



20th European Conference on Modern South Asian Studies

Panel 26

Kerala Studies: Trajectories in Transition

Convenor: Ravi Raman, University of Manchester

List of Abstracts

**1. M.A.Oommen (Retired Professor of Economics, University of Kerala)
Reforms, Capabilities and the Kerala 'model'**

This paper seeks to examine whether economic reform initiated in India has put Kerala's widely hailed development attainments made without much spatial or gender disparities or serious compromises on the choice of the future generation in jeopardy when we evaluate it from the capability and sustainability perspectives. While affirming that reforms create and have created economic opportunities, one cannot ignore the fact that growing unemployment, inequalities in income and land distribution, commercialisation of education, the reversals in health status indicators, the frequent visitations of vector-borne diseases, ecological hazards and so on have adversely affected the positive aspects of the Kerala 'Model'. This paper is an effort to empirically examine these aspects from a capability perspective and to evaluate the prospects of the democratic decentralisation currently under way characterised by some Western scholars as a 'New Kerala model' a viable alternative

**2. Dr KT Rammohan, Mahatma Gandhi University, Kerala
'Public Action' Reconsidered: The Dalit and the Brahmin in the Kerala Model of Development**

Public action is merely the supply and demand framework of economics as applied to human development. People demand human development; the proactive state supplies it. The paper unravels the fractured nature of public action in Kerala, southwest India. The 'public' comprise varied classes, castes, and communities and their 'action' yield varied results in human development. While the elite castes and communities attained commanding positions in bureaucracy and professions, and their organisations established institutions of higher education and healthcare, the 'untouchable' Pulayas, with a history of social movement as long or even longer than of the upper castes, could merely acquire basic civil rights and enter the lowest tiers of the government. The paper traces especially the trajectories of social movements of Pulayas and Nambudiris, located on the extreme ends of the caste order, and the differential outcome.

**3. J. Reghu, Institute of Encyclopedia Publications, Trivandrum
'Community' as de-imagining Nation: Relocating Narayana guru and Ezhava movement in Kerala**

All historical narratives of modern India, whether nationalist, Marxist, sub-altern or post-colonial exalts the anti-colonial national struggle as the only political drama within which 'non-national' / 'social' players play but subsidiary roles. The discourse of Indian nationalism was legitimised by the dichotomy of 'national' / 'non-national' or 'political' / 'social' domains. The national was always thought to be the 'major' realm of the political and social was of the 'minor' realm of castes and communities. From the perspective of the nationalist discourse, what happened at the micro level of communities were enfolded into the major historical narrative of Indian nationalism as "reform movements". In the south Indian state of Kerala one such "reform movement" occurred in a lower caste of small peasants and toddy tappers

called Ezhavas and were led by a charismatic figure who came to be known as Sree Narayana Guru. This paper is an inquiry into how Narayana Guru could overcome the nationalist dichotomy by his deployment of the concept of 'samudaya', meaning 'community' knowing no boundaries.

4. M.M. Khan, Government College, Trivandrum, Kerala

Negotiating Caste, Religion and Nation: Travancore Ezhava Community in Flux, 1917-24

This paper attempts to deal with issues related to Ezhavas and their negotiations with Hindu religion and Indian nationalism during 1917-24. Ezhavas, prominent among the subaltern castes in Travancore was terribly marginalized by the traditional Hindu social structure, sought liberation through converting into other faiths. The ethos which fomented community formation of Ezhavas heavily interrogated Indian nationalism, Hindu religion and its hierarchies. Temple entry demand (1917-24) of Ezhavas, led by T.K.Madhavan (1885-1930) was the part of the strategy to contain the surge of conversion and to make them loyal to Indian national movement. Madhavan, who internalized the Hindu religious values, had the support of Narayana Guru, the supremo of Ezhava community. The paper also looks at the various aspects of temple entry demand and unravels the paradoxes including the relationship of Ezhavas with national movement and other castes in Travancore at a particular juncture in the history of anti-colonial struggle.

5. Filippo Osella, University of Sussex

'Globalisation is ruining us': neoliberal capitalism, Islamism and business in Kozhikode (Calicut), South India

This paper discusses relationships between Islamic reformism and neo-liberal capitalism in Kozhikode, a medium sized city in Kerala, on the south-western Indian coast, also known with the colonial name of Calicut. We are particularly concerned with the ways through which reformist Islam is called upon to encourage participation in neo-liberal global. At the same time, it is neo-liberalism which constitutes the background against which contemporary reformist religious discourse seeking to modernize and transform Muslim selves is articulated, discussed, taken up or contested. In other words, we are exploring the production of economies of morality in the context of Kozhikode Muslims' contemporary business practices.

6. Ravi Raman, University of Manchester

Post-development Social Movements: Vulnerability, Negotiation and the Waves of "Political Indigenism" in Kerala

My aim in this paper, is to engage with the question of how subjects/agencies emerge as operators of real politics/the truth procedure in a given situation of "void", what forms of resistance they undertake and in what way they integrate material and discursive dimensions of everyday life into their resistance praxis. Conceived as post-development social movements, the Muthanga 'event' and the *Cola Quit Plachimada* struggle help us to understand, through a more nuanced treatment, how the indigenous communities have been articulating their concerns in relation to human rights and livelihood issues, and how they have consistently resisted the conditions imposed by the hegemonic global capital, the state and the legal structure. The study thereby addresses how the minority/ethnic communities have gradually constructed a counter-discourse through the successive incorporation of multiple issues, coupled with a wider participation from civil society and social agencies, and how they contest the discursive and material practices of structure-authorities and macro-power relations.

7. T.T Sreekumar, National University of Singapore

Social Space, Civil society and Transformative Politics of New Social Movements in Kerala

The aim of this article is to contextualise the crisis that new social movements face in Kerala in the wake of the increasing tension between civil and political societies in the state. The larger objective is to show that development and democratisation do not operate in different social spaces; one cannot be obtained at the expense of the other. Encroachment upon the social space for civil society by the political society in developmental states will seriously affect the process of democratisation and political reforms. Analysing the crisis faced by Kerala's civil society is important because most scholars who project Kerala as a model for

other Third World societies do not pay adequate attention to the crisis or are not aware of the problem.

8. Luisa Steur, Central European University, Budapest

Contemporary adivasi activism and the contested legacy of the Kerala model of development

It is often argued that adivasis have been left out of the Kerala model of development and that the emergence of adivasi movements in the state since the early 90s is a sign that adivasis are finally managing to have their voices heard. Though such may be the case to some extent, I argue that exaggerating the victimhood of adivasis under the Kerala model and the absolute advantages of adivasi identity politics over the previous class-based mobilizations in Kerala can have perverse effects: it neglects the difficulties of emancipation under neoliberalism and feeds into a hegemonic image of adivasis as helpless primitives rather than contentious citizens. In my presentation I thus focus on uncovering some of the silenced histories that form the legacy of the Kerala model of development for adivasis and that shape the present-day dilemmas of adivasi activists.

9. Nissim Mannathukkaren, Dalhousie University Canada

The Conjuncture of 'Late Socialism' in Kerala: Towards a Preliminary Theorization

This paper will argue that the emergence of new material conditions and social relations in Kerala from the 1980s has begun to increasingly constrain the attempts to carry forward the historic struggles for democratization led by Communist and other counter hegemonic movements. It will especially look at the cultural dimension of this conjuncture which we will call, adapting the anthropologist Alexei Yurchak, 'late socialism'. The defining feature of this condition is the contradictions and paradoxes generated by the clash of socialist ethics and ideals and capitalist practices. In outlining the pathologies of this conjuncture, this paper will seek to question two tendencies in recent scholarship: one, a modernist (albeit critical) discourse which valorizes the emancipatory potential of political initiatives like the People's Plan and, two: a postmodern-inspired postcolonial discourse which adopts a narrative of modernity versus tradition and simplistically locates the first half of the binary as the source of all the discontents of the present.

10. Caroline Wilson, University of Sussex

Revisiting the Kerala model – Questioning Good Health at Low Cost?

Kerala has been distinguished from other states for the paradox, that despite low levels of national income, it has standards of health equal to those found in developed nations (e.g. Pannikar and Soman 1984). Given the pandemic of lifestyle diseases - diabetes, BP and heart disease it is questionable the extent to which Kerala can now be viewed as a success story. The paper links the lifestyle pandemic to rising incomes, particularly from Gulf migration and ideas of 'the good life.' It traces the epidemic pathway to policies of economic liberalisation, which has increased private health care provision in the state. The dominance of the private sector has been a nurturing environment for the creation of medical dependency, whereby people are reliant on doctors for the management of chronic illnesses. The paper examines the incentive structures created by the private health care system, and why they are unfavourable to the successful management of lifestyle diseases.

11. Dr Shoba Arun, Manchester Metropolitan University, Dr T. G. Arun, University of Central Lancashire and Professor Richard Heeks, University of Manchester

Trajectories of Change: Gendered Technologies and Perspectives

New technologies, particularly Information and Communications Technology (ICTs) are central to understanding transformations that are characteristics of the information society and post modernity. The paper explores to what extent socially-contextualised technologies may be able to take into account the role of social actors and interactions, often ignored in the blind pursuit of the neo-liberal agenda. Some examples of ICT initiatives from Kerala will be examined in understanding how the emphasis on technological determinism is useful in tracing social and economic changes at large, but the economic and social shaping of technology is often illustrative of wider social and gender relations, particularly in the light of the strengths and weaknesses of the Kerala model.

12. Mohanan Pillai, Pondicherry University, India

Democratic Decentralisation and Participatory Planning in Kerala: The Locomotive of a New Development Culture

The politics of democratic decentralization in Kerala is the outcome of the quest for a new agenda for action in response to the development challenges of the state. The new generation Marxists of Kerala has contributed substantially to the operationalisation of the new politics of democracy at the grassroots level. The attempts of the younger activists of the CPI (M) have been to rescue the party becoming redundant in the context of new challenges to socialist movements the world over as also further advancement of the left in the state by befriending the social formations that are historically hostile to communism in the state. The mainstream print media of Kerala who sensationalized the campaign, it seems, have failed to grasp the meaning of parliamentary road to socialism and its far reaching implications, for the society and polity of Kerala, by way of the 'de-leninizing' process in the programme CPI (M).

13. Forrest Fleischman, Indiana University, USA

Reconsidering food security in Kerala.

This paper examines the current state of agriculture in Kerala, and its implications for food security. Although many commentators conclude that the decline in rice production since 1970 threatens food security, they pay little attention to contemporary conditions. As a result of land reform and labor migration, much contemporary agriculture is in the form of home gardens – polycultural systems which enhance food security by providing a broad array of food products which are not easily counted in official statistics. Attempts to enhance regional food security which focus on aggregate measures of food grains and ignore the complex nature of contemporary agricultural production are likely to have the perverse effect of decreasing the food security of rural Kerala.