

Class, Caste, and Coalition: How Kerala's Communists Built Inclusive Electoral Power

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This article explores the distinct history of the Communist movement in Kerala, emphasising how it effectively combined caste-sensitive reforms, class-based mobilisation, and secular coalition building to create a long-lasting model of democratic socialism. The Left in Kerala, led mainly by the CPI(M), reframed Marxist philosophy to take into account India's caste and religious diversity, in contrast to other Communist movements that were unable to adjust to complicated social circumstances. Through historic initiatives like the People's Planning Campaign (1996), the Agrarian Relations Bill (1957), and comprehensive welfare programs, the Left established participatory governance, strengthened underprivileged people, and destroyed upper-caste landlordism. The Left adopted a strategy of "pragmatic inclusivity," including minority welfare and caste-conscious policies into a class-based development program, as opposed to embracing caste or religious populism. This tactic supported secular and redistributive ideas while fostering coalitions across class and religion. The movement's ability to provide redistributive justice, institutional accountability, and grassroots engagement is the foundation of its long-term electoral and moral durability. As a result, Kerala provides a globally applicable example of ethical developmentalism, showing that when

ideology is incorporated into inclusive institutions, profound democracy may exist even in pluralistic, stratified cultures. In the postcolonial world, this study adds to larger discussions about identity, socialism, and state-led growth.

Keywords: Class and caste intersection, Land reform, Participatory governance, Secular coalition-building, Democratic socialism.

1. Introduction

Kerala holds a special place in the political landscape of postcolonial India because of its Communist movement's adaptability and tenacity, as well as its remarkable human development metrics. First established in 1957 under the leadership of E. M. S. Namboodiripad, it is the only state in India where a democratically elected Communist administration has successfully institutionalised long-term redistributive governance through democratic methods (Heller, 1999; Franke & Chasin, 1994). Kerala's Left parties, especially the Communist Party of India (Marxist) [CPI(M)], solidified electoral power by methodically integrating lower castes, peasants, workers, and religious minorities within the framework of a secular welfare state, in contrast to Communist movements elsewhere that either radicalised underground or were electorally marginalised.

According to this paper, Kerala's Left is a unique example of how class-based mobilisation, context-sensitive caste politics, and secular coalition building were combined to create what academics have called a model of "deep democracy" (Heller et al., 2007) and "ethical developmentalism" (Parayil, 2003). Theoretically, the key to Kerala's Communist success is its capacity to turn social exclusion, landlessness, and caste-based inequality into platforms for democratic representation not by abolishing religion and caste, but by integrating them into a larger structural agenda of local empowerment and redistribution (Panikkar, 2002; Devika, 2021). Instead of being intellectually dogmatic, the Left in Kerala modified Marxist frameworks to fit the caste-specific circumstances of India, acknowledging caste as a cause of oppression as well as a political identity that could be mobilised for fair change (Jeffrey, 1992; Herring, 1983).

The study's first section looks at caste and land relations in pre-Communist Kerala, emphasising the Jenmi system's ingrained Brahminical landlordism and ritual exclusion. The article then follows the development of the Communist movement in the 1930s and 1940s, focusing on how it was rooted among Mappila Muslim peasants, Dalit labourers, and marginalised tenant farmers. It then examines how historic initiatives, such as the People's Planning Campaign (1996) and the Agrarian Relations Bill (1957), utilised institutionally based redistribution to alter caste and class structures. Particular focus is also placed on how the Left was able to embed Muslims, Christians, Dalits, and Ezhavas into a participatory, secular governance model while fostering cross-class, cross-religious coalitions.

This article concludes by showing that Kerala's Communists established a long-lasting electoral and moral alliance through inclusive institutional design, resource redistribution, and programmatic governance rather than through appeals based on identity or populism. They accomplished this by transforming a socially divided society into one that could implement democratic reforms from the bottom up and converting material justice into political legitimacy. Kerala thus offers a replicable example of democratic socialism, providing important insights into how left-wing politics can flourish in a pluralistic, stratified society without sacrificing social justice or secular ideals.

2. Historical Context: Caste, Land, and Social Stratification Before the Rise of Communism

Kerala's socioeconomic structures were firmly built on a Brahminical hierarchy before the advent of communist politics in the state; rigid occupational divisions, ritual purity, and birth-based status served as guiding principles. Keralan (Malayali Hindu) society adopted a very strict and separated variant of the varna-jati system, despite the fact that it is present throughout India. One of the harshest and most formalised systems of stratification on the Indian subcontinent, according to scholars, is Kerala's caste system (Panikkar, 2002).

The highest caste, the Namboodiri Brahmins, used the Jenmi land system to preserve their dominion both spiritually and geographically. Both royal and colonial governments gave them favoured posi-

tions in the military, civil service, and landholding, and they leased their vast estates to middlemen, particularly Nairs (Dale, 1980). The enduring caste hierarchy rules prevented Syrian Christians and upper-class Ezhavas from enjoying full ceremonial and social equality even after they were granted access to missionary education and colonial support (Jeffrey, 1992).

Communities that were economically and socially marginalised, such as the Mappila Muslims, Pulayas, Cherumars, and Parayas, were at the bottom of this hierarchy. Geographic segregation, untouchability, unseeability, and restrictions on accessing public transportation and temples were all problems for these populations. Their marginal status was sustained by systematic spatial and ritual exclusion in addition to poverty, which strengthened their symbolic and material subordination (Dale, 1980; Heller, 1999).

The broader agrarian system was also heavily feudal, with thousands of tenants, many of whom belonged to religious minorities or peasant castes working in oppressive conditions. Legal acknowledgement was lacking for leaseholders, and privileged castes held the majority of land rights. The Malabar region, which was a part of the British-ruled Madras Presidency, was especially perilous for Mappila Muslims. Many people see their many uprisings, most notably the 1921 Mappila Revolt, as a multifaceted expression of class, religious, and anti-colonial dissatisfaction (Miller, 1976).

Early social reform movements, spearheaded by individuals like Sree Narayana Guru, Ayyankali, and groups like the SNDP Yogam and Pulaya Mahasabha, arose in the early 20th century, parallel to these fault lines. These campaigns demanded rights to land, government jobs, education, and access to temples, challenging caste-based exclusions (Jeffrey, 1992; Hardgrave, 1969). These activities established the popular and intellectual foundation for political change by utilising the language of social justice, self-respect, and human equality (Panikkar, 2002).

At the same time, class-based movements emerged, providing a forum that recognised the connection between caste, socioeconomic status, and political marginalisation. For example, the economi-

cally successful but socially marginalised Ezhavas were major players in communist organising in Travancore and Cochin (Franke & Chasin, 1994). Dalit and Muslim communities, who saw in Marxist platforms an alternative to both religious hierarchy and elite-nationalist paternalism, were drawn to the promise of land reform, labour dignity, and economic justice in addition to the working castes (Heller, 1999).

Kerala, before communism, was therefore a highly stratified environment of caste-generated inequality entwined with economic domination and ceremonial hierarchy rather than a level playing field for class conflict. Communism was able to create a revolutionary political agenda in this fractured environment, converting class exploitation and caste humiliations into mass mobilisation around reformist, secular, and redistributive politics.

3. Communist Mobilisation and Class Formation

The height of anti-colonial agitation in Kerala was accompanied by the rise of the Communist movement in the 1930s and 1940s, although their socioeconomic foundation and ideological stances were very different. In contrast to the Indian National Congress, which primarily reflected urban, upper-caste, and elite interests, the Communist Party of India (CPI) gained support from industrial workers, landless rural poor, and tenant farmers. Many of these individuals were members of historically marginalised castes and religious communities, especially Dalits, Mappila Muslims, and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) (Heller, 1999).

Inspired by Marxist-Leninist doctrine and modified for Kerala's unique caste-class structure, the CPI provided a materialist critique of societal injustices that went beyond identity and ritual status to concentrate on wage labour, property relations, and exploitation. Disenfranchised populations who had experienced both economic and sociocultural oppression found immediate connection with this ideological realignment (Panikkar, 2002).

3.1 The Organisational Infrastructure of Mobilisation

The Communist movement in Kerala was founded on grassroots organisational structures that allowed for popular mobilisation, local leadership development, and ongoing ideological

education rather than only spreading through propaganda or election campaign rhetoric. Among these cars were:

- **Kisan Sabhas (Peasant Unions):** These served as platforms for tenant farmers resisting illegal evictions, exploitative rent practices, and landlord control. The All-India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) and regional adaptations sharpened class consciousness in agrarian regions like Malabar and Palakkad (George, 1990).
- **Karshaka Sanghams (Farmers' Collectives):** These village-level organisations served to defend local interests and foster class solidarity. They provided a crucial bridge between informal rural protests and the more disciplined CPI party structure (Herring, 1983).
- **Trade Unions and Labour Federations:** In semi-urban hubs like Alappuzha, Ernakulam, and Kollam, unions affiliated with the Communists organised workers in sectors such as coir, beedi, and cashews. These movements introduced a new idiom of political expression for wage labourers, many of whom were women, religious minorities, and Dalits (Franke & Chasin, 1994).

Class consciousness was co-produced via lived struggle as a result of the implementation of bottom-up mobilisation techniques through these networks. By dismantling caste barriers and fostering new kinds of solidarity, these institutions evolved into more than just instruments for electoral mobilisation; they were also centres of political education and social change (Devika, 2020).

3.2 Malabar as a Hotbed of Agrarian Class Militancy

The Malabar region quickly became a centre for Communist mobilisation due to its unique political economy, which was influenced by colonial land tenure, Jenmi domination, and the marginalisation of Muslim tenants. Due to their lengthy history of social marginalisation and economic exploitation, Mappila Muslims were positioned to play a significant role in the early agrarian class movements (Dale, 1980).

Initial campaigns focused on:

- Legal security for tenancy
- Equitable crop-sharing systems
- Resistance to bonded labour and mass evictions

A sizable base of Muslim labourers and peasants who had previously identified with their religion started to identify with their common oppression as a class as a result of this mobilisation. The political landscape of northern Kerala was significantly altered by this shift in political subjectivity (Osella & Osella, 2008).

3.3 Linking Economic Issues with Social Dignity

Framing economic problems as connected to social dignity was a key characteristic of Kerala's Communist mobilisation. By establishing new standards of value based on labour, equality, and justice, Communist language and programs undermined ceremonial hierarchies in a society where caste controlled not only occupation but also personal status, social relationships, and daily space (Parayil, 2000).

The early Communist movement established a counter-hegemonic rhetoric that gave subaltern voices new agency in public life by repoliticizing poverty, humiliation, and exclusion via a rights-based lexicon and moral framework. The CPI's electoral victory in 1957, when class-oriented mobilisation was formally defined into governance and policy, was made possible by these early political underpinnings.

4. Land Reform as Democratic Class Restructuring

The 1957 passage of the Agrarian Relations Bill, one of India's first and most ambitious initiatives to enact land reform through a constitutional, as opposed to insurrectionary, framework, was a pillar of the first Communist cabinet in Kerala, which was headed by E.M.S. Namboodiripad. Deep agricultural disparities rooted in Kerala's semi-feudal landholding patterns, where a small number of upper-caste elites controlled almost all labour, land, and rural society, were intended to be addressed by the measure (Herring, 1983).

The legislation had three central objectives:

- The abolition of landlordism and exploitative tenancy arrangements;
- The protection of tenant rights through security of tenure and legal recognition;
- The redistribution of surplus land to the landless and marginal cultivators, many from historically oppressed communities (Franke & Chasin, 1994).

Most importantly, the bill aimed to democratize class relations and establish the state as a social justice actor. It symbolised a shift from redistributive citizenship to ceremonial hierarchy.

4.1 Undermining Caste-Based Feudal Dominance

Upper-caste Jenmis, such as Namboodiri Brahmins, Nair nobles, and Syrian Christian elites, historically controlled Kerala's pre-reform agrarian economy. While lower-caste groups like OBCs, Dalits, and Mappila Muslims worked as insecure tenant farmers or agricultural labourers without ownership rights, they owned sizable estates under the janmam (absolute ownership) tenure system (Panikkar, 2002). By establishing land limitations, eliminating inherited landlord privileges, and acknowledging the legal rights of tillers, the Agrarian Relations Bill challenged this monopoly.

The Communist regime undermined the symbolic and economic foundation of caste domination in this way. Traditional power structures in both economic and ceremonial spheres were upended by the change in land ownership, which helped Kerala's rural society to change (Jeffrey, 1992).

4.2 Empowering Marginalised Agrarian Classes

Tenants and landless labourers from groups traditionally excluded from land ownership, Mappila Muslims in Malabar, Ezhava farmers in Travancore and Cochin, and Dalit agricultural workers throughout the state were the main beneficiaries of land reform (Dale, 1980). The changes offered tangible underpinnings for civic and political engagement by ensuring tenancy protection or transforming insecure tenants into small proprietors.

The effects went beyond the economy. Kisan Sabhas and Karshaka Sanghams, two mass organisations connected to the CPI, were frequented by many of these recently empowered citizens. By connecting livelihood stability and civic involvement, land reform thereby solidified a new participatory political class (Isaac & Franke, 2000).

4.3 Crafting a New Electoral Base

Another political purpose of land reform was strategic. The CPI and later CPI(M) fostered a devoted, agrarian-based voting bloc by dispersing land and acknowledging the rights of tenants. In rural and semi-urban areas, this new class of beneficiaries, many of whom were politically marginalised under governments led by Congress, became the core of Left support (Heller, 1999).

In this way, land reform evolved into a democratic mass incorporation method. By establishing a connection between political legitimacy and economic fairness, it allowed the Communist cause to expand its support base while upholding its ideological principles.

4.4 Legacy and Long-Term Outcomes

The 1957-1959 reforms, which are frequently hailed as the "Kerala Model," set the foundation for Kerala's development trajectory. Strong links between land reforms and measures of human development have been found by scholars, including:

- Increases in literacy and school attendance, bolstered by agrarian stability;
- Decreased fertility rates and improved maternal and child health outcomes;
- The democratisation of local governance and enhanced political awareness (Parayil, 2000).

What started out as an agricultural reform turned into a social and political revolution. Land now functioned as a gateway to recognition, rights, and dignity rather than just as capital. The reform shifted Kerala's political culture toward more inclusive and redistributive goals by ending the upper-caste elites' monopoly over land and municipal governance.

Ultimately, it is impossible to see Kerala's land reform in a vacuum because it served as the cornerstone for the state's democratic social class reconstruction. Redistribution and representation became mutually reinforcing within the participatory framework it developed.

5. Caste Inclusion Without Caste-Blindness

Despite their ideological commitment to economic redistribution and class conflict, Kerala's Communist movement did not embrace a caste-blind socialist paradigm. Rather, Left leaders, especially those from the CPI and later the CPI(M), created a context-sensitive strategy that saw caste as a material reality that intersected with class in important areas like social mobility, labour segmentation, and land ownership, rather than as a simple superstructure (Herring, 1983).

The Kerala Left incorporated caste-conscious interventions into a larger redistributive framework, departing from traditional Marxist interpretations that viewed caste as residual or epiphenomenal. This pragmatic revisionism became a hallmark of the Left Democratic Front (LDF) government in Kerala, particularly after the establishment of the first Communist ministry in 1957.

5.1 Caste-Conscious Measures in a Class-Based Framework

Certain caste-sensitive policies were folded into the class-centric welfare framework of the LDF to structurally address entrenched inequalities:

- Reservation policies in education and public employment were not only upheld but expanded for Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and Other Backwards Classes (OBCs), reinforcing affirmative action as a redistributive mechanism (Jeffrey, 1992).
- Caste-based cooperatives were fostered across sectors such as agriculture, fisheries, and artisan trades. These cooperatives offered marginalised communities access to credit, inputs, and markets, while also functioning as platforms for socio-political participation (Isaac & Franke, 2002).
- The challenge of Dalit landlessness was explicitly addressed in later CPI(M) governance through targeted allocation of surplus land and housing assistance, moving beyond rhetoric toward meaningful redistribution (Franke & Chasin, 1994).

Through the incorporation of caste-conscious mechanisms into its reforms centred on class, the Left developed a multi-layered redistribution model that acknowledged inequality as both identity-based

and structural.

5.2 Disrupting Elite Domination Through Grassroots Representation

The Left also broke the upper-caste elites' monopoly in civil, bureaucratic, and electoral institutions, restructuring political representation. Leaders from SC/ST and OBC groups fostered political engagement through mass organisations such as local panchayats, trade unions, and Kisan Sabhas (Heller, 1999). Importantly, these leaders were actively involved in allocating resources and formulating policies rather than being merely regarded as figureheads.

Decentralised funding and decision-making power allowed villages and subaltern communities to truly manage development agendas during the People's Planning Campaign (1996-2001), which accelerated this change (Parayil, 2000).

The Left also escaped the pitfalls of populism based on caste. Devika (2020) refers to this as "solidaristic representation", a more profound participatory paradigm that emphasises justice, representation, and mutual recognition instead of using caste identities as a tool for vote-bank politics.

5.3 Pragmatic Inclusivity: Balancing Class Solidarity with Caste Justice

The term "pragmatic inclusivity" appropriately describes this context-specific approach to caste. This approach, which was rooted in class conflict but was adaptable enough to take into account caste-based injustice, helped Kerala's Communists stay away from two ideological extremes:

- The Congress model, which largely tokenised caste through elite co-optation;
- Narrow identity politics, which often re-inscribe caste boundaries while neglecting economic injustice.

Rather, by combining affirmative action, redistributive policies, and participatory public institutions, the Left in Kerala co-articulated caste and class (Panikkar, 2002). Instead of eliminating caste, the result was a unique form of political mobilisation that reframed its

significance in the context of a larger egalitarian and developmental narrative.

The Left was able to create a long-lasting and inclusive social coalition thanks to this synthesis, which also helped Kerala stand out in India, where caste-based populism and communal exclusion are still frequently used as primary election tactics.

6. Building Cross-Class, Cross-Religious Coalitions: Material Inclusivity and Secular Mobilisation

One of the most important but little-studied aspects of Kerala's Left politics is its ongoing capacity to rally and hold onto the support of religious minorities, especially Christians and Muslims, within a secular, class-based political agenda. Unlike the prevailing paradigms of Indian electoral politics, which frequently use sectarian identities as tools for polarisation or elite co-optation, Kerala's Left parties, primarily the Communist Party of India (CPI) and later the CPI(M), adopted a coalition strategy based on material considerations. With its foundation in shared socio-economic interests and developmental commitments rather than tokenistic representation, this strategy embodied a unique political formation: a cross-class, cross-religious alliance (Bhargava, 2010; Devika, 2021).

This alliance's history was influenced by both collaboration and conflict. The state's educational and land reforms were resisted by Christian clergy and some Muslim organisations siding with the Congress party and Hindu upper-caste elites during the notable Vimochana Samaram (1959), a right-wing mobilisation against Kerala's first elected Communist government (George, 1990; Jeffrey, 1978). Religious minorities' concerns about government interference in schools run by churches and their general opposition to agricultural restructuring were mirrored in these mobilisations. Nevertheless, the long-term development of Kerala's political economy, especially after the 1970s, favoured tactical convergence between the Left and religious minority groups in spite of this early hostility.

This political realignment was centred on Left-led welfare and redistributive programs that disproportionately benefited parts of Latin and Syrian Christians living in rural and semi-urban areas, as

well as backward caste Muslims, particularly in the Malabar region. It had a very materialist agenda. Programs were created to promote minority employment, increase access to education, broaden land tenure rights, and create specialised bureaucratic organisations like the Minority Welfare Department (Government of Kerala, 2021; Kerala State Planning Board, 2019). The Left positioned itself as a promoter of developmental citizenship, where minority inclusion was expressed through rights-based entitlements rather than symbolic gestures, rather than appealing to religious sensibilities.

Symbolic policy actions targeting communities of religious minorities further strengthened the alliance's resilience. In honour of Kerala's first Muslim chief minister, the C.H. Mohammed Koya Scholarship offered financial aid to Muslim students from low-income families, greatly boosting enrollment and retention in postsecondary education (Jaffrelot & Thomas, 2012). Similar to this, the Left Democratic Front (LDF) governments' Kaivalya Skill Development Programs sought to alleviate labour market exclusions by giving minority youth entrepreneurial and vocational skills that were in line with Kerala's changing economy. Collectively, these programs served as vital tools for social mobility, changing the state's clientelist approach to minorities to a rights-based developmental agreement.

A new political subjectivity that combined egalitarian goals with community-based advancement was created among Kerala's minorities as a result of this class-sensitive yet caste- and religion-aware system of administration. The Communists reduced the hostile logic that frequently defines identity politics by integrating minority welfare into larger redistributive and participatory development agendas, especially through grassroots organisations like grama sabhas and local planning boards. The CPI(M) synthesised caste and religion into a multi-layered policy framework that permitted intersectional inclusivity without sacrificing ideological coherence, as Devika (2021) and Rajan (2009) contend.

Thus, in terms of democratic mobilisation, this coalition strategy represents a theoretical intervention into more general discussions about class vs identity. The Kerala experience shows that mate-

rial redistribution can promote the formation of multi-ethnic, multi-religious coalitions, specifically when supported by sustained state investment in secularism, welfare, and participatory governance practices. This goes against the notion that class and religious identity are incompatible axes of political representation.

All things considered, Kerala's Communist-led integration of Muslims and Christians into a secular class coalition is a unique example of non-identitarian minority politics in postcolonial India. It also provides a replicable model of inclusive developmental governance, in which communal polarisation is lessened through the strategic alignment of rights, resources, and representation. Kerala serves as an example of how, with sustained public investment in health, education, and institutional inclusion, the material basis of politics can transcend identity-based fragmentation, allowing for a more substantive and democratic secularism.

7. Decentralisation and Participation: Institutionalising Inclusive Democracy through the People's Planning Campaign

Launched in 1996 by the Left Democratic Front (LDF) government led by the CPI(M) in Kerala, the People's Planning Campaign (PPC) is one of the most extensive and comprehensive attempts at participatory governance in the Global South. It signified a dramatic change from bureaucratic service delivery and top-down planning to a decentralised paradigm that empowered local self-governments and ingrained democratic engagement at the local level (Isaac & Franke, 2000).

Both political need and intellectual dedication were the driving forces behind this change. To maintain its redistributive vision under a neoliberal environment, Kerala's Left administration employed decentralisation as a political tactic as well as an administrative solution in the 1990s when faced with the limitations of economic liberalisation and diminishing central fiscal transfers. By giving elected officials at the district, block, and panchayat levels control over around 35-40% of the state's development budget, the PPC put the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments into effect. These organisations were given permission to organise, finance, and carry out neighbourhood

welfare initiatives (Isaac & Franke, 2000; Heller, Harilal, & Chaudhuri, 2007).

At the heart of the PPC were institutional mechanisms designed to empower marginalised communities, including:

- Grama sabhas (village assemblies) that enabled direct participation of citizens particularly women, Dalits, and lower-income groups in development planning.
- Beneficiary committees and neighbourhood groups that institutionalised representation for working-class and landless populations.
- Community audits that enhanced transparency and social accountability in public spending and service delivery.

This paradigm served as a vehicle for coalitional transformation in addition to decentralising power. It permanently and systematically included the voices of traditionally marginalised socioeconomic groups, particularly women, Dalits, Adivasis, and informal labourers, into the policy-making process (Heller et al., 2007).

Academics have considered the PPC to be an Indian version of "deep democracy," in which the legitimacy of the democratic process was expanded to encompass continuous practices of inclusion, deliberation, and co-governance in addition to election cycles (Harriss, 2005). PPC changed from being an administrative exercise in public sector efficiency to a radical political enterprise that, by tying everyday life to institutional power, revitalised Leftward mass mobilisation, especially among marginalised caste and gender groups.

The PPC also had a long-lasting feedback effect on the formation of electoral coalitions, which is significant. Local political identities and leadership chances, particularly for Dalit, OBC, and female representatives, were devolved along with economic resources and implementation authority through decentralisation. This made it possible for the CPI(M) to formalise support throughout regional political boundaries, establishing a kind of daily hegemony that persisted long after official election cycles ended.

Labour unions, cooperative societies, and Left-affiliated mass organisations like Kudumbashree, a well-known women's self-help organisation, all continue to exist as a result of this hegemonic presence. Even under shifting political regimes, these groups continue to have a significant influence on developmental goals and are deeply ingrained in Kerala's social infrastructure.

The People's Planning Campaign, in conclusion, is a prime example of Kerala's Left's exceptional capacity to convert ideological pledges into institutional design. As a revolutionary effort of participatory democracy, intersectional inclusiveness, and developmental justice, it stands beyond simply being a decentralisation experiment. In a divided and unequal society, the PPC has emerged as a key tenet of Kerala's long-lasting coalitional politics, demonstrating how significant decentralisation may support more general objectives of redistribution, participation, and structural inclusion.

8. Outcome: Electoral Durability Through Ethical and Embedded Developmentalism

A unique accomplishment in Indian political history is the Left Democratic Front's (LDF) long-term tenacity, especially under the leadership of the Communist Party of India (Marxist). This is an instance of a coalition led by Communists not only surviving but also adapting, growing, and winning elections through inclusive governance and democratic methods. By fostering moral legitimacy among historically marginalised communities, institutional embeddedness, and adaptive programmatic governance, Kerala's Left has maintained electoral competitiveness and ideological centrality, in contrast to most other regions of the nation where Communist movements either withered or became peripheral (Prashad, 2007).

Three interdependent features explain this electoral durability:

- Consistent provision of material welfare, such as guarantees of employment, universal access to public healthcare, and education, strengthened the support of women, religious minorities, and the working classes.
- Material assistance was consistently provided, including universal access to public healthcare, education, and job guarantees, which

united the support of women, religious minorities, and the working classes.

- A long-standing reputation for moral leadership, characterised by a leadership culture of responsibility and austerity, a comparatively low number of significant corruption scandals, and a close relationship with grassroots movements (Prashad, 2007).

The LDF has remained firmly established in decentralised organisations, including panchayats, municipalities, cooperatives, and welfare boards, even during times of state-level election defeat. Between election cycles, the Left has maintained its influence in discourse, policy, and grassroots organisation because of this decentralised infrastructure, which has functioned as a parallel domain of political and social reproduction (Parayil, 2000).

These organisations serve as both political pedagogy and mobilisation hubs in addition to being administrative shells. Cooperative movements, unions, student federations, and women's collectives like Kudumbashree have all strengthened the CPI(M)'s practical approach to daily life. Despite shifting electoral environments, the Communists have been able to continuously replicate their social base thanks to their ideological embeddedness.

Kerala's ethical developmentalism model, which combines high social spending with participatory governance, has been so successful politically that even opposing parties have been compelled to acknowledge the welfare consensus that underpins it. Kerala's socioeconomic trajectory, which has been significantly influenced by decades of Left-leaning governance, displays a structural and normative alignment around redistributive justice, in contrast to ideological pendulum movements in other Indian states.

This resilience calls into question long-held political theory presumptions that socialism in liberal democracies is essentially self-depleting or transitional. Instead of fading over time, Kerala's communism developed by establishing its tenets within institutional structures as opposed to relying either on charismatic leadership or widespread mobilisation. It transformed political theory into a dynamic system of responsibility, redistribution, and participation.

The CPI(M)'s project in Kerala is therefore more than just a holdover from early trade union mobilisation or land reform. Ethical developmentalism can ensure legitimacy and longevity within democratic governance's procedural structures by demonstrating that it is a viable socialist governing paradigm that is both practically adaptive and normatively resilient.

9. Conclusion

Kerala's political history presents a convincing argument against widely held beliefs that class-based mobilisation, democratic pluralism, and socialist governance are incompatible in hierarchical societies. This study showed that the Communist movement's capacity to modify Marxist theories to fit local histories of caste dominance, religious plurality, and agrarian oppression is just as important to its long-term success in Kerala as its ideological fervour. Kerala's Left created a governance architecture that included social justice, democratic participation, and material redistribution into the day-to-day operations of the state through a special fusion of radical reform and institutional pragmatism.

Beginning with a highly hierarchical socioeconomic structure characterised by communal marginalisation, feudal land relations, and dominance of Brahminical rituals, the early Communist movement transformed the complaints of Muslim tenants, Dalit labourers, and landless peasants into a broad coalition for structural change. In addition to destroying the economic underpinnings of upper-caste hegemony, historic interventions like the 1957 Agrarian Relations Bill also contributed to the emergence of a new class of politicised citizen-subjects. The Left empowered subaltern social groups to influence development from below by transforming governance into a participatory process through the People's Planning Campaign.

The Left in Kerala, crucially, fought against the drawbacks of vote-bank identity politics as well as the constraints of a class-blind orthodoxy. Rather, it adopted a strategy known as "pragmatic inclusivity," which incorporated policies considering caste and religion into a larger class-based welfare and development agenda. This allowed for the formation of cross-religious and cross-class coalitions, particularly

between Muslims and Christians, who were given platforms for real progress through focused programs and participation in institutions rather than just symbolic accommodations.

As a result, Kerala's Left has maintained normative legitimacy in addition to electoral endurance, cultivating a political culture based on ethics, accountability, and grassroots involvement. Its accomplishment is the transformation of redistribution into representation and coalition into governance, which has not been accomplished in many other democratic contexts. Kerala serves as an example of how social diversity, socialism, and secularism can all be incorporated into a cohesive and long-lasting political plan.

Kerala's experiment with left-wing democratic administration serves as a globally applicable paradigm at a time when many democracies are finding it difficult to deal with growing inequality and polarised identities. It demonstrates how even the most hierarchically divided societies may be reorganised into democratic, egalitarian, and participatory polities when ideology is mediated through inclusive institutions and responsive welfare frameworks.

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