

## BA Political Science Programme

State & Society in Kerala  
MODULE – V

## Kerala Model of Development: Features, Challenges and Prospects.

## The Kerala Model or Kerala's Development Experience

What is meant by 'Development'? Does it mean having more mobile phones and bikes? The answer is 'No'. The reason is that even if you have many riches, if you don't live long, if your health is bad, if your child does not cross the age of 1, if you are not educated, there is no meaning in life. So Development does not mean having more and more money. But it means good quality of life. This is the lesson Kerala is giving to the world today. What is meant by "Quality of Life"? Take for example, when a Keralite has 10 rupees in his pocket, an American has 700! Now let us compare their Quality of Life. An average American lives up to 72 years. An average Keralite lives up to 70 years. Not much less. Remember, length of life is an indicator of 'Quality of Life'. There are other indicators of 'Quality of Life' like education, Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) etc. All these indicators are very close or more than the standards of money rich countries. So what is the lesson? You need not be super rich to have good 'Quality of Life'. But how did Kerala achieve this? This is exactly what development experts are trying to learn from Kerala. They call this 'Kerala Model of Development'.

Kerala is 100 percent literate. Kerala's birth rate hovers near 18 per thousand, compared with 16 per thousand in the United States--and is falling faster. In the rest of India, the birth rate is about 40 per thousand.

In Physical Quality of Life Index (PQLI), the Kerala score is nearly 90. For the rest of India it is 60. Literate women are better able to take charge of their lives; the typical woman marries at 22 in Kerala, compared to 18 in the rest of India. Infant mortality in 1991 was 17 per thousand, compared with 91 for low-income countries generally.

Kerala's attitude toward female children is an anomaly as well. Of 8,000 abortions performed at one Bombay clinic in the early 1990s, 7,999 were female fetuses. Girl children who are allowed to live are often given less food, less education, and less health care, a bias not confined to India. In China, with its fierce birth control, there were 113 boys for every 100 girls under the age of 1 in 1990. There are, in short, millions and millions of women missing around the world--women who would be there were it not for the dictates of custom and economy. So it is a remarkable achievement in Kerala to say simply this: There are more women than men. In India as a whole, the 1991 census found that there were about 929 women per 1,000 men; in Kerala, the number was 1,040 women, about where it should be. And the female life expectancy in Kerala exceeds that of the male, just as it does in the developed world.

Kerala has the highest newspaper-consumption per capita in India. People are politically conscious. In each town square political parties maintain their icons--a statue of Indira Gandhi or a portrait of Marx, Engels, and Lenin. Strikes, agitations, and "stirs," and "harthals" are so common. Kerala demonstrates that a low-level economy can create a decent life, with good health and education.

Bill McKibben\*\* writes that if Kerala and the United States managed to achieve the same physical quality of life, Kerala is the vastly more successful society. One of the reasons for the success of Kerala is the equitable redistribution of resources.

## Kerala Model of Development: Challenges.

- There is a sharp decline in the expenditure on education and on health and family welfare.
- There is an issue of sustainability of Kerala Model of Development. It means how long we can keep our development achievements steady without losing it.
- There is a problem of ecological over-kill. Kerala is one of the most bio rich areas in the world. The state has some of the rare varieties of plants and animals. Development programmes must consider this fact very seriously. Forest lands are destroyed for development purpose and agriculture. Wet lands and paddy fields are fast disappearing. Large scale road constructions threaten the natural environment in the state. The long cost line of Kerala is under threat.

## CRITICAL LOOK AT THE KERALA MODEL:

1. Kerala has one of the highest per capita consumer expenditure. That means, Kerala is increasingly becoming a consumer state which is a drain on her economy.
2. The high growth rate in Kerala is only because of production of service and construction. It is not because of other income generating production facilities.
3. The income levels of various Castes and Tribes, traditional fishermen, and section of Muslims is very low.
4. There is an increase in the crime levels. Family violence, crime against women, mafia gangs, day light robbery are increasing.
5. Public spending on education was as high as 29% in 1982-83. It is declining now. It was only 17 % in 2005-06.
6. Spending on health and family welfare also is declining. As a result of it, there is a decline in the quality of public health care resulting in poor health status of the poor. Even the poor utilize only 30 to 40 % of the public health care because of the poor quality of service. As a result of it, the poor end up spending 40% of their income on health care, while the rich need to spend only 2.5%.
7. Corresponding to the above, there is tremendous commercialisation in the fields of education and health care resulting in a large divide between the rich and the poor.
8. There is an increase in the number of income based private un-aided educational institutions in the state. There is a mushrooming of self financing professional colleges also in the state.
9. In 1990-91, out of a total student population of 5.9 million, private unaided schools accounted for only 2.5 per cent. In 2005 -06, it was 7.4 per cent. The student intake in the government schools declined from 39 per cent in 1990-91 to 31.5 per cent in 2005-06. However, there is a reduction in the number of non literates among various Castes and Tribes. More than 80 per cent of engineering seats and 65 per cent of seats in medical colleges in the self-financing sector. There were efforts from the part of various governments to rationalise the fee structure; but in vain.
10. Affordability and accessibility of public health care and education is on the decline ever since the neo-liberal policies of the governments. Just like inflation, there is a kind of “mediflation” also in the cost of health care.
11. There is something called “ecological over kill”, which means over exploitation of the ecology and heavy stress on the environment by means of growth of the economy. There is heavy stress on forests and the river systems. The water rich wet lands, which are called the “kidney of the economic system” are fast disappearing. The paddy lands of Kuttanadu and the related water bodies have become an ecological and environmental disaster. Interestingly, despite the heavy annual rainfall, Kerala has the lowest per capita availability of fresh water. Above all, there is powerful forest and sand mafia functioning in the state, which lets no government to take any meaningful action against them to control their activities. Levelling of paddy fields, and mountains, over quarrying and sand mining are the major ecological threats.
12. There is increasing stress on the environment because of domestic waste disposal and public waste management. There is effort to curb the plastic menace. The hospitals alone produce nearly 2 lakh tonnes of solid waste per day. Vector-borne diseases like chikungunya and dengue fever are the result of bad management of wastes and garbage. The greatest health hazard the Kerala population facing today is from Mosquito. In controlling the mosquito also we are a big failure.
13. The traditional know-how is virtually vanishing. There is no meaningful effort from the part of governments to protect and record traditional knowledge. Except for the efforts of few NGOs, there is no much of efforts in this regards. The sewage produced in the coastal areas alone is about one million cubic metres per day.

Above all, the greatest issue is the sustainability of a model. If a model cannot be sustained for a long period, it is of no use and it cannot be called a model at all. Nobody can learn any lesson from it. The sustainability of Kerala model is under question. A model which is not sustainable is not dependable. Whether the Kerala Model is sustainable is a big question now.