

Kerala's development experience: a search for a micro response to a macro process...

[Science](#), [Physics](#)



? Kerala's development experience: a search for a micro response to a macro process abstract The concept of development, in the sense of achieving 'human good' has always been there since the advent of human society, only with varying understanding, emphasis, and implications. It is seen as a process, requiring constant response and continuous solutions and also as a result of human action, only through which, reorientation of any development process becomes possible (Varma, 1989: 34).

The past decades have seen a series of development paradigms, involving progressive modifications, towards achieving the 'human good', but the results have been highly disappointing and distressing, with naked manifestation and a stark reality of the extreme riches and the extreme poverty existing side by side. In fact, most of the development approaches in the post-colonial era have contributed not only to the creation and perpetuation of such a divide but also in widening it endlessly. India's macro development experience is an apt illustration of such a scenario.

Kerala's development experience has to be understood only in the context of the development experience of the country as a whole. Kerala's development experience: search for a micro response to a macro process The concept of development, in the sense of achieving 'human good' has always been there since the advent of human society, only with varying understanding, emphasis, and implications. It is seen as a process, requiring constant response and continuous solutions and also as a result of human action, only through which, reorientation of any development process becomes possible (Varma, 1989: 34).

The past decades have seen a series of development paradigms, involving progressive modifications, towards achieving the 'human good', but the results have been highly disappointing and distressing, with naked manifestation and a stark reality of the extreme riches and the extreme poverty existing side by side. In fact, most of the development approaches in the post-colonial era have contributed not only to the creation and perpetuation of such a divide but also in widening it endlessly. India's macro development experience is an apt illustration of such a scenario.

Kerala's development experience has to be understood only in the context of the development experience of the country as a whole. India's development impact In the post-colonial Independent India, which envisaged an advanced, prosperous, democratic, egalitarian and just society as implied in its constitutional proclamation of a 'socialist pattern of development', eradication of poverty became one of the prime targets of most of the early development initiatives. However, even after five decades of India's independence, in spite of intensive development efforts, the result has not been much different.

True, India has got an impeccable record of achievements to its credit. India has achieved a literacy rate of above fifty percent from a just 16 percent at the time of Independence. From a state of dependency for food, it has not only achieved a self-sufficiency but also has developed an export capacity in food production. The economic reforms in recent years and the process of globalisation have accelerated India's economic capability in every direction including Industrial growth.

With its large technological and professional man-power, with regard to nuclear, space and computer capabilities, India is fast emerging as a global power. Though these are commendable achievements, the overall picture is nowhere near the targets and far from satisfaction. In spite of India being one of the highest food producing countries in the world, one out of every two children in India is said to be malnourished. In the land of many rivers, safe drinking water seems to be still a pipe-dream for many.

The health record is even more frightening as India is still the highest in the world, in the number of TB patients, malarial deaths, blind people, HIV positive cases, occupational casualties, Hepatitis ' B' patients and infant mortality rates. The constitutional injunction to provide free compulsory education to all children upto the age of 14 by 1960 is far from realisation. In fact, with the tripling of our population since Independence, the illiteracy rate being well above 40 percent, the number of illiterates has almost exceeded the total population of India at the time of Independence.

Moreover, even among the literates, for many, education means just identifying letters and in most of the villages, many ' literate' do not even seem to manage that. There is a vast child labour force of 44 million. Above 70 million children are outside schools. There is a housing shortage of over 30 million and the registered job seekers are inching towards 40 million. Those who are ' below poverty line' being anywhere between 25 and 40 percent, more than 300 million in absolute figures, India has the largest concentration of poor people in the world (Outlook, 19 Oct. 998). The human development indices are deplorably low, placing India at the 126th position,

far below many countries in East, Southeast and West Asia and Africa that became Independence much later than India did. The continuing population explosion only indicates that the educational, health and social status of women is far from satisfaction. High fertility and mortality rates, illiteracy, and school dropouts especially of the girl child have also contributed to this state of affairs.

Likewise, the situation concerning preventive, public and primary health, drinking water, sewage, and sanitation and housing is far from satisfactory. Unemployment continues to be a nagging problem obscuring a clear solution. Growing urbanisation is also contributing to innumerable problems for want of clear perspective and planning. Environmental degradation, deforestation, and land appropriation continue to pose serious threats to the healthy development scenario and harshly affect the weaker sections, the most.

India's development impact only prove that the development initiatives of the past decades, meant for the uplift of the deprived sections have miserably failed, with the result of increasing poverty, inequality and ecological imbalance. Whatever efforts that have been adopted in bringing about a desirable development paradigm, a relatively contended human existence with fulfilment of basic human needs and protection of basic human rights have also proved to be still a far-flung reality.

All these have only underlined the lopsided orientation and misplaced priorities of the past development paradigms and also the necessity for

rethinking development. Today, development as 'human good' has come to imply equality and a dignified human existence for every individual, irrespective of caste, religion, race, or culture. Haq (1996: 16) identifies equity, sustainability, productivity, and empowerment as four essential components in the human development paradigm.

It involves searching for the roots, giving due recognition to every people's dignity and existence, and evolving a genuine and collective participation of the people at the micro level development planning and implementation without neglecting the the macro-level development process. Such a development perspective necessitates a thorough revamping of the past development orientations and initiation of a fresh thrust from bottom upwards in every sense, by decentralising the development planning and democratic institutions. It would be a process of real democratisation and a return to nature, to the people, and to the grassroots.

In short, there should be a right identification of what is the core and what is the periphery (Gregory, 2000: 7). Kerala's development experience It is in this context that Kerala's development experience assumes significance. Kerala has been a pioneering state in many revolutionary social transformations and successful development initiatives, whether it be in implementing the land reforms or in achieving the development parameters of the WHO, or in the total literacy campaign that brought the credit of becoming the first totally literate state in the country.

In the quality of life indicators, Kerala's achievement is comparable only to the highly developed nations but within a limited economic development that is far below that of the nation's average. Thus, in terms of 1993 figures, in spite of having a low per capita GNP of just about \$180, far below than even the all India average of \$300, Kerala could achieve and maintain an adult literacy rate of 91 per cent as against 51 per cent for all India; life expectancy of 73 years for males and 79 years for females as against 55 and 54 years respectively for all India; infant mortality rate at 13 as against 24 for all India; and the birth rate at 17 as against 25 for all India; all comparable to the advanced nations. Such a high material quality of life indicators coinciding with low per capita income, both distributed across nearly the entire population of Kerala, with a set of wealth and resources redistribution programmes and high levels of political participation and activism among the ordinary people, have earned for the state a unique place in the development thinking.

This has also led to the emergence of a 'Kerala Model' of development that has been widely appreciated and recommended by the economists and other social scientists to be worthy of emulation by the developing world, before questions arose and criticisms unleashed over the sustainable nature of the model. 'The Crisis of the Kerala model' had become more apparent with the Model's failures and shortcomings that were threatening its sustainability.

Some of these included the following: The slow growth of Kerala's SDP
Increasing stagnancy of agricultural production and the dependency on and the vulnerability to outside sources for the major food items including rice

Down-sliding of the traditional industries such as coir, cashew and handloom mainly due to the price escalation for raw materials and cut-throat competitions Sluggish and even negative industrial growth

Alarming situation of unemployment Series of fiscal crisis threatening to undermine many of the Kerala Model redistribution programmes More than 15 per cent of the state's population being the ' outliers' of the Model Acute environmental crisis, involving serious repercussions, especially in the context of stagnant economy, high population density and intense land-use.

All the above failures and shortcomings of the Kerala model had become vastly identified and highly intensified in the context of globalisation, a macro process that has swept the whole world, including the developed and the developing nations alike, in the nineties and continue to change the developing face of the world economy and life People's Planning: Kerala's Answer to a failed model and the process of Globalisation The idea of development from bottom upwards with a decentralised system of planning is not something totally new.

In Gandhiji's vision of Purna Swaraj, every village has to become a republic in which every individual enjoys total freedom. In his social paradigm, every individual should become the core, whereby the society is constructed as a vast oceanic circle, progressing from the individual to the family, from the family to the village, from the village to the state and from the state to the nation and so on. This is possible only when the villages are reinvented to

become a republic of its own, recreating the sense of village solidarity, and making every member of the village a partner in the development mission.

Only such an approach, which enables every human being to realise that they are only a part of nature, would be meaningful and sustainable. Though the slogan of 'Gram Raj' and the desirability of a decentralised system of planning has been as old as the freedom movement, the country had to wait till 1993, when the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments were enacted, for a determined effort towards a genuine process of decentralisation. In line with these amendments, The Kerala Panchayat Act had been passed and came into effect since 23 April 1994. Nevertheless, the provision of a constitutional and legislative framework alone need not ensure its adaptation unless there is a political will and commitment on the part of the state governments, to such a system of administration and planning as it requires a total restructuring of the system.

The democratisation of the planning process involved certain necessary conditions such as the devolution of powers, responsibilities and resources as well as the complementary measures on the part of the government, but not sufficient to ensure its success unless accompanied by an intensive people's campaign in order to motivate and empower the local self governments to take up the new challenges.

Being conscious of such conditions, the state of Kerala, in August 1996, started the new experiment of People's Planning through People's Campaign not only to ensure an 'informed participation' of the people, going beyond

their nominal participation (Isaac and Harilal, 1999: 492-5) but also to help them make 'informed choices' (Franke and Chasin, 1999: 139). In a world of globalisation and economic liberalisation, there emerges a political and economic structure that only favours models based on private accumulation and growing inequality over Kerala's emphasis on public services and egalitarian ideals.

Only in such a context, emerges Kerala's answer to the search for a New Model in the form of a micro planning called People's Planning through People's Campaign, based on decentralisation and high levels of local participation, both as a response to the failure of the old model and as a challenge to the hostile world of international capitalism, vowing to bring a meaningful environmental preservation and empower the grassroots (Franke and Chasin, 1999: 118-133).

Today, Kerala is leading the nation through 'People's Planning', which essentially dwells on the devolution of power to the grass roots, thereby initiating another social revolution of the sorts, in the development paradigm. It is believed that a success in this unique experiment would definitely make development to be truly sustainable and meaningful to the people and would redefine the entire life and polity. According to Mencher, the Indian villages are still populated with most weaker sections who hardly gain anything from most of the development programmes (1978: 10).

The people's planning being different in its orientation and approach, is naturally expected to reach out to the least of the grass-roots at the micro-

level governance and empower them to plan out the basic livelihood systems by themselves and gain the capacity to ensure its sustainability and climb up the ladder of dignified social existence together with other fellow citizens.

conclusion: Towards a Sustainable Model of Development As the world is under the sweep of globalisation, no nation or state can keep away from its grip or sway.

Living in an age of information that has created an image of a global village, the individual, regional and national identities are at stake, crying for independence and freedom. The very survival itself is at stake, which can be overcome only if there are proper ways and means to identify one's strengths, potentials and indigenous resources and utilise the same for asserting one's identity at different levels as well as for their respective survival and also contribute to the benefit of the mankind beyond their respective boundaries.

It is here that the micro-level people's planning could combat the negative forces in the macro process of globalisation. In this context, people's planning of Kerala's development experience provides an alternative model of a sort in development. The success of the emerging model, however, depends on the extent of its independent approach, free from all sorts of political overtones and identities, a genuine sense of belongingness and solidarity and collective search for strengths and a common commitment for the greater cause of a genuine development. References Franke R. W. and B. H. Chasin. 1999. 'Is the Kerala Model Sustainable'. In M. A. Oommen. (Ed.). Rethinking Development: Kerala's Development Experience. Vol. 2. New

Delhi: Institute of Social Sciences & Concept. Gregory S. 2000. Rural Social Change, Social Equity, and Sustainable Development. In Mukhopadyay, S D and S Choudhury. (Ed.). Social Transformation and Rural Sector. Visva-Bharathi: Department of Agricultural Extension, Agricultural Economics and Agricultural Statistics Haq, Mahbub ul. 1996. Reflections on Human Development. Delhi: Oxford University Press. Isaac, T. M. Thomas. and K. N. Harilal. 1999. ' Democratisation of the Planning Process - Experience of People's Campaign in Kerala'. In M. A. Oommen. (Ed.). Rethinking Development: Kerala's Development Experience. Vol. 2. New Delhi: Institute of Social Sciences & Concept. Mencher, J. P. Agriculture and Social Structure in Tamil Nadu: Past Origin, Present Transformation and Future Prospects. New Delhi: Allied. Varma, S. P. 1989. ' Models of Development: Search for Alternatives'. In Iqbal Narain. (Ed.). Development, Politics and Social Theory. New Delhi: Sterling. *****