunakaran Ministry, put forwarded the proposal of Pre-degree Board on the pattern recommended by National Education Policy (NEP)<sup>xii</sup>. Most of the states had adopted the delinking of pre-degree from universities to give more importance to higher secondary level by National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) and relieving of over work load from colleges and universities. The teachers, students and university employees started to agitate against the government. The employees and teachers were anxious about the job security. The teachers fear that the plus-two classes will be eventually handed over to the schools, which will affect their status. The prolonged strike disrupted the educational system in Kerala. As a result the examination and valuation of papers became in muddle and it made so many issues in Kerala politics. In the next Assembly election, the ruling UDF ministry under K. Karunakaran shattered and LDF ministry under E.K Nayanar came to power and cancelled the proposed Pre-degree Board. But the same government amended some provisions of Pre-degree Board and introduced the Plus two course in government schools in 1990.<sup>xiii</sup>

One important factor which is to be specially noted that, only peaceful methods were adopted by students during agitation, when it was under the influence of Mahatma Gandhi at the time of Indian independence struggles. But political circumstances altered the course and content of the movement in later years. Student politics became violent and blood-shed in 1960s and 1970s. Pre-degree became completely delinked from colleges in the year 2000

and it became a fatal blow to colleges and student organisations. Even though so many UG courses and PG courses allotted in colleges, it was not an alternative to vibrant Pre-degree classes in colleges. The political parties could easily utilize the service of Pre-degree teenagers but, the UG & PG students are not willing to vibrant politics, except some special situations. Even though politics is there in most number of colleges, the vibrant politics has ended after the delinking of Pre-degree from colleges.

## Notes & References

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<sup>i</sup>Kerala Students Union, herein after referred as KSU. It is the state body of National Students Union (NSU)

<sup>ii</sup>Student Federation of India, herein after referred as SFI. Before 1970 it was known in Kerala as Kerala Students Federation (KSF) and all associated Marxist groups get together and renamed as SFI.

<sup>iii</sup>Official website of Kerala Higher education department.20.12.2018

<sup>3</sup>Letter No.Election/CU/2018-19 of University of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram Dated:13.09.2018 From The Registrar To The Principals of Affiliated Colleges

<sup>v</sup>Interview with Mr. Vivek Jacob, District Secretary, All Kerala Private College Teachers Association, Pathanamthittadistrict, Kerala on 10.10.2018

<sup>vi</sup>Letter No. Election/CU/2018-19 of University of Kerala, Op. Cit.

<sup>vii</sup>KSF was the former name of SFI and renamed only in 1970. It was the student wing of communist party.

<sup>viii</sup> M.M Mathew, Political socialisation of student organisations in Kerala with special reference to Mahatma Gandhi University, Unpublished Ph.D thesis, St. Thomas college, Palai.1994.p.101

<sup>ix</sup>G.O. (P) 221/72/Edn. Dated 6th October 1972

<sup>x</sup> Speech of Prof. V.NMurali, former President, All Kerala Private College Teachers Association at Diamond Jubilee session of AKPCTA , Thiruvananthapuram on 10.03.2018

<sup>xi</sup> M.M Mathew, Op.Cit.p.110

<sup>xii</sup> Dr. O.CPromod, *Problems and Challenges of Higher Secondary Section in the schools in Kerala-A study*, Proceedings of 4<sup>th</sup> International conference on Kerala History, National Book Stall, Kottayam. 2017.p.482

<sup>xiii</sup>Idem.