

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

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Human beings are thoroughly diverse. We differ from each other not only in external characteristics (e.g. in inherited fortunes, in the natural and social environment in which we live), but also in our personal characteristics (e.g. age, sex, proneness to illness, physical and mental abilities). The assessment of the claims of equality has to come to terms with the existence of pervasive human diversity.

-Amartya Sen (1992:1)

1.1 Introduction

Economic development and the quantification of development progress has been the principal matter of concern for social scientists, policy makers and political leaders for the last several decades. For the earlier socio-economic philosophers, development has been a major concern, which according to them must be evaluated on the basis of how far it has been succeeded in enhancing the quality of human life (UNDP, 1990: 9). However, by the middle of the last century, when Development Economics had emerged as a full-fledged branch of Economic Science, even the experts, not to say about the common person, often failed to recognise this obvious fact. In development debates, income and investment occupied the prime positions and how far they have succeeded in changing human life has been largely ignored. The experiences of several countries during the last century had shown that there is no automatic link between the level of income and the state of human welfare. The realisation about the inadequacies of the income approach or rather the ‘resource centred’ approach, had prompted the socio-economic experts to look for alternative development paradigms, which ultimately led to the emergence of the human development
approach. In simple terms, human development is the process of enlarging the choices open to the people.

The concept of human development, as it is in vogue, owes much to the work of Amartya Sen for its theoretical basis (Fukuda-Parr, 2002: 1). It assumed popularity through the Human Development Reports (HDRs), published annually since 1990 by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). It makes its public appearance in the form of the Human Development Index (HDI), which the HDR team of the UNDP under the leadership of Mahbub ul Haq has devised as a yard-stick of development progress.

1.2 The Problem

Although, Kerala is a small state at the South-West cost of India, which occupies just 1.27% of land area and 3.1% of population\(^1\), it attracted special attention of development economists and policy makers around the globe, than any other part of the developing world. Ever since the introduction of HDRs by the UNDP, Kerala became a common subject of reference in almost every work related to human development. The reason behind this is the spectacular human development achievement of the state with relatively low GDP per capita. The attainments of Kerala in education and health are comparable with the rich industrial nations of the West while her per capita income is in line with the poorest nations in the world. Several studies on human development in India have shown that among the states and union territories of India, Kerala ranks first in terms of various human development indices, while in terms of GDP per capita,

\(^1\) As per Census of India 2001
her rank falls half way down. Hence, Kerala is often cited as a good example by the votaries of the human development paradigm, to show the superiority of HDI over per capita income, as a measure of human progress.

During the 1990s, there have been many efforts to study the disparities in human development among population subgroups in a country. Such subgroups may be defined in terms of characteristics like geographical or administrative regions, rural-urban residence, gender, ethnicity, occupation and so on. One who goes over the relevant literature can locate quite a few significant studies about the interstate disparities in human development in India, although most of them are based on grossly limited databases. In addition to these, several states have made significant efforts to study the intra-state variations in human development also. It may be interesting to note at this point, that even a district in the country—the Idukki District of Kerala—has a Human Development Report to its credit. However, no systematic effort to examine the human development achievements and deprivations of different population subgroups of Kerala was yet to take place when this author has started the current project. Even now it is on the anvil and the report is yet to come out. The present study is a humble attempt to fill this vacuum. It is an enquiry into the regional disparities in human development in the state.

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3 In 1995, the Madhya Pradesh Government has made the pioneering effort in this field by publishing the first State Human Development Report in the country. Several states followed suit thereafter and by the end of 2004, as many as 10 State Governments have published their respective State Human Development Reports and some others are expecting a formal release soon.
Human development is a complex and holistic concept and it is still in the process of evolution. There is no unanimity among experts regarding the exact number, nature and system of weighting of indicators to be used for the measurement of human development. The UNDP itself has introduced a number of indices like the Human Development Index (HDI), the Gender-related Development Index (GDI), the Human Poverty Index (HPI) and the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) to study different aspects of human development. The list is almost endless and one can add some other indices too to quantify some other type of achievement or deprivation in human development. As none of these indices are individually capable of providing a comprehensive picture about the human development performance of the population under study, it is necessary to use many indices together to get a good idea about the nature and extend of inequalities and deprivations in human development. Further, the problem of regional disparities in human development must be addressed in terms of over-all, gender-wise, and caste-wise achievements and deprivations, to the extent data are available. Hence, we set the hypothesis that there is no regional disparity in Kerala, as far as each of the above component indices are concerned, which ultimately lead us to the broad hypothesis that negates the existence of regional disparity in human development in Kerala.

1.3 The Objectives

The main objectives of the proposed research work are:

1. To improve the measurement of human development by analysing the weaknesses of existing indicators of human development and attempting to suggest alternatives.
2. To get an idea about the nature and extent of regional disparities in human development in Kerala with special emphasis to gender and ethnicity.

3. To understand the methodological problems in the study of regional human development of Kerala.

4. To suggest remedial measures to the problems identified in 1 to 3 above.

1.4 The Methodology

Human development is rather a qualitative phenomenon than quantitative. But its assessment involves quantification. Therefore, the research methodology employed is a combination of qualitative and quantitative techniques. The basic model used for analysis is more or less the same as that underlies the UNDP HDRs. However, modifications of the basic model are attempted at.

From the very outset, it should be noted that dividing the state of Kerala into a few well-defined regions is difficult, owing to her geographic, climatic and demographic compactness. Considering the various features of the state, difficulties of regionalisation, purpose of the study and availability of data, a three-stage classification was used for the state as a whole. To begin with, an administrative classification was used, in which the fourteen districts of Kerala were considered as separate regions. The fourteen administrative regions were then regrouped into three historical regions, on the basis of the political regimes under which they remained pre-independence and pre-state formation periods. The three regions were Malabar, Cochin and Travancore. Yet another

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5 The fourteen districts of Kerala, arranged from North to South are Kasargod, Kannur, Wayanad, Kozhikode, Malappuram, Palakkad, Thrissur, Ernakulam, Idukki, Kottayam, Alappuzha, Pathanamthitta, Kollam and Thiruvananthapuram.

6 The six northern districts from Kasargod to Palakkad constituted the Malabar region, Thrissur and Ernakulam constituted Cochin region and the six remaining districts formed Travancore region.
classification was also used in which the state as a whole was divided into two broad regions—the North and the South; the former coinciding with the Malabar region and the latter was the combine of the Cochin and Travancore regions. In addition to these, a three fold classification into lowland, midland and highland regions, on the basis of geographical elevation, had been used for the sample study.

Sample selection was based on judgement random sampling method. To facilitate a meaningful comparison, it was decided to obtain the low, mid and highland samples from the same district. The plan was to identify the three categories of Panchayats in the district, to select two Panchayats from each category and to take seventy-five households from each of the selected Panchayats. Kollam, being a district with typical stretches of these three categories of areas, had been chosen as the sample district. As per the *Land Resources of Kerala State*, areas having altitude up to 7.5 meters above the Mean See Level (MSL) are considered as lowland areas, whereas areas with altitude higher than seventy-five meters above MSL are treated as highland areas. Areas falling between 7.5 meters and seventy-five meters of MSL are termed as midland areas. Utmost care had been exercised while selecting the sample Panchayats, so that they truly represent the generally known features of the respective geographical regions to which they belong. The selected Panchayats were Chavara and Panmana from the lowland region, Vettikkavala and Kareepra from the midland region and Aryankavu and Thenmala from the highland region. Thereafter, seventy-five adjacent households from an area that could be considered as a cross-section of the Panchayat were taken as final sample units, in
consultation with local people and Panchayat authorities. The sample households
were taken from Ward III of Chavara, Ward VII of Panmana, Ward V of
Vettikkavala, Ward VIII of Kareepra, Ward IV of Aryankavu, and Ward II of
Thenmala. Thus the sample contained 450 households in total, 150 each from the
lowland, midland and the highland regions.

The biggest hurdle in a study relating to human development is the
adequate availability of appropriate data. This study employs both primary and
secondary sources. Primary data were collected from a sample survey conducted
among 450 households in six Panchayats of Kollam District of Kerala, as
explained above, using a structured questionnaire. The survey was conducted
during October-December, 2000. The household questionnaire is reproduced in
Appendix III. Before using the survey instrument for the actual survey, it was
tested by conducting a pilot survey among twenty-five households in Kottangal
Panchayat of Pathanamthitta district in Kerala. In addition to the household
survey, data were collected from the official records of local self-government
agencies and the offices of the health, education, police and a few other
government departments. Similarly, data from the publications of international
agencies like the UNDP, the ILO and the UNICEF, Central and State Government
agencies like the Office of the Registrar General of India, the NSSO, the
Department of Economics and Statistics and various other Departments were also
used. In addition to these, a few internet data sources were also used. The
tabulation of the household questionnaire was done with CSPro 2.2, a free software downloaded from the website of the US Census Bureau.⁷

1.5 A Brief Review of Literature

The available literature relating to this study may be broadly classified into three groups—works relating to theoretical and methodological aspects of human development, works discussing about the human development position of Kerala in relation to the rest of India and other parts of the world, and works dealing with the human development performance of regions and population subgroups in the state of Kerala.

There is an extensively large volume of resources in the first category. The HDRs published annually by the UNDP may be the most significant among them. The first report in this series, HDR 1990, gives a brief but clear review of the antecedents of the human development paradigm. Mahbub ul Haq’s *Reflections on Human Development* is another important work dealing with the need and advantages of the ‘human centred’ approach to development in relation to the ‘resource centred’ approach. However, the most remarkable landmarks in the evolution of the human development approach are the two works of Amartya Sen (1985, 1987). Similarly Morris (1977) must be regarded as yet another landmark in the transition from the resource centred approach to the human centred approach. Cobb, Halstead and Rowe (1995) and Cobb, Goodman and Wackernagel (1999) provide brilliant treatment of the drawbacks of the GDP approach. The technical and methodological details of the various indices of human development can be seen in the Technical Notes provided in various

⁷ The software has been downloaded from <http://www.census.gov/ipc/www/cspro>
HDRs. Anand and Sen (1994, 2000) also provide valuable information on these matters. In addition to these, the large number of background papers prepared by the UNDP in connection with the preparation the HDRs, provide a good amount of information on various theoretical and empirical aspects of human development and related concepts.

One of the strongest methodological criticisms against the UNDP approach to human development can be found in Castles (2000a and b). Many of these and some other criticisms are analysed and answered by the Friends of the Chair of the United Nations Statistical Commission (2000). Murray (1991) discusses the data constraints relating to the computation of HDIs and recommends that “human development is too important to monitor and evaluate to allow data limitations to wholly prevent attempts at measurement”. Emes and Hahn (2001) not only pointed out some important limitations of the HDI, but also developed an alternative measure called the Index of Human Progress, which according to them is superior to the HDI.

There is a reasonable volume of literature in the second category also. A state-wise comparison of HDI for India has been made by A. K. Sivakumar in 1991. He also computed the GDI for Indian states in 1996(a). Shivakumar (1996b) makes a comparison of Indian states in terms of human development deprivation. Aggarwal (1996) has conducted a study on the aggregated and disaggregated data on India’s human development since independence. The book, *Human Development: An Indian Perspective*, edited by K. L. Dalal discusses the various aspects of human development and deprivation in the Indian context. Shariff and Srinivasan (1997) present a fairly good picture of the various aspects

Useful information about the isolated aspects of development achievements and deprivations of Kerala as a whole and also of her constituent population sub-groups, are available in fairly good quantity. For instance, quite a good number of scholars, have discussed about the mismatch between Kerala’s economic development and social development, in different contexts. Kannan (1990 and 1999), Heller (1995), etc., belong to this category. Ibid, Kannan (1999) holds public intervention and female development as the pillars of Kerala’s achievements in poverty alleviation and improvements in human capabilities, vis-à-vis six Asian countries and the rest of India. However, Taramangalam (1998) views public intervention with apprehension and is pessimistic about the future of ‘Kerala Model’ of development. Franke and Chasin (1998), on the contrary, have an opposite view and are quite optimistic about the future of ‘Kerala Model’.

Ramachandran (1996) makes a fine review of various aspects of Kerala’s development and related literature. His work heavily depends on the hundreds of papers presented in the International Congress on Kerala Studies organised by the A. K. G. Centre for Research and Studies, Thiruvananthapuram in 1994. The abstracts of papers presented in this Congress have been published in five volumes, which is a rare collection of information about a wide verity of aspects of Kerala’s socio-economic development (A. K. G. Centre, 1994). Similarly, there are many studies dealing with the development progress of special target groups
and selected localities in the state. For instance, different aspects of the development and backwardness of the feminine gender have been addressed by Damayanthi (1999), Pushpangadan and Murugan (2000) and Eapen and Kodoth (2002). Radha and Chowdhury (2002) and Lakshmy Devi (2002) have addressed the empowerment aspect of female development. Krishnakumar (2001), which deals with the quality of life of low income groups and Zachariah (2001), which discusses the demographic and socio-economic transition of Syrian Christians of Kerala are two other examples of studies relating to the development of special target groups.

When it comes to the question of relevant literature on intra-state patterns of human development in Kerala, the picture becomes bleak. The only commendable attempt in this category has been the work by M. A. Oommen (1996). Although it is a national level study carried out with severely confined data, it gives district level HDI values for the state. However, compared to the UNDP method, he has employed a slightly different set of indicators for arriving at the HDI values. As part of his study about rural literacy in Kerala, Joseph A. Thomas also has computed the HDIs for ten districts of Kerala, using 1991 data.

1.6 Importance of the Study

The study is significant due to a number of reasons.

1. Human development is an evolutionary concept which is steadily progressing as a viable and valuable alternative to the income approach to development. Application of its analytical tools to widely different empirical situations will provide useful insights into their strengths and weaknesses, which in turn will provide room for improvisation.
2. As UNDP is regularly preparing HDIs for every country in the world since 1990, the regional HDIs will facilitate international comparison of the degree of development of different localities in the state.

3. Kerala is generally considered as a compact unit of nearly homogeneous development pattern. The current study will be useful in verifying its truth.

4. The construction and comparison of local level HDIs for Kerala are of great significance today in the light of the ongoing People’s Planning in the state.

5. A study of this kind will provide valuable insights into the data problems associated with the construction of disaggregated HDIs in the state of Kerala.

6. As it is an area where not much empirical works have been taken place, the present study has academic as well as practical significance.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

The present study has a few notable limitations. First, nowhere in the world data relating to human development indicators are cent percent adequate and accurate and the situation is miserably bad in countries like India. If data on a particular indicator are not available, the researcher may go for a suitable alternative indicator. Further, the component indicators of various HDIs are still under modification and different authors compute HDIs from slightly different indicators and different system of weights. In this study also a few such alterations are found to be necessary. Although utmost care has been taken while making the modifications, it may slightly affect the comparability of the values
computed with the corresponding values obtained elsewhere. This, however, need not affect the conclusions of this study. Further, this study lacks a thorough assessment of the disparities in human development progress of regions overtime due to the difficulty of obtaining adequate data on some variables over a reasonably good period of time.

1.8 Presentation of the Thesis

This thesis is divided in to six chapters. The first chapter introduces the problem of study, states the objectives and research methodology, makes a brief review of related literature, points out the importance and limitations of the study and closes with a description of the chapter division of the thesis. The second chapter is rather theoretical in nature. It deals with the origin, meaning and measurement of human development. It also discusses the limitations of the existing analytical tools of human development and extends recommendations for improvement. Chapter three addresses the broad human development features of Kerala in relation to the rest of the world and particularly in relation to other parts of India. Chapter four discusses the regional disparities in human development in Kerala in terms of conventionally used human development indicators. The fifth chapter is similar to the fourth, except that it deals with the regional disparities in human development in Kerala in terms of some non-conventional indicators. The final chapter is one of synthesis, conclusions and recommendations. It arrives at conclusions and recommendations by synthesising the results of the preceding two chapters. In addition to these, the thesis contains appendices with survey instruments and technical notes.