

"Someone told me that Kerala is one place on earth where the collapse of Communism in East Europe or its degeneration in China has not led to the collapse of the ideology," quips Olle Tornquist, an associate professor at the Department of Government, Development Studies Unit in the Uppsala University of Sweden and a known expert on Kerala development.

Tornquist, who has been closely following Kerala's developmental experience and political transition for the past one decade, was recently in Thiruvananthapuram, after attending the International Conference on Kerala's Development Experience in New Delhi.

In the seventies Olle was doing his PhD thesis on the destruction of the Indonesian Communist Party. His study on Kerala stemmed from the eagerness to see if there were similar problems experienced by other countries also.

"I have come to the conclusion that in the early eighties the old movements in Kerala had come to a dead end. There were no signs of increase in productivity thanks to the land reforms. The old tenants possessed the crop land, but were not much interested in increasing productivity."

Tornquist was convinced that there was little scope for a new start for the Left in Kerala. However, defying his predictions the Left Front won the polls in 1987. He was here during the time and found that new issues had emerged — unemployment and abuse of resources, both in the public and private sectors.

A need was emerging within the traditional movement to do something new. This gave some pragmatic space to renew oriented people within the movement as well as within organisations like Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP). From there onwards there was a restart on some aspects — total literacy campaign and group farming were part of this.

In 1993, Tornquist was here again with a new project. It was an effort to compare over time the importance of democratisation for renewal-oriented popular movements in the comparatively liberal Philippines, the authoritarian Indonesia and democratic Kerala.

In all these places either the



Decentralisation NEED OF THE HOUR

Swedish expert on Kerala development Olle Tornquist says that it is development at the local level that will help the State to progress and prosper. H SHAJI speaks to him

Communist parties collapsed or came to a standstill. Despite the different experiences, there was the same orientation — trying new kind of development in urban as well as rural areas, giving emphasis on democratisation, and yet having some broadly Left-oriented policies.

Tornquist is all praise for the ongoing People's Campaign for the Sixth Plan. Among the development strategists, it is fashionable to talk about decentralisation, emphasising civil society and democratisation. But what the

Planning Board is doing is unique. I have not seen any such imaginative and forceful campaign which involves so many people anywhere else.

However, he is sceptical whether most people in Kerala do understand the enormous potential of the programme. "It may either go wrong or may change the entire political and developmental discourse. It can shake up the centralised bureaucratic system. Thus, it may actually enforce real decentralisation."

Tornquist says his criticism

towards programmes like total literacy campaign, group farming and resource mapping was that without decentralisation one would not get anything substantial out of it.

Whether the traditional politician likes it or not, they will have to call at least 50 to 70 skilled people in each village, he says. He is also hopeful that the programme, in due course, will change the nature of political parties.

On the allegations that the CPM is using the programme for partisan ends, Tornquist says that it is

bound to happen in the initial stages. "Because you will have to give them something to hang on. Also there are sections within the CPM and CPI who are reluctant. So, how can you say at one hand that they are hesitant and on the other hand it is a party-guided programme. And those who are serious about it in the CPM are not going to use it for narrow political gains. Of course it is politics. The politics in it is to open up and make it possible to compete on the basis of constructive development."

"My main concern is that when it comes to implementation, there will have to be a similar strong sustained campaign to help people implement the projects. People should be given local orientation and ideas and not strict guidelines. "All this is going to be troublesome since there is no well-functioning local administration. Work of various well-meaning sections has to be coordinated in such a way that it does not undermine the democratic structure in the panchayats. There should be checks and balances so that private contractors are not coming in. But this will take a long time."

Olle admits that the economic basis of the Kerala model is undermined. "There has to be more production orientation. Though I am not an economist, I fail to see any scope for large scale industrialisation. On the one hand it should be ensured that one has more productive use of land which could be done at the local level. There is also enormous potential in animal husbandry and vegetable production sectors. But it requires institutional check."

It also requires a lot of social contracts between labour and capital and this has to be negotiated in such a way that both sides can live with it. Reasonably conscious labour or civil servant will not stand up for structural changes in Kerala's productive development unless they are guaranteed social security.

"I can give you one example from my own country. In Sweden in the 1980s, the Social Democratic Government with the cooperation of farmers guaranteed basic social security. The rapid economic development was made possible through the cooperation between labour and capital to the benefit of both. This is not to sug-

gest that they had common interests in all lines but it is a combination which was ensured by labour and peasant organisations on the one hand and capital organisations of entrepreneurs on the other.

"So the Kerala model, in terms of social security, is a necessity for a reasonable transmission/transformation of the State. The social and democratic content of it may be an asset in modernising the State."

During his earlier study, Tornquist invited responses from his informers. One of them, K Vijayachandran, a CITU ideologue and now the KSIDC chief, has termed his attempts as pastime of western academics. He even saw the study as part of an attempt to overthrow the leftist movements.

However, Tornquist is optimistic about the Leftists in Kerala. He is against equating the Kerala Communists with the East European Left or the Chinese Communists. "Kerala Communists have been working within a democratic framework for all these years. They are quite pragmatic in their orientation and though they have a highly centralised structure on general questions, there is a lot of space for people to intervene at the local level."

"But there is also a lack of orientation towards local development. To make the party use politics in development, you need external pressure. This should emerge not only from within the party but also from the administrative set-up."

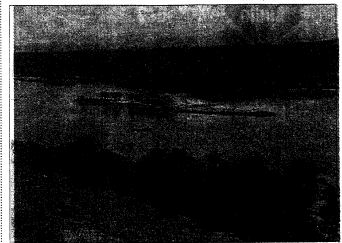
"When people will get more engaged in local development, it will put pressure on politicians to take in people who are development experts and who have skill."

"There is potential for a renewal in the political system. It is not going to happen in a drastic way. It needs pressure from the low level. The survival of Communists in Kerala owes much to the tradition of pressure from below, space for action in society for various initiatives from below."

Olle Tornquist is least bothered about the ideology. "You put any label, Communist or anything, I don't care. I would call it general Left orientation. Of course, for various reasons they will uphold their ideological positions. But that doesn't matter if the real thing is happening at the local level."

Tiny islets ALLURE VISITORS

Photo by PEETHAMBARAN



AT least 10 tiny islets lying between Valappattanam and Parassinkkadavu attract picnickers from various parts of North Malabar.

Valappattanam is just six km from Kannur town on the Kannur-Mangalore national highway. Get down on the Valappattanam bridge from where one can hire country boats to enjoy the alluring beauty of these islets. Barchi, 2 km from the bridge, the longest one in the Malabar region, lies the Bhagat Singh islets. Close to them is the magic isle of Samuel Aron.

The Bhagat Singh islets comprising five tiny isles are full of coconut groves. They also provide a training ground to young toddy tappers who learn their first lessons in this profession from the masters.

The magic isle of Samuel Aron is rich in bio-diversity. The magic well providing pure water during all seasons in a land where only saline water is available and the remnants of the large bungalow once used by Aron attract lots of visitors to this isle.

The Pampuruthy and AKG islets



K A ANTONY

are close by and 10 minute journeys through the Valappattanam river will take one there. Hardly one km on the North of the famous Muthappan Madappura at Parassinkkadavu is the Kothuruthy isle. People on pilgrimage to the Muthappan Madappura often visit these tiny islands which provides them with a good treat to their eyes and ailing minds.

One can also have a look at the Parassinkkadavu Snake Park which is only a stone's throw away from the Muthappan Madappura. One can watch rare species of varieties of snakes, birds and animals. A five-minute drive will take one to the national highway from where one can return to the Valappattanam bridge.

To the northeast of the Kalari vattukkal temple is the Chakkal kottilom, the headquarters of the famous Moorzika dhyana-Malayalam poet Cheruvu, believed to have authored the famous *Krishnagada* during stay at the Chinnakkal kottilom. A five-acre pond and the famous Sreekrishna temple are the other attractions of this place.

Photo by RAMESH CHAMPAKKARA

EMS-ite Thiruvananthapuram
Prasanna (1995-1996)
Selected speeches (Malayalam)

Plastic at your

and careless disposal of toxic and other wastes. The incident in Delhi in November 1994, when over 500 people took ill after inhaling fumes from

