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KERALA EFFORTS AT INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT

IN VIEW OF THE GLOBAL CRISIS OF SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

Olle Törnquist

Kerala Council for Historical Research

Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala
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Puthupally Raghavan Memorial
Annual Public Lecture 2018

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**Kerala Efforts at Inclusive Development
In view of the Global Crisis of Social Democracy**

Olle Törnquist

Professor of Political Science and Development Research,
University of Oslo

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Introduction

We live in era of substantial changes world over fomented by the rising tide of right wing politics in most continents and many countries. Adding to this is the unfolding sufferings unleashed by climate change. Many in the political leadership of the dominant world powers have become deniers of climate change. However, the saving grace of the times is the ‘small voice of history’— Greta Thunberg—who did not mince words when she was demanded to tell the truth to the powers be. We very much have scholars in Kerala also who question the philosophical basis of the much hyped notion of sustainable development that in fact comes out, as argued by such scholars, from the very same idea of development that plunged the planet into crisis. This moment defines the current predicament that we face globally and locally. It is in this context that KCHR publishes the text of Puthupally Raghavan Memorial Annual Public Lecture, 2018, ‘Kerala Efforts at Inclusive Development in View of the Global Crisis of Social Democracy’ delivered at KCHR by renowned Political Scientist Professor Olle Tornquist.

In this lecture Prof. Tornquist, following his decade’s long comparative research in the Global South as well as in the Scandinavian countries opens up the questions of citizenship, equality, economic development and the deepening of democratic experiences of the communities as well as nations. One of the great challenges today is to salvage the fundamentals of liberal democracy that have come under fire right within the homes of such ideas. It is not just a vitriolic Donald Trump who let go of



democratic conventions or Boris Johnson who even dissolved/prorogued a parliament hailed as mother of parliaments without due considerations; we do have the detractors of democracy in the Global South too who have their eponymous reigns now from Brazil to India. It is in this context that many of the problems analysed and the directions suggested by Prof. Tornquist in his lecture ring very true when we publish it for the larger academic community and the general public. He has shown, through the analysis of Kerala's development experience how the broad based political and social mobilizations paved way for its subsequent economic transformation. It is in this context that he refers to the politics of 1930's and 1990's to identify them as the well springs of social transformation in Kerala. It is also suggested that in spite of the structural problems, the gains of democratic transformation need to be sustained for furtherance of the inclusive development. More importantly, Prof. Tornquist also refers to the impending dangers of authoritarian regimes passing off as democratic, riding upon the crest of the slogans of development. These would have the effect of eventually destroying democracy from within which is a real threat that the democracies in the Global South are facing today.

With the publication of Prof. Tornquist's lecture we are beginning the publication of KCHR Public Lecture Series and we hope to bring out all the lectures conducted at KCHR so far for the benefit of the public and the academic community. Through this we aim at the production and circulation of critical social science knowledge that would enhance our understanding of the social phenomenon in question.

Professor P. Sanal Mohan

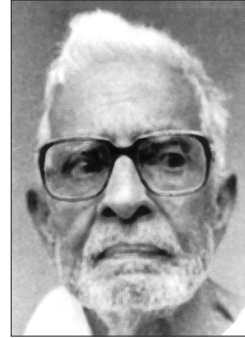
Director, KCHR





Puthupally Raghavan (1910 - 2000)

Puthupally Raghavan was born in a joint family amid the complexities and poverty of the system at Puthupally near Kayamkulam. He participated in the independence struggle even during his school days. He gradually engaged entirely in the social and political movements of the society. He was active in various roles such as a politician, journalist, researcher, author and translator.



He was one among the few People's History researchers in Kerala. Of more than 30 books authored by Puthupally Raghavan, majority directly related to the history of Kerala. As a history scholar, he preserved not only the memories, but also the documents and records of historical events and happenings from childhood. He wholeheartedly and unconditionally shared it with any research scholar who approached him.

He took deliberate efforts to overcome the borderlines set by family and people, religion and caste, money and society, materialism and spirituality. Attracted towards Gandhism from childhood, he actively participated in the national, social and revolutionary movements in the society. On the divide of the Communist party he kept off from public life and confined himself to the sphere of reading and writing. He possessed a remarkable personality and was able to view all kinds of sufferings philosophically even at the age of 90.

Wife: Late Smt. Santhamma, Daughters : Sheela, Shobha

Major Works: Indian Viplavathinte Ithihasam (1988), Kerala Pathrapravarthana Charithram (1985), Swadeshabhimaneyude Pathrapravarthanam Rajavazhchayude drishtiyil (1988), R. Sugathan (1984), Kanneerinteyum Chorayudeyum Kadhakal (1979), Viplavasmaranakal (Jeevacharithram 9 volumes) (1996), translated The Decline of Nair Dominance by Robin Jeffrey with M.S. Chandrasekhara Warriar.

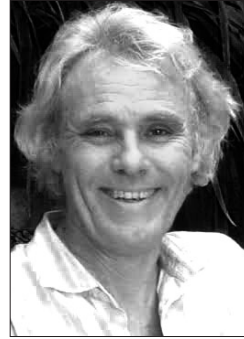






Olle Törnquist

Olle Törnquist is Professor of Political Science and Development Research, University of Oslo. He has focused since the early 1970s on the problems and options of popular organisations and democratisation, especially in Indonesia and India, including Kerala, with references to the Philippines as well as S. Africa Brazil and Scandinavia. His most recent books with colleagues include “Reinventing Social Democratic Development: Insights from Indian and Scandinavian Comparisons.” (Niaspress and Manohar)



Abstract

Kerala efforts at inclusive development in view of the global crisis of social democracy

Kerala's varied efforts for a century at development by way of public and political action towards equal civil, social and political rights are up against new challenges. This is not unique. Hence it may be useful to discuss Kerala in view of the crisis of likeminded ideas, such as in Latin America and Southeast Asia, but also in the North, most recently in Scandinavia. Here too, broadly speaking social democratic projects are hard pressed by uneven market driven global development as well as the hijacking by authoritarian elites of fragmented counter movements through populist religious- and ethno-nationalism.







Kerala Efforts at Inclusive Development In view of the Global Crisis of Social Democracy

Olle Törnquist

In these times of threats around the world against the freedom of thought and knowledge, it is crucial to recall the efforts and integrity of concerned scholars like Puthupally Raghavan. Hence, it is a privilege to be invited to talk in his honour.

These are harsh times in other respects too. The prime danger is certainly climate change. However, I would argue, this dilemma cannot be handled without considering that the vulnerable sections of the population are most hard hit, as in Kerala during the torrential rains and flooding. The better off can invest in protection and alternatives, others cannot. The utmost risk, therefore, is that public measures to reduce environmental destruction and contain climate change may well become an additional burden on the weak sections of the population. If so, moreover, the reactions will not necessarily be led by progressive leaders but such as in the recent case of the ‘yellow vests’ in France by a strange mix of leftists and rightists, and the latter may well become the dominant. Hence the importance of a compelling leftist green agenda.



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I. Right Wing Nationalism

This takes us to the second global threat: xenophobic nationalism and communal identity-politics. Kerala has recently been affected by this too. But let me in spite of this begin in the North, with the stunning election of Mr. Trump in the United States, the campaign for Brexit in the United Kingdom and the rise of populist right wing movements in France, Austria, Germany, Italy, large parts of Eastern Europe and now also in the Nordic countries. Why is this?

I want to take the perhaps most surprising case as an example, Sweden. Given its strong social democracy, many analysts thought it would be as capable as in the 1930's of containing fascist and Nazi movements, at least within its own borders. But from the late-1970s, the increasingly market driven globalisation of finance and production has undermined the nationally confined Keynesian economic policies. The same has applied to the agreements between unions and employers on welfare policies that also promoted production. Keynesianism and agreements on equity-based growth should ideally have been globalised to meet these threats – there is nothing wrong in globalisation as such. But there was insufficient support, including from weakened progressives in the South, for proposals such as those put by Olof Palme and Willy Brandt in the 1970s to foster a New Economic World Order. For a good many years, most of those in Sweden who suffered from market driven globalisation through, for example, the closing down of Sweden's huge textile industry and shipyards, and the subsequent depopulation of entire municipalities and regions (it has been under my own skin since my youth), did not turn to xenophobic right wing movements. They trusted instead in the extensive social democratic public policies of structural adjustment by way of unemployment insurance, re-education,



and packages towards competitive new industries. However, from the 1990s onwards, these policies in turn were undermined by increasingly neo-liberal priorities, including, unfortunately, by rightist social democrats encouraged by Tony Blair. Similarly, the idea of Keynesianism and welfare pacts within the European Union were contained by ordo-liberalism, i.e. legislation and state interventions to protect the hegemony of the market. It was in this context of unemployment and deteriorating social democratic ideals and policies, in addition to presumptuous liberal professionals enjoying the new global freedoms, that the increasing influx of migrants and refugees from crisis-ridden parts of the Global South nourished populist right wing reactions and latent racism.

However, the rise of right wing nationalism is of course a major threat in the Global South too. We only need to recall examples such as the recent developments in Duterte's The Philippines, Bolsonaro's Brazil and the undermining of reformist populism in Indonesia – along with the catastrophes of (supposedly) leftist populism in Burma and Venezuela. Generally, the roots are similar to those in the North, but the problems are even more severe.

In the South, Keynesianism and social democratic agreements on welfare-for-productive-growth had never really been feasible, given the imperial dominance, ineffective democratisation, and weak industrialisation, generating fragmentation of interests and collectivities. The attempts at alternative political shortcuts to progress were only economically successful when authoritarian regimes in East Asia (over the years China and Vietnam too) subordinated their projects to the logic of the globalised markets. Meanwhile Nehru's more democratic but centralist shortcuts had done less well; and the outright failures at similar roadmaps in, for example, Indonesia and many parts of Africa and Latin



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America ended in repression and autocratic capitalism.

It is true that from the late 1970s, and especially after 1989, the economic liberalisation of globalisation provided a framework for political liberties too, and a 'third wave' of democratisation. There certainly were failures in the Middle East and North Africa, where competitive state-driven imperialism remained strong. And the new democracies in other parts of the South were shallow. But within these new democracies, and the earlier ones that had survived, such as India, there was some room of manoeuvre for a third generation of, broadly speaking, social democratically oriented movements. Cuba remained paralysed, relying on authoritarian friends and its own army plus informalisation of the economy, but elsewhere new democracy-driven activists strengthened unions and civil societies, fostered active citizenship and encouraged grass roots participation. It proved difficult, however, to bring large numbers of people together and to deepen democracy so that welfare could be fostered along with liberal economic growth, even in showcase states such as South Africa and Brazil. We shall return to the details, but almost like in the North, these deficiencies of the social democratic alternatives in the South have also contributed to disillusion and the rise of conservative nationalism. The Philippines has passed the line, Brazil too, and there are several others.

II. Crisis of Social Democracy

In spite of the encouraging achievements by the third generation, these setbacks, along with those in the North, have thus generated an overall crisis of social democracy that may be useful to conceptualise before we turn to Kerala.

Social democracy is a broad framework of ideas and strategies about development based on social justice and the popular





politics required to get there. In critique of Kautsky, who claimed that this would come about with an inevitable crisis of capitalism, and syndicalists who focused on union based cooperatives, Lenin contended that enlightened leadership was necessary –while Bernstein for one, refuted them all, arguing for the primacy of democratic politics. The latter thesis turned definitional in the 20th and 21st century thinking of social democracy. Moreover, the idea of equity based development based on democratic politics is certainly not defined by what leaders and parties claim stand for, but by their actual visions and priorities. Hence, it is quite natural also to include, for example, much of the actual policies and politics of the former Congress Socialists in Kerala who joined the communist movement while holding on to their democratic mass politics within the framework of India's liberal democracy.

In addition to the general definition, it is necessary, therefore, to add some concepts to analyse the actual politics and ideas. In historical perspective, four pillars of social democracy stand out. One, that social democracy is rooted in broad social-interest based and democratic collectivities, in contrast to organisations focusing on the working class only or avant-garde activists. Two, the primacy of democratic linkages between State and society. Liberal democracy is crucial, but also equal citizenship and participation, as well as interest based representation in public governance. Three, the emphasis on what since 1948 is labelled human rights, and in particular citizens' equal social rights and rights in working life, along with welfare programmes. Four, the negotiation between capital and labour (but also at times primary producers like small farmers) of social growth pacts, supported by likeminded governments, about productive labour rights and universal welfare measures as a basis for effective production, and vice versa.

Moreover, while the general formula (of equity-based growth



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by democratic means) is solid, actual policies and politics are in a crisis that varies between three generations and contexts. The first generations dominant in the North where it developed in the framework of comprehensive industrialisation and wide alliances for liberal democracy. Here, the crisis is mainly about the weakening of the nationally confined welfare-cum-growth programmes under neo- and ordo-liberal globalisation, plus the absence of a credible alternative. The second generation included anti-and post-colonial leaders such as Nehru who lost steam with the economically unsuccessful and democratically shallow political shortcuts to progress. The third generation (from about the late 1970s) has in sharp contrast taken the civil and social rights as well as democratisation from below as its point of departure. This has generated a number of advances, but as already indicated it has been difficult to combine and organise scattered interests, scale up local practices, foster representation to make a difference in governance. Moreover, when new leaders have gained some influence – such as in Brazil under Lula and Rousseff, in South Africa from Mandela and onwards, in the Philippines under Aquino Jr, and in India under the United Progressive Alliance –welfare policies and liberal economic growth have been bifurcated.

A common conclusion is therefore that it is impossible to reinvent social democracy. I disagree, while acknowledging the challenges. Hence, it might be useful now, to draw on these points of departure in trying to understand and learn from the challenges of the Kerala efforts at inclusive development.

III. Alternative Sequence?

In view of the crisis, John Harriss and I recently concluded a book about the reinvention of social democracy (drawing on





Indian and Scandinavian comparisons in particular) with the statement that it may be fruitful to think in terms of resequencing social democratic development. The first and second processes of building broad collectivities and democratic linkages between state and society certainly remain basic, and we think that the associated problems can be worked out. But the fostering of social growth pacts is a next to impossible task in the South, as globalised and uneven development generates fragmented organisation on the side of labour in particular, but also among investors and employers. Consequently, comprehensive welfare states too would be impossible; given that hitherto they have only been feasible in the North, as a result of social growth pacts. However, we suggest, comprehensive social and work rights, and related welfare programmes, might actually be possible to fight for ahead of the pacts. There *are* signs of counter movements against commodification (of the kind identified by Karl Polanyi) that come together behind rights and welfare reforms. And entrepreneurs competing on improving productivity (rather than surplus extraction only) may benefit from certain welfare programmes too. If such reforms are productive and based on broad progressive alliances, these might even foster negotiations towards sustainable inclusive development.

Against this backdrop, I would like to put forward two arguments about Kerala that turn out to be optimistic about the chances to address the crisis. One is that the building of broad based collectivities has proven possible (in spite of diverse employment conditions and religious heterogeneity), first in the 1930s for civil and political rights as well as land reform, thereafter in the 1990s for the People's Planning Campaign. The other argument is that Kerala progressives may do better than the likeminded friends that have lost out, such as in Brazil.



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IV. Combining Citizen Rights and Class Struggle

The first argument, as already mentioned, is that during two critical periods in history, Kerala has proven that it is possible in the Global South to build broad progressive and democratic collectivities in spite of what have often been deemed structural barriers. These refer to the unfavourable conditions in comparison with the North because of weak citizens' rights and democracy as well as limited industrialisation resulting in uneven development with very diverse employment conditions and extensive self-employment—in addition to ethnic, religious and other communal identities. Severe problems certainly occurred in following up the united front work in the 1930s as well as in the struggle for the Planning Campaign, but these challenges were rather due to political decisions than structural obstacles. This calls for a more detailed discussion.

Probably the most impressive example of efforts at social democratic development in the struggle against colonialism, and later on against its legacies too, was in Kerala in the 1930s behind the then Congress Socialist Party and leaders such as E.M.S. Namboodiripad. They further developed the efforts by socio-religious reform movements against stiff caste and religious institutions along with the dominance of non-Malayali Brahmins and, of course, the British. Several of these caste and religious movements (prominently among the *Ezhava*, Muslims and Christians) had already broadened their demands for access to education and government jobs (in the context of the expansion of commercial agriculture with increasing demand for skilled labour, traders and administrators) to wider and joint claims for civil and social inclusion. In the 1930s then, the socialists could facilitate the combination of these requests for,



on the one hand, equal civil and social rights with, on the other, the increasingly important class-based demands in response to the world economic crisis. This rested with their ability to offer more effective mass based organisation and leadership than the individual caste associations, including the *Pulaya* and *Ezhava* caste movements of often bonded labourers and toddy tappers respectively. In addition, the struggle in Travancore and Cochin by agricultural labourers as well as many tenants, toddy tappers, and coir and cashew workers against evictions and for redistributive justice and decent wages and employment conditions, could be combined with the peasants' movement in Malabar against unreformed feudalism. Similarly, the broad alliance was consolidated in the joint opposition against colonialism as well as for a unified state of Kerala along linguistic and cultural lines against 'foreign' Brahmins. In short, socialist politics was based on mass movements with a joint agenda for land reform and improved workers' conditions in combination with demands for direct relations between equal citizens and a unified state of Kerala (rather than via communal associations).

Remarkably, the essence of this Kerala project was actually quite along the same lines as those characterising the two most successful instances of the rise of democratic popular movements in the world so far. Firstly, the rapid development in Indonesia in the 1950s of the world's largest democratically oriented communist movement, by way of combining class based demands and the fostering of modern nationalism based on equal citizenship and democracy— until it subordinated itself to Sukarno's and the Army's 'Guided Democracy'. This was in-spite of the fact that there was nothing exceptional about either Kerala or Indonesia such as unifying ethnic or religious identities or non-feudal or colonial past. The second case was, the broad alliance fostered by the Scandinavian social democrats



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from the early 1930s of workers and rural people for inclusive development based on a 'people's home' with equal rights and productive universal welfare, until being unable to stand up in the 1980s against market driven globalisation. In short, the first two pillars of social democratic development(broad interest based collectivities and democratic citizenship and linkages between society and state) are feasible in the South too.

It is certainly true that although the reformist Kerala communists thus won the first elections in the unified state in 1957, their broad citizen-cum-class movement was there after undermined. The efforts at inclusive growth by a land reform along the lines previously supported by the Congress party,as well as the inclusion of the underprivileged sections of the population in publicly supported education, were resisted by all possible means in a 'liberation struggle', supported by the Congress as well as the United States of America. Hence, the democratically elected government was ousted. Worst, the United Front strategies to get back in power, then, were no longer based on the combination of demands based on socio economic interests and quests for more equal citizenship, which had brought people together from the 1930s and onwards. Rather, the Fronts and the new left-led governments rested no won compromises within the elite between the special interests of various parties and leaders. This generated divisiveness between the parties, the popular mass movements and citizen associations, in addition to corruption.

V. Reinvention of the Broad Alliance from Below

As already indicated, however, these problems were not structural. They could be altered – and so they were, imaginatively, from the mid-1980s until the early 2000.



Numerous activists and concerned scholars combined work in civil society and politics, initiated a number of campaigns for full literacy, more democratic education, and local development plans. The problems of scaling up the initiatives and by-passing rigid and divisive political and union leaders were to be solved by campaigns for decentralisation and planning from below, and finally a full scale People's Planning Campaign, directed by the State Planning Board. Support was provided by no one less than the prime architect of the ground-breaking policies in the 1930s, E.M.S Namboodiripad. More than one third of the investment budget was at the disposal for local governments that followed the directions of the Planning Board about participatory planning of projects towards equity and growth. In terms of the four dimensions of social democratic development, the missing growth coalitions (combined with social provisioning) were to be fostered by way of participatory local development institutions that propelled plans and projects. These institutions as well as village meetings would certainly be open for elected politicians and conventional interest organisations, but also for informal workers, self-employed, concerned professionals, educators, youth, and especially women, minorities and dalits. This would facilitate active and equal citizenship along with more direct democracy. Equally important, welfare measures would serve as a basis for badly needed development, given that Kerala's growth figures were depressing at the time and that unemployment was increasing.

The initiation of the campaign was immensely impressive, but in addition to external problems such as falling prices of agricultural and related products, a number of in-built weaknesses became obvious in the process of implementation. Guided by questions based on the experiences in at first hand Brazil, South Africa and the Philippines, and historically in Scandinavia, the main



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challenges may be summed up in terms of poor scaling-up and political hijacking.

The scaling-up problem was *not* about combining local projects and single-issue engagements, an otherwise typical problem among civil societies and interest organisations supported by liberal donors. The Kerala campaign was inclusive of numerous groups and volunteers and firmly co-ordinated by the planning board along with the local governments, the panchayats. The main problems of scale were instead economic and outright political.

The economic challenge was, first, to prioritise welfare measures that not only supported vulnerable people but also fostered production; second, to co-ordinate planned projects with private and cooperative investments in comprehensive plans; third, to link such plans to the larger economy outside the local contexts. Kerala has few big cities but is 'rurban'. Large parts of the local economy and many people living in the villages, not just the Gulf migrants, are even related to the global economy. Hence, for example, the local middle classes, including the well-educated youth in search of jobs, soon found out that there was little in the plans for them, and dropped out. In short, town hall meetings were often good to form collectivities and formulate demands but not to foster competitive inclusive development. Interestingly, it was equally difficult to scale-up participatory budgeting in Brazil, among other cases. And actually, one hundred years earlier, Sweden's pre-democratic local citizen councils entrusted with the responsibility for poor and disabled had to be complemented with locally implemented national programmes. Why? Because those involved in the agrarian economy could not (and refused to) take care of all the vulnerable labourers in the context of expanding markets and rapid industrialisation.



The scaling-up calls, of course, for improved linkages between State and Society. This takes us to the political part of the problem. Just like in Brazil or the Philippines where more active citizenship has been fostered by way of participation, Kerala faced obstacles of combining new direct democracy with existing party-political representation and the bureaucracy, plus pressure politics by various interest groups. The rules and regulations were often unclear, the accusations over poor accountability and corruption multiplied, and the conflicts mounted. Moreover, as in Brazil where direct local democracy could not be used to keep an eye on central level politics – and contain the corruption that ultimately brought down the labour government – the fledgling forms of direct democracy in Kerala were of little use for locals to influence decisions on higher levels. What should be done? In liberal polities, participation beyond the local level is usually by lobbying and networks. That is to the benefit of the already powerful. Conventional communists have relied on democratic centralism in their parties. That proved so bad that Deng Xiaoping added the market to connect ‘cellularised’ communities and production units. Scandinavian social democrats developed a system of democratic representation of relevant interest and issue organisations in public policymaking and governance, plus extensive system of written hearings. But that presupposed sufficiently broad organisation of all vital interests involved, and even in South Africa (with extensive and strong trade unions as compared to many other countries in the South), the lack of such organisation and representation of the huge numbers of informal labourers is a major reason for crisis in the country. In any case, the issue of linkages is critical and must be handled.

The second major and outright political challenge is that when the scaling-up issue remains unresolved the risks for political hijacking increases. In South Africa, for example,





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the hegemonic African National Congress gained control of supposedly participatory local governments and strived to dominate most progressive movements and associations. In Kerala, sections within the major left party (CPI-M) and the Left Front made attempts to take over and benefit from the People's Planning Campaign, while others refused to support leading local campaigners as candidates in elections and slandered and isolated major leaders. As a result, the campaign was further weakened and its framework was radically altered after the Left Front had lost local elections in 2000 and state elections in 2001.

VI. Leftist Stagnation and Market driven Development

In spite of the set-backs it is also important to remember that the Campaign resulted in decentralisation of state and governance to which locally more active citizens can now turn with demands and proposals and even participate in some of the implementation. Certain innovative schemes such as women's self-help groups within production remain too. But the campaigners did not succeed in generating a new democratic formula for the combination of equity and growth; and especially small farm and plantation agriculture has done poorly. Already from the 1990s, the increasing rates of economic growth in Kerala were more related to the liberalisation of the Indian economy and the increasing influx of remittances from the many migrant labourers, primarily in the Gulf countries, sending back the equivalent of more than a third of Kerala's GDP. The competitive power of Keralites in international markets rests on previous struggles for civil and social rights, and public investments in education, but by now it is certainly not the underprivileged who are competitive in these job markets. In spite of the influx of remittances, moreover, most investments are not in production and services in



Kerala of the kind that they contribute to elsewhere in the world, but in construction of villas, in property, simple service and related speculation, which do not really support public welfare and dynamic inclusive growth. Meanwhile environmental degradation increases, and the rate of growth has only been on a par with the other high performing Indian states.

Even though a new Left Front government (2006-2011) combated corruption and defended petty producers and the poor, there were disputes about priorities and no dynamic alternative to neo-liberalisation. The once so crucial interest organisations deteriorated. Their presence is particularly poor (or non-existing) within the new sectors such as tourism and technology as well as among informal labour (including adivasis and dalits) and the many incoming migrants from the north taking jobs in low paid sectors as Keralites have taken up better paid jobs elsewhere. Congress-led governments tried to foster modern industry and infrastructure, such as in Cochin-Ernakulam, but suffered from poor coordination of factionalised business in addition to extensive corruption.

VII. New Kerala Roadmap?

The new Left Front government from 2016 is more unified behind combined efforts at reinvigorating, on the one hand, public health, education and small-scale local development initiatives in the interest of the less well-off people in particular, with, on the other hand, industrial and other modern development projects, thus responding to the aspirations of the educated middle classes as well. In view of similar ambitions elsewhere, such as during the United Progressive Alliance in Delhi, the Aquino Jr. government in the Philippines and the more likeminded regimes



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in South Africa and Brazil, however, there are obvious challenges involved in combining liberal economic growth in the global context and welfare measures in its backyards.

These common obstacles are not confined to insufficient productive investments of revenues during the commodity boom, such as in Brazil (and even worse, of course, in Venezuela), or for that matter of remittances in Kerala. In addition, the welfare measures have often been limited to handouts for the poor. There is a good case for the idea of a basic universal income. But only as a complement not as a substitute for social democratic transformative reforms generating good jobs (including in welfare sectors) and fostering both ordinary people's wellbeing and bargaining power as well as their health, skills and other factors that are crucial for inclusive and more competitive production. Some synergies between welfare reforms and growth can certainly be designed by authoritarian states, as in East Asia. But even if we prefer less dictatorship, it must also be acknowledged that democratic negotiations and agreements between capital and labour and other parties involved, as historically in Scandinavia, presupposed powerful democratic interest organisations, and, of course, a supportive government. In spite of an otherwise unusually broad labour movement, South Africa suffers from poor organisation and representation of informal labour, the absolute majority of the population. In countries where organisation has been even weaker, a common shortcut has been the mobilisation of counter movements behind reformist populist leaders such as Jokowi in Indonesia against various neo-liberal drawbacks, followed by their supposedly direct-democratic governance in co-operation with 'friendly' movements and associations. Typically, however, there have been more populist mobilisations against neo-liberalism than in favour of well-designed and anchored strategic reforms. This in





addition to insufficient interest organisation and representation have opened up for right wing nationalists to employ similar populist methods in hijacking sections of the counter movements. Like in Duterte's The Philippines, Bolsonaro's Brazil and in the undermining of President Jokowi's reform agenda in Indonesia.

Contexts differ, but several of the challenges are similar in Kerala. Revenues are insufficient and private resources among investors as well as migrants must be mobilised in partially risky ways to sustain welfare – including for sections of the population like the *Ezhava* community that might be approached by right wing nationalists trying to use issues like Sabarimala to foster politics based on caste- and religion rather than interest- and equal rights. The recent environmental disaster has added to the problems. What should be done? The participatory local planning was too difficult to scale up. The Planning Board (or for that matter a party or certain ministers) cannot substitute for authoritarian developmental states in designing and enforcing comprehensive plans inclusive of both state and private priorities. There are insufficiently broad and coherent professional associations and interest based organisations among labourers as well as employers-cum-investors to negotiate the combination of productive welfare reforms and investments.

Yet, Kerala, it seems to me in comparative perspective, might have the potential capacity to handle the blocks which likeminded partners elsewhere have stumbled over. Firstly, Kerala can benefit from the historical legacy of two periods of pioneering and successful formation of broad democratic alliances by combining citizen rights and interest based politics. There will be no repetition of the Left's disaster in West Bengal. Second, Kerala is blessed by a quite widely accepted emphasis on equal citizen rights. This includes principles of active and independent citizens as well as democratic direct linkages between state and society



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via parties and interest and citizen organisations – in contrast to mediation via communal organisations and their strongmen. The right wing nationalists may not be able to ‘make another Tripura’. Third, Kerala’s recent efforts at equity and growth have not been dependent on an unreliable commodity boom, which elsewhere has nourished primitive accumulation and corruption along with landlords and oligarchs. Kerala may rather benefit from having uprooted landlordism and from having fostered more sustainable and potentially productive public health and, in particular, education, which is more difficult to monopolise, plus tourism, which may be regulated.¹

The prime potential in Kerala, it seems to me, is, thus, the capacity to nourish the historical experiences and lessons in promoting sustainable and inclusive development based on knowledge. Inclusiveness, however, calls for welfare reforms and investments in education that are both attractive for middle classes and make increasingly many Keralites indispensable in education-based production and services inside the state plus consultancies outside. Revenues and investments, moreover, call for cooperation with many private actors, from migrant workers to entrepreneurs. And both requirements cannot be dictated but must be negotiated.

Given Kerala’s history of democracy and popular participation, it would be a contradiction of sorts if such negotiations were to rest with individuals within the government and the leading party. Overseeing committees of noted experts are fine but more about technocratic governance than democratic oriented negotiations. And while the planning board could play an active role in suggesting transformative productive reforms that many actors would be able to unite behind, it is beyond its current mandate

¹: This potential is also relevant in Cuba, though it is hampered by insufficient citizen democratic rights.





and capacity to negotiate comprehensive plans that involve both public, cooperative and private actors. It would be premature of me to suggest how such negotiations (and democratic representation in them) could be facilitated in an alternative way, but probably it is the lynchpin.



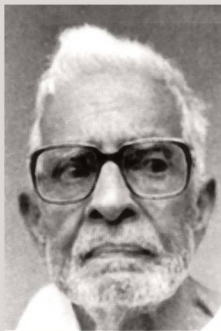


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Puthupally Raghavan

Puthupally Raghavan was one among the few People's History researchers in Kerala. He was active in various roles such as a politician, journalist, researcher, author and translator. Attracted towards Gandhism from childhood, he actively participated in the national, social and revolutionary movements in the society. As a history scholar, he preserved not only the memories, but also the documents and records of historical events and happenings from childhood. Of more than 30 books authored by Puthupally Raghavan, majority directly related to the history of Kerala. His major works include Indian

Viplavathinte Ithihasam (1988), Kerala Pathrapravarthana Charithram (1985), Swadeshabhimaneyude Pathrapravarthanam Rajavazhchayude drishtiyil (1988), R. Sugathan (1984), Kanneerinteyum Chorayudeyum Kadhakal (1979), Viplavasmaranakal (Jeevacharithram 9 volumes) (1996) etc.



Olle Törnquist

Olle Törnquist is senior Professor of Political Science and Development Research, University of Oslo. He has written widely since the 1970s on comparative radical politics and democracy, especially in Indonesia, parts of India and the Philippines, and in Scandinavia. Most of his writings is available at <http://folk.uio.no/ollet/>



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Vyloppilly Samskrithi Bhavan, Nalanda, Thiruvananthapuram- 695003

Phone / Fax – 0471 2310409 , Mob: 94471 37651

E mail: kchrtrivandrum@gmail.com, www.kchr.ac.in