

Economy & Society

As early as in the 1850s, Travancore (now part of the State of Kerala), along with the princely State of Baroda (now in Gujarat), were the pioneers of mass education and women education in India. The pro active role of the erstwhile rulers of pre-Independence India, especially in the area of education, had prepared the ground for major social reforms. Travancore, which was a constituent of the present unified Kerala, was the first to pick up the fire left over by the Rajas. Kerala witnessed a major social reform movement initiated by, visionaries and socio-religious reformers of the early twentieth century, like Narayana Guru, Chattampi Swamikal and Mannath Padmanabhan, which subsequently merged with a stream of trade unionism, political mobilisation and ultimately, the unique global model of a Communist Ministry through the ballot, in 1957. That makes the early story of the, now well known, 'Kerala Model of Development'.

The 'Kerala model of development', pre supposes a welfarist society on par with the Western world, has been constantly tussling with the imperatives for maintaining sustainable economic development. Historically, this tiny State of India has adopted two important strategies: migration beyond the borders of the State and of the country, on the one hand, and investment in education on the other. That has shaped Kerala into an essentially dependent economy, which some critics call a 'money order economy', with a weakened base of the productive sectors. While, there is a constant phenomenon of flux in the current of population, back and forth, the State sends out a sizable number of its population abroad, bringing in significant foreign remittances. Almost an equal number of immigrants come within, from across various other States of the country like Bihar, Orissa and West Bengal, in order to meet the labour deficit, in local production.

The Kerala model of development brings, as an offshoot, many of the negatives of welfare societies across the world: an ageing population, high morbidity rates of its people, and budgetary stringencies, and especially mounting deficit financing.

Kerala's grand tradition of "discussing politics over a cup of tea....." ,got progressively eroded with its second wave of migration since the 1970s. And now ,economists speak of its "Dutch Disease"!In a globalised world, Kerala and Holland are not that distant destinations. But, there are lessons to learn from each other.....

But to the advantage of Kerala, there are several positives, such as a high demographic dividend, high rate of women's education, and much lower death rates. But, one thing is sure: in a changing global order, Kerala has something unique to offer to the rest of the world, last but not the least, in terms of survival strategies.

