



FACTS against MYTHS

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Vol VII # 6/2001

INFORMATION BULLETIN

The Collapse of a Paradigm: Myth of the Kerala Model of Development

COMMENT

Kerala in the recent years had been the focus of national and global institutions for successful performance in key areas of human development, particularly, education, health, and social welfare measures. Its experience had shown that condition of life of people could be improved even at a low level of economic growth through different applications of public action and the appropriate redistribution strategies. This development experience has come to be summed up in a commonly used phrase, 'Kerala Model'. The Model challenged the traditional economic paradigm: first agriculture and industry have to develop and then, in due course, improvement in the standard of living of the masses would follow. It is this historical sequencing of economic growth and mass welfare sanctified by the experience of developed North that sought to be questioned by this Model.

As one of the relatively economically backward States in the country with a per capita domestic production consistently below national average Kerala was able to provide for the basic needs of most of its citizens. A composite index of quality of life taking into account various factors placed Kerala above the general trend prevailing in India. It also recorded success in bringing down the birth rate in a non-coercive manner. In countries of comparable income, including other states of India, life expectancy is 58 years, and only half the people can read and write; the birth rate hovers around 40 per thousand. Development experts use an index they call PQLI,¹ for "physical quality of life index", a composite that runs on a scale from 0 to 100 and combines most of the basic indicators of a decent human life. In 1981, Kerala's score of 82 far exceeded all of Africa's, and in Asia only the incomparably richer South Korea (85), Taiwan (87), and Japan (98) ranked higher. By 1989, Kerala's score had risen to 88, compared with a total of 60 for the rest of the country. It had achieved all this even though it is among the most densely crowded places in the world --the population of California squeezed into a state the size of Switzerland. It had developed a remarkable public distribution system, and the average level of nutrition of its population (judging by anthropometric measurements) is better than that of the country as a whole.

The 'Kerala Model' was clearly the direct opposite of the conventional view that perceived development as a sequel to growth, which postulates, in other words, that economics should give the topmost priority to growth of per capita output, and if growth occurs then human development will automatically follow. In short, it challenged the thesis, "that high levels of social development cannot be achieved in the absence of high rates of economic growth". The 'Model' holds that the elimination, or at any rate alleviation of the dismal conditions of life which the masses in the South face, does not have to 'wait for the Revolution' or await that distant dawn when growth has taken place to a sufficient extent for it to 'trickle down' to make an impact upon the people. (See Box on next page)

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How Kerala Became a Model²

Kerala emerged at the end of the 8th century, when the local monarchy supplanted a looser, feudal structure. The trade contacts of the ancient and early medieval periods gave way to a more modern, and more exploitative colonial domination. By 1792, the British controlled what is now Kerala, dividing it into three districts. The first hints of singularity came in the colonial period. In the southern two-thirds of the State, the British left the local princes in power. Hoping for an agricultural surplus large enough to satisfy both themselves and the British, these Rajahs offered tax breaks for the reclamation of swamps and marshes, and gave tenant farmers more control over the land. In 1956 Kerala became a State following the reorganisation of States on the basis of language. The two princely states of Travancore and Cochin, and the Malabar district of the Madras Presidency of British India were combined to form Kerala.

Some of the essential elements in the Kerala model have a history that predates the creation of the State of Kerala. Travancore was considered a model native state as early as 1867, when a British secretary of State for India proclaimed it as such in Britain's House of Commons. Cochin followed close behind. The Rajahs of Travancore had established a British-style administration and had even encouraged the activities of European missionaries attracted to the region because of the presence there of a sizeable and wealthy community of ancient Christians. Above all, these rulers (and also the Cochin rulers) launched economic enterprises (e.g. plantation agriculture and agri-based industries), encouraged, and even subsidised other commercial and capitalist development. They also pioneered progressive social policies, especially in education and public health. In particular, the state developed a successful educational system that integrated the traditional and the modern: Malayalam and English, government schools and (government-aided) private schools, initiated by various religious minorities, especially the progressive elements among these communities. For instance, the religious teaching of Vakkom A.K. Moulavi an associate of Ramakrishna Pillai, the crusading editor against the Travancore Monarchy. Vakkom Moulavi had that the laws of Islam concerning temporal matters were not immutable and hence, depending on the conditions of time and place, they are subject to change. He emphasised the principle of '*ijtihad ital*' (independent judgement) against the Islamic fundamentalists. The missionaries, who operated on different sociological and theological premises than the indigenous Christians, had initiated the progressive Christian theological trends in the State. Unlike the "inward looking '*samudayam*' consciousness of the largely upper caste Syrian Christian community", the missionaries focussed on the lower castes and contributed significantly to their social awakening. At the same time missionary activities were intertwined with colonial intervention and therefore later developed a conservative edge that stunted their emancipatory potential. (The new educational system was open to large sections of the population including many previously disadvantaged groups).

One response to these changes was the emergence of a tradition of social and political mobilisation. While increases in education and social consciousness among the previously disadvantaged challenged the old order, the new resources that were made available by the growing commercial-capitalist economy and expanding educational opportunities opened up new possibilities for social mobility outside the framework of the caste-based ascribed status system.

The first such movements were the social reform and protest movements organised by castes and communities who had suffered deprivation under the old system. Ironically, it was the upper-caste Nairs who set the ball rolling in 1891 with the "Malayali Memorial" statement, submitted to the Dewan protesting against the dominance of Tamil Brahmins in government service in Kerala. This was followed by one of the most significant social protest and reform movements in Kerala, led by Sri Narayana Guru of the Ezhavas, the largest caste overall and the most important of the lower castes. Originally intended as a non-sectarian movement open to all, the Sri Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (SNDPY) eventually became an influential caste association. There followed a series of similar movements and caste organisations among the Scheduled Caste community, Pulayas, the Syrian Christians, and among the Nairs. In the 1930s, the issue that dominated Kerala was the demand of the Ezhavas and other lower castes to enter the Hindu temples and the temple premises. This demand led to the famous temple entry proclamation of 1936. From 1888 on, Travancore began to experiment with popular assemblies, which became more and more democratic by the 1920s and the 1930s. Intense mobilisation and agitation by communal and caste organisations led to an arrangement of proportional representation or quotas for them in the assembly.

In the 1930s, Malayalis began organise new kinds of social movements – nationalist movements, which spread rapidly. On the eve of Second World War the newly formed Communist Party in Travancore began organising the working class, including landless agricultural labourers, into the trade unions against landlordism. When elections were held in Kerala in 1957, the newly established state democratically elected the Communist Party to power. It was this government that launched some of Kerala's most important and comprehensive reforms and social welfare measures, including the much discussed land reforms.

The Kerala Model had emerged in the background of the failure of the State to address the development concerns of post-Independent India. This failure led partly to the growth of a number of peoples' movements initiating reforms in various social fields alongside movements of workers, peasants, and also political movements. All these together congealed in arousing peoples' consciousness, demanding rights to education and health-care. By the 1980s Kerala became the most touted development "model" attracting attention from the academia and policy makers nationally and internationally. However, cracks had begun to emerge in the 'model' by the 70s itself and some of the indices were suspected. Since then a number of studies for and against the model have been published based on the background of the general socio-economic situation in the State also dubbed as "God's Own Country" by the State Tourism Department. One such study indicated that communities like Dalits, Adivasis and fisher folk were not even considered part of the Model. Little wonder, then, in the new Millennium when the euphoria over the 'Model' has collapsed awkward questions have been raised leading to the conclusion that the "Kerala Model" is no model at all. To get a deeper understanding of this fact it is essential to address the serious socio-economic issues facing present-day Kerala that threaten the life-support systems of especially the marginalised sections in the State. The first step in this direction is to dismantle the various myths that the Model had generated.

MYTH: *The excellent public health services and the social welfare measures pursued by the State are an illustration of what the Kerala Model of Development has achieved for Kerala.*

FACT: However, with the collapse of 'Model' it is being realised that the physical quality of life had been hastily compared to that existing in the West, which had a history of over 300 years of capitalist industrialisation made possible through colonial pillage and plunder. Kerala had drifted towards a US model as a result of the state's failure to manage and fund adequately the state's own hospital.³ The number of beds in the state sector increased from 36,000 to 38,000 between 1986 and 1996, but the aggregate bed strength in the private hospitals jumped from 49,000 to 67,500. Besides, the private sector had outpaced the State sector in acquisition of medical technologies. The result is over-medicalisation, cost escalation, and the marginalisation of the poor. Simultaneously, uncomfortable facts like a high suicide rate (family suicides); alcoholism, widespread prevalence of mental illnesses; a division of labour, whereby the State furnishes cheap labour and primary products and imported consumer goods were conveniently swept under the carpet as meaningless.

Till 1997 very few studies had been undertaken on the structural and functional aspects of the health service system of the State. No comprehensive report is

available on the subject⁴. On many occasions, the interaction of number of factors has been causatively linked with, in these studies, on the Kerala health status. One study however on the health service system in Thrissoor district was taken up for the study in 1996. Some of the highlights include

*the functioning of the inpatient services in the periphery was found to be very poor except in two PHCs. In 4 PHCs, the inpatient section had not started and in three others, it was almost non functional;

*The five Community Health Centres of the district function mostly like bloc PHCs. For all practical purposes, the taluk headquarters hospitals function as the first referral centres. The general conditions in these hospitals were very unsatisfactory. X-ray systems were working in three out of five centres. Blood bank and ECG facilities were not available in any of them. Gross imbalance and very poor quality of speciality services were very conspicuous in all these five places.

In Kerala, the staff strength of medical officers in hospitals was sanctioned long ago and not on the basis of speciality requirements. This factor, combined with the private practice of government doctors and the rampant political corruption in the transfer of doctors, had made the situation highly vulnerable. Doctors with financial and political clout exploited the situation. Further,

✱ On the current issue of AIDS no data were available on the of the district. However, data gathered during interview with field staff revealed that there were at least 46 unreported full-blown or sero-positive cases. The type of social stigma, humiliation and isolation an AIDS patient and relatives in Vellangalloor PHC area suffered, was most unexpected from such a highly educated State! It raised some doubts about the effectiveness of the health education and IEC activities of both the health department, in general, and the National AIDS Control Programme, in particular;

✱ the outbreak of Japanese Encephalitis in early 1996, and the cholera outbreak as the end of the year, with more than 70 deaths in two districts also reflect some unresolved problems in the field of public health in the State. Half the deaths took place in the Adivasi belt of Palakkad and the other half in Alappuzha district

The achievements of Kerala in the health status are well known but this revealing study does not support the projection of the PHS of the State as the most important cause of such a Kerala phenomenon! There were many other equally relevant factors in force, the cumulative effect and the interplay of which had brought

Missionaries, Colonialism & Education

Kerala today enjoys widespread and a high standard of education. This achievement is at times attributed to Christian missionaries and to the British. This is undoubtedly true. However, this was true mainly in the early days of Development when missionaries had launched the process of mass education. In later years, however, their activities were intertwined with colonial intervention. Consequently, their educational philosophy developed a conservative outlook that blunted their liberative impact. It was left to the caste-reform groups and the later, when the British departed, the nascent Left who spearheaded the spread of education in the State. The first great boom of these later efforts was in the 1920s and 1930s, particularly in southern Kerala, where the princes acceded to popular demands for even more schools. Through their efforts in the 60s educational programmes spread into Malabar, the Northern State that had been ruled directly by the British, and began granting scholarships to the "Untouchables" and the Adivasis. They set up reading and writing circles in villages. Workers were encouraged to write in union-sponsored publications. The right to literacy became a popular mass movement. The Left that ruled for much of the late 1980s continued to press the issue, aiming for total literacy, implementing various literacy skills like alphabetisation and numeracy. (See box on page 5)

the State to the unique position it had achieved.

Finally, other shortcomings of Kerala's social development have since come into open. Though Kerala is known for its prolonged life expectancy, its people are not very healthy as revealed by the high morbidity rates. (Kannan et al, 1991, Panikar, P.G.K., 1992). Both the diseases of poverty and old age as in affluent countries prevail in the State. As Gita Sen (1982) points out "...A good health care system can only prevent deaths from diseases upto a point and in a situation of very low per capita income, people may still be quite malnourished and disease prone. This is despite the PDS. Besides, the social security system is also under severe strain as the state is not able to increase its coverage despite the increasing number of the aged, a result of the State's demographic transition and increasing the volume of service pensions to the government employees as also social security pensions (George, 1993).

MYTH: The effective literacy programmes, inspired by the Kerala Model, were instrumental for the success in controlling Kerala's population growth.

FACT: The root of this myth is again based on another related misconception i.e the so-called 'Kerala Hypothesis' (5). The sharp decline in Kerala's population growth rate (PGR) had given rise to this hypothesis following the excesses in the implementation of fertility control measures during 1975-77 a period now synonymous with the Emergency. Consequently, primary health-care was also included in the model for obvious reasons. Literacy, the antonym of illiteracy, was construed to be the synonym of primary education. This attitude, however, did incalculable harm to the very foundation of education in India.

In the euphoria to "discover" this populist approach to control the country's population the need to validate the 'Kerala Hypothesis' with the demographic and literacy data from the other States prior to extending it as a national programme was overlooked. Above all, the need to test the hypothesis even with Kerala's own pre-1971 data was also side-stepped.

Kerala's PGR has been rising from 1941-51 to 1961-71 as also its total and female literacy. During this period, the PGR rose from 2.08 to 2.22 per cent a year while the total and female literacy rates declined from 65 to 30 percent and 75 to 35 per cent resp. This data clearly contradicts this hypothesis.

Another important aspect is that the rate of increase of Kerala's PGR from 1941-51 to 1951-61 has been identical with 1951-61 to 1961-71: both being equal to 0.65 per cent per year.

The impact of any genuinely effective population control method must be reflected in the rate of change of PGR. Had literacy been really effective in controlling population growth, the significant decline in Kerala's literacy during 1951-71 ought to have made some changes in the State's PGR during the same period. But this did not happen. Further, it is important to highlight again that the decline in Kerala's illiteracy rate did not show any sudden decline that might account for the sharp decrease in the State's PGR in 1971-81.

The proponents of the Hypothesis again not only overlooked the State's own demographic and literacy data from 1941-71, but also ignored the post-1971 census data from other states, which again indicate a total lack of correlation between illiteracy and population growth. A State-wise analysis of census data from 1971-1991 shows the PGR went up hand in hand with the literacy level in 7 States and remained unchanged in two States.

Some of the romantic experts of the Model were so carried away with Kerala that even when they noticed that while registering a sharp decline in PGR, Kerala had also achieved a total literacy rate of around 80 per cent, they asserted that unless the literacy level was at least 75 percent, family planning would not succeed. It may be pointed out here that out of the 11 States

where PGR showed decline during 1971-81 to 1981-91, none except Kerala had recorded the magic level of 75 per cent literacy. Thus, the "Kerala Hypothesis" is invalid.

Furthermore, the decline in Kerala's PGR from 1971-81 was due to other objective factors. Since the late 60s onwards, Keralites migrated to the Gulf States in masses for employment (estimated to be around 1.4 m. in 1994 i.e. 5 percent of the State's total population). The earning of one person in these countries is enough to raise substantially the living standard of at least 15 persons in Kerala. Such earnings from the Gulf countries did not only provide direct financial assistance to the workers' kith and kin back home but indirectly the remittances also helped in promoting overall growth in Kerala's economy. This point is supported by the fact that the percentage of people below the poverty line in the State declined from 48.4 per cent in 1977-78 to 26.8 per cent in 1983-84, which is the highest, decline in the country.

Finally, literacy is not a necessary condition nor is literacy *per se* capable of curbing population growth. At best, it provides a supportive role in promoting "family planning", amongst only those people who have attained a certain standard of living that provides the basic motivation to have a small family for overall prosperity. Standard of living has to be raised to the level that every additional child would mean a sharing of resources. Only then will parents see more children as an economic liability. Hence, successful literacy programmes do not automatically translates into successful family planning!

MYTH: Women in Kerala, unlike their sisters in other parts of the country, enjoy a high degree respect and dignity and are more empowered and liberated.

FACT: Indeed, for very good reasons, Kerala has always been projected as a highly unique State with the focus always on its demographic characteristics and achievements on the social front. For instance, it has a sex ratio, which is more advantageous to women. Yet women in Kerala have failed to achieve social progress commensurate with their high literacy rate. Does this, however mean that Kerala women enjoy a better position in the country today? For instance a survey carried out by the daily, the Hindu.⁶

*In literacy and education achievements, Kerala women do not lag behind their counterparts in others States. Their literacy rate in 1991 was 75 per cent against 39 in the country. But this does not apply to literacy of Dalit and Adivasis women whose literacy was 74.31 per cent in 1991 (79.66 per cent for SCs in general) while it was 42 per cent (51.09 per cent for STs in general) among the STs. In effective literacy, the State average for women is 86.17 per cent (39.2 per cent for India).

Towards Total Literacy¹

The pilot project on total literacy began in the Ernakulam region that includes Cochin. It was similar to the Cuban experiment of sending fresh graduates and graduate students to the countryside for a year to educate the rural masses. In late 1988, 50,000 volunteers fanned out around the district, tracking down 175,000 illiterates between the ages of 5 and 60, two-thirds of them women. The People's Science Movement recruited 20,000 volunteer tutors and sent them out to teach. Within a year, it was hoped, the illiterates would read Malayalam at 30-word a minute, count and write from 1 to 100, and add and subtract three-digit numbers. The larger goal was to make people feel empowered, feel involved. The early lessons were organised around the renowned Brazilian pedagogue Fr. Paolo Freir's concept of 'conscientisation' and that the concrete problems of people's lives provide the best teaching material. People suffering from Hansen's disease (leprosy) were taught to hold a pencil in stumps of hands with rubber bands. Nobody was left out. For people with poor eyesight, volunteers collected 50,000 pairs of old eyeglasses and learned from doctors how to match them with recipients. On February 4, 1990, 13 months after the initial converts, the then Prime Minister, V.P. Singh marked the start of World Literacy Year, declared Ernakulam the country's first totally literate district. Of the 175,000 students, 135,000 scored 80 percent or better, in the final test. The region's official literacy rate thus went above 96 percent. Many opted to continue in follow-up classes and probably learned enough to read bus signs. The total cost of the 150 hours of education was about \$26 per person. Organisers knew the campaign was working when letters from the newly literate began arriving in government offices, demanding roads, and hospitals.

The above also does not apply to all the 14 districts of the State. It was found that effective literacy of women in Palakkad, Wyanad, Kasaragod, Malappuram and Idukki was lower than the State average. In all these northern districts, the literacy rate for men was considerably higher than that of women. In Idukki, the female literacy rate is 83 per cent while the corresponding figure for men is 90.8 per cent. In Wayanad, the difference is almost 10 per cent (77.7 per cent for women and 87.6 per cent for men). In Kasargod, the gap is wider — 76.3 per cent for women and 89 per cent for men. However, despite the inequality they experience female literacy in the State is no doubt higher than those of her sisters in other parts of the country. The backwardness of these districts does not explain the gender gap that favours the enrolment of boys as reported in areas like Palakkad, Idukki and

Thiruvananthapuram. The inequality continues despite high literacy levels and the contradiction is primarily due to prevailing patriarchal values.

In recent years, the rising educational aspirations and levels among Malayali women is one of the important factors that has come as a threat to male power and ironically has led to a disturbing increase in atrocities on women although other factors also influence this development. Crime against them had increased 21/2 times in 1996 since 1991 although the crime is much lower than rest of the country. Nevertheless, rape has been the most frequently committed crime. Paedophilia was not rare either. The age-wise distribution of rape-victims testifies to this. The number of victims below the age of 10 years is disturbingly high.

MYTH: Dalits, Adivasis, fisher-folk and migrant labour in Kerala have also been the other beneficiaries of the Model enjoying a quality of life better than those in the rest of the country.

FACT: The Model has overlooked these communities so dependent on the commons of the state and not merely in the whole development process albeit their status is slightly better than those of their kind in the rest of the country. None the less, disparities between them and the rest of Kerala is considerable.

Fish and fisheries play an important role in the socio-cultural life in Kerala. Yet the fisher folk experience a very poor quality of life. They live on the geographic fringes of the land and depend exclusively on the sea for their livelihood. Overcrowding is one of the causes of the substandard condition of their marine habitation. In a state where every household is entitled to a piece of homestead plot (as per the Kerala State Homestead Act) this community does not possess any homestead plots. Those who own land below 5 cents account for 32 cent of the fishing households compared to 9 per cent in the State as a whole. While 15 per cent of the households own land between 1 and 5 acres in the state as a whole, in marine fishing communities this figure is a mere 1 per cent. Further, many like those in the Beach Ward in Aalppuzha, live in perpetual fear of being evicted any time. These families, uprooted from their dwellings on the shore due to sea erosion, are temporarily settled in the land acquired for the "National High Way". The state government fails to consider their repeated appeals for their right to an alternate housing site. In some areas like Poonthura, District of Trivandrum, families of up to 8 members living in tiny houses leave no space for privacy, or arrangement for waste disposal, let alone playgrounds for children. Besides, the women of Pulluvila lack adequate toilets. Owners of coconut groves dump compost and water waste for the coconut palms affecting the health of the fisher folk. The result is the breeding of pathogens and diseases vectors like mosquitoes. The dreaded diseases filariasis, according to this study, has already made inroads into these settlements.

Kerala prides itself in the sharp decline in infant mortality with the rate being 40 per 1000 births (1981) which reduced further to 17 per 1000 live births in 1991 and the population growth rate to 1.9 per cent per annum. The corresponding figures for the fishing communities are 85 and 2.3 per cent.

Gender discrimination is also prevalent, in favour of male children as evidenced in the sex ratio of 972 females to 1000 males. This gain is contrary to the all-Kerala situation where females outnumber males by 32 (1032:1000). This gender bias in favour of males is all the more ominous in the context of studies of fishing communities which reveal that the pattern of sex differentials in infant mortality show the expected higher incidence of male mortality over females in the neonatal period. Consequently, it must be inferred that the higher mortality of females is in later childhood.

Literacy and education are other hallmarks of the State's social advancement. Here too the fishing community lags behind. Further, their literacy level though they are much lower than that of Kerala as a whole, are higher than the literacy rate for the country and is therefore rightly considered an advance even if partially. However, the adverse socio-economic condition of marine fisher folk are perpetuated more by their poor and lower standards of educational achievements when compared to the rest of the population.

Further, the fisherfolk have also experienced the destruction of the fish habitats by fishing trawlers with fish resources getting depleted; some species have already become extinct and several endangered. Finally, some inland fisher folk of Prakkulam in Kollam district, living along the banks of the Ashtamudi Kayal, have experienced the insensitivity of the State Tourism Department which permits the use of motorised tourist boats in the lake causing heavy pollution of the lake water through oil slicks thus endangering fish wealth in the lake. The pollution has reached such proportions that fish caught from the lake sometimes smell of kerosene. Industrial pollution is also another problem especially for communities on the Shakumukhom-Vettukad coastal belt in the district of Trivandrum. Here the effluents of the Titanium Products, a public sector industry, are let out into the sea untreated. Fisherfolk who come into contact with the polluted water, develop skin and other diseases due to the high concentration of sulphuric acid and other toxic elements in the effluent water. In such a polluted area, aquatic life has entirely disappeared.

The other marginalised community, the Adivasis, experience a similar situation. Ironically, however, the Adivasis, which make up only 1.10 per cent of the population, had been declared totally 'literate' in July 1993! With depleting forests, organised land encroachments, and severe cultural alienation, the Adivasis were totally at loss. In 1996, efforts had been

Atrocities on Women in Kerala

Women in Kerala also experience other forms of discrimination. "Female Equality" is restricted to merely of getting a job and contributing to the household income. Questioning the status quo, like gender roles or the nature of female-male relationship is not tolerated. Key feminist issues like sexuality and housework, domestic violence, women's bodies and the constructs of masculinity and femininity, are virtually considered taboo except among a tiny minority.

On the participation of women in political life in Kerala there are any number of examples to show that women's entry into the public arena was not only difficult but was also actively discouraged. Consciously or otherwise, they gave way for the men to fill up the public space. Occasional pronouncements against this discrimination were 'acknowledged' by male leaders but never a part of a societal debate. According to a study in the Hindu men refused to accept women. Some women councillors disclose that they find it difficult to work as the men are domineering. Proxy control by husbands and other male members in the family is however, absent in the municipalities and corporations. To illustrate: In the Assembly, there are only six women legislators out of the total number of 141. In 1957, their number was 7 in a House of 121. Among the 20 elected members from the State to the Lok Sabha, only two are women. In the 1997 14-member State Ministry, for instance, there was only one woman. Again, despite the higher level of education and participation in grassroots-level movements, women are conspicuously absent in the higher levels of decision-making. Even the mass movements where membership is predominately of women, representation of women at the leadership level is marginal.

The other related myth is that women in Kerala have late marriages and this fact, unlike their sisters elsewhere, is a pointer to the high level of consciousness among them. However, the number of single women in Kerala is comparatively much higher and their marriage age is relatively also higher mainly due to the acute problem of dowry and the necessity of its accumulation which can take years for poor young women to earn and save up. Further, dowry deaths are also on the rise. Again, unlike their sisters elsewhere the difference is that these deaths are in the form of suicides. Young women are not allowed to select their future husbands on their own free will. To do so results in social boycott or familial ostracism. In 1994 a film, 'Ilaiyum Mullum' (Leaves and Thorns), by an alternative film maker, K.P. Sasi, critically exposed the widely held myth under question. The film was based on actual incidents that occurred in Kerala.

Thus, Malayali women, for all their educational and occupational achievements and involvement in public affairs, have never able to break the patriarchal mould on leadership in politics; those who tried, such as Akimbo Sheridan in the 1950s and K.R. Gouri in the 1980s, have been subjected to 'innuendo, ridicule and disappointment'. Moreover, in this State too the 'value of children' equates to the 'value of sons'.

planned to legalise such encroachments, while a survey at the time had indicated that already 9,646 Adivasi households from a total of 21,600 families in Wyanad district were landless! The government and various vested interests have been trying to portray the migrant workers as the oppressors of Adivasis. It is however the warped policies of the governments that has led to the present conflict between these two communities.

Despite the amendment to the Kerala Scheduled Tribes (restriction on transfer of lands and restoration of alienated lands) Act, 1975, incorporated in Schedule 9 of the Constitution providing for the restoration of all land alienated since 1960, all successive state governments have failed to implement these rights of the Adivasis. The Act was included in the Ninth Schedule to ensure that it was protected from challenge in any court under Art.31-B. Despite the Act being enacted way back in 1975, it did not come into operation till January 24, 1986 conferring retrospective effect from January 1, 1982. Moreover, nearly 70 percent of the land acquired from 'jennies' during the Agrarian

Reforms Act, 1970 is still held by the Kerala Government. The biggest landowner after the Government are the TATAS owning over 50,000 acres.

Similar state of affairs is that of the Dalits. Their status too has also remained unchanged and upper caste dominance has not been fundamentally changed by Kerala's history of social reform and communist rule. Dalits are mostly limited to the agricultural sector and are more landless than elsewhere in the country. Whereas 56 percent of the non-Dalit workforce in the State is in the secondary and tertiary sectors, only 40 percent of Dalits are; and 77 percent of Dalits in agriculture were land-less, compared to 63 per cent at an all-India level.⁹ According to a report in the Indian Express (August 17, 1999) the share of Dalit landholding in the State was only 2.94 per cent; their average land holding only 0.07 per cent which was significantly worse than the national average. Dalits in Punjab being in share of land-holding, high national average of 0.49 acres for Dalits, was significantly lower than the non-Dalit population, it was still enough to provide them a small footing as cultivators.

Report confirms the above reality regarding their income levels as well, citing a 1994 survey by the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER), which notes that wage labourers in rural Kerala were better off than in most parts of the country. However, this has not led to any significant improvement in the status of Dalits in Kerala. Overall, monthly expenditure of Dalits in the State was about three-fourth of non-Dalit population and this had fallen to 68.2 per cent for urban Dalits in 1987-88. Figures on employment and unemployment showed that Dalits continue to suffer disproportionately. The overall statistics on poverty showed similar pattern. Dalits were about 1.5 times more likely to be in poverty according to the headcount ratio compared to all groups. The much-touted land reforms led to giving land to tenants and not to landless farm labour, according to the above Report. Thus, the land reforms were partial, confined to land to the tiller-tenant/ sharecropper and did not extend to providing land to the needy and landless. This, however, does not detract from what was achieved.

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Facts Against Myths is a monthly bulletin of factual information on a number of development myths and fallacies, etc, including information against alien development models, paradigms and false concepts on caste, creed and gender.



Produced and Published by :
Vikas Adhyayan Kendra
D-1 Shivdham, 62 Link Road,
Malad West, Mumbai 400 064, INDIA

☎ : 882 2850 & 889 8662 Fax : 889 8941
Email : vak@bom3.vsnl.net.in

Design & Layout : Kartiki Desai

Printed by : Omega Offset, 4574, Shetty Gally
Belgaum 590 002. ☎ 0831-424124 / 433429

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