

Revisiting the Kerala Model of Development

The Kerala Model/Experience of development is too popular a discourse to be ignored. A State with comparatively low economic development, similar to the developing world, has achieved social development indicators on a par with the developed world. Widespread interest in the experience created a discourse that has crossed borders igniting the minds of social scientists and lay folk alike. However, with substantial changes in the socio-political and economic milieu of the State, it is a relevant exercise to re-visit the model.

First, what is happening in the State and to the State? Evidence suggests that there is a severe cut in the social service sectors which actually made up the core of the model. Health care and education systems, the two most important pillars, are under intense privatisation processes and the kind of equity measures which created the model are no more to be seen. The onslaught of new epidemics and the increased rate of life style diseases along with accidents due to increasing alcoholism are severe strains on the public health care system. Conflicts and controversies in the educational system have made it almost dysfunctional. The quality of education which made the system a substantial provider of human resources is now a memory of the past, except for small islands of excellence. The very recent confrontational stance of the government vis-à-vis private educational institutions raises serious apprehensions. While the State wants to regulate an avaricious private sector for laudable reasons, correspondingly the state sector does not show results and quality which could keep the State a storehouse of human resources. The number of 'unemployables' is on the increase. There is a hollowness about the claims of the State that needs to be addressed. One stark instance is the claim for 100 percent rural electrification made long ago. As any rural dweller, about the power situation. It is dismal. There are similar disturbing trends: increasing suicides (individual and family), domestic violence, the growth of mafia groups, and criminalisation in all sectors. Perhaps the most disquieting reality is the increasing disparity in incomes in the post-reform period. Added to this is the severe cut in social security entitlements; we have

a scenario where sustainability questions about the Kerala model are more relevant than ever.

The two substantial questions are of equity and sustainability, the very questions that were raised at the time of the conceptualisation of the model itself. At present, in the context explained earlier, these issues become all the more relevant.

The challenges to research and documentation are indeed crucial too. Qualitative research into the Kerala scenario, its developmental experience and predictions about the future are very important for the sustenance of a model which has kept the hopes of many people alive.

Chief Editor