Lessons in Democracy from Kerala State, India
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Richard W. Franke, Professor of Anthropology

1. The Total Literacy Campaign: 1989-91

"Sakshara Keralam, Sundara Keralam—A Literate Kerala is a Beautiful Kerala." Thousands of literacy activists chanted this slogan on January 21, 1989, as they began five simultaneous *jathas* or processions from different parts of Kerala's Ernakulam District. The jatha groups marched for 5 days through villages and urban neighborhoods, stopping at hundreds of reception points to perform songs and street dramas, to hold public discussions and to issue calls to illiterate people to come forward and learn to read. Local communities provided food and lodging for the procession members who included many of Kerala's most famous writers, artists, professors, and university administrators. On arriving in Ernakulam City on January 26, they joined thousands of students and other volunteers in a massive public meeting to light a ceremonial literacy torch and take the literacy pledge:

> I do hereby solemnly pledge that I will do everything within my capacity to liberate my motherland India from illiteracy and to arm the toiling and suffering millions with the weapon of the letter.[1]

The next day the campaign began to mobilize the 50,000 volunteers needed for a one-day survey of all 600,000 households in Ernakulam District. In April another series of jathas was organized, with at least one performance conducted in every village and urban neighborhood. These jathas converged once again in Ernakulam where 250 costumed artists formed an Akshara Chakram, or "Letter Circle." This visual display capped 10 days of dramatic actions that mobilized nearly 22,000 volunteer literacy teachers. Organizers opened an office and—in an act designed to dramatize their commitment—kept it open 24 hours daily until February 4, 1990 when Ernakulam District was declared totally literate.

Classes began in May of 1989. Additional jathas and artistic performances helped create an atmosphere in which illiterates felt they could come forward and join in the classes. After the classes began, literacy walls were set up in each ward of each village and town to give news of the campaign. Literacy banners sprouted throughout the District. Organizers ran a competition for the most attractive banners.[2]

At special events called *Kalamelas*, illiterates were encouraged to come forward and display any talents they had. Many could sing, dance, or recite. The campaign encouraged such activities to bring out the self-esteem and self-awareness of the learners.

Thousands of prizes and certificates were awarded. Teacher training involved additional jathas, performances, and a 3-day formal training session.

Organizers hoped to teach villagers to read in Malayalam—the language of 97% of Kerala's people—at the rate of 30 words per minute, to copy a text at 7 words per minute, to count and write from 1 to 100, to add and subtract 3-digit numbers, and to multiply and divide 2-digit numbers. In minority language areas, the classes were conducted in the local languages, not in Malayalam. Most of the learners were women from the lowest castes and classes. Organizers also hoped to transfer some knowledge about the world through lessons on human basic needs, Kerala and India, public institutions the learners would have to encounter, nutrition, the dignity of work, prevention of disease, equality of the sexes, the need for clean drinking water, India's freedom struggle, the nature of local government, how to use the post office and fair price shops, oral rehydration therapy, how to read a clock, and which immunizations should be given to one's children at what ages. Thirty-seven lessons were given.

The campaign drew inspiration from the ideas of the great Brazilian educator Paulo Freire: take the immediate problems in people's lives as material for literacy training. Readings centered around hunger, poverty, safe food and drinking water, housing, and employment. Many lessons included songs. The health lessons were coordinated with an immunization campaign that eventually led to near 100% levels of protection against measles, tuberculosis, diphtheria, and polio.[3]

Here are a few examples of the test questions to illustrate how Freire was used. When he invented his method in the 1950s, Brazilian peasants and workers found they could learn more quickly when the lessons centered on their feelings of anger and oppression.[4] [Example: favela] In Kerala, the poor have won many recent battles, so the organizers altered Freire's approach, using it primarily to encourage participation and awareness:

1. Janaki gets wages at the rate of 21 rupees per day. How much will she earn for 5 days" work?

2. Gopalan bought 75 roof tiles for his latrine. He can take 5 tiles by headload at a time. How many headloads will he have to carry to take all the tiles?

3. Rat-snake is our friend. Why?

4. What will happen if there are no ration shops and Maveli stores in the country?

5. How is the liquid for oral rehydration therapy prepared?

Perhaps I should help you with questions 3, 4 and 5. Here are the answers from the instructors' guide:

3. The rat-snake is not poisonous. It is harmless to humans. It helps us by eating the rats that harm our crops.

4. Essential articles like rice, sugar, and kerosene are distributed through the

ration shops and Maveli stores at fair prices [about 2/3 of the market price, RWF]. If the stores are closed, common people will suffer hardship.

5. Mix a little salt and a spoonful of sugar in a bowl of rice gruel.

Of 174,000 illiterates identified in the original survey, 135,000 scored over 80% on the test; the other 39,000 failed the test, but gained some literacy skills they could build on in follow-up programs. Volunteerism kept down costs: students became literate for less than US$26 each.[5] The main organization running the campaign, the Kerala People's Science Movement, was awarded the UNESCO literacy prize for 1990.[6]

The campaign was not over. From March 1990 to April 1991, activists extended the Ernakulam District campaign to Kerala's other 13 districts. They mobilized 350,000 teachers, and conducted more jathas, street theater, songs, and contests. In April 1991 Kerala was declared the first state in India to achieve total literacy. Today several Indian states are attempting to copy the Kerala program with varying degrees of success.

2. The Kerala Model

I should try to explain something that might seem strange. Why should people have exerted so much energy to teach the alphabet to 10% of the population that lives in the most literate state in India? And why bring literacy to a lot of poor, old, low-caste women who won't live much longer anyway and who might not do very much with what they have learned?

To answer these questions, we need to understand a phenomenon called the Kerala Model of development. For several years, Kerala has fascinated development experts by its high material quality of life achievements at low levels of per capita income. The evidence for this can be seen on table 1.

As you can see, Kerala in 1997 had a per capita income of $324, just 1.3% of the US average of $28,740. Even when Kerala's lower prices are taken into account—by means of the purchasing power parity—Kerala's people have only 5% of what Americans live on. But compared to the US, Kerala has 100% of the literacy, 80-90% of life expectancy, infant mortality within 6 per thousand, and a birth rate within 2 per thousand. As you can see from the table, India and other countries designated as low income by the World Bank do not come close to Kerala.

Table 1: Comparison of Quality of Life Indicators, 1990s

Indicator	Kerala	India	Low-Income Countries[a]	United States
Per capita GNP in US dollars (1997)	$324[b]	$390	$350	$28,740
At Purchasing power parity (PPP) (1997)[d]	$1,371	$1,650	$1,400	$28,740
Adult literacy rate as percent of total adults				
Males	94[c]	65[f]	65	96
Females	87[c]	38[f]	41	96
Scheduled caste females (1991)	74	24	--	--
Scheduled tribe females (1991)	51	18	--	--
Life expectancy in years				
Males	67[e]	62[f]	58[f]	74
Females	72[e]	63[f]	60[f]	80
Infant mortality per 1,000 (1996)	13	65	80	7
Rural (1991)	15	82		
Urban (1991)	7	45		
Birth rate per 1,000	18[e]	29[e]	40[g]	16[g]

Sources: GOK 1995b:3; GOK 1998:11, 101; Bose 1991; World Bank 1999:187, 190, 192, 202; World Bank 1995:162-63, 212-15.

Notes: We used the most recent figures we could locate in all cases.

Figures with no superscript are for 1997 unless indicated by a year marking in the left column.

[a] Low-income refers in 1997 to 54 economies with per capita GNP of $785 or less. With India excluded, it refers to 53 countries, including the 37 countries used in Franke and Chasin 1989:11 for 1986 data and the 38 countries used in Franke and Chasin 1994:ii for 1991 data. The additional countries in the 1997 list are former Soviet republics and former regions of Yugoslavia. The addition of these countries tends to improve the quality of life figures for the low-income category, diminishing Kerala's lead.

[b] We estimated the US dollar figure for Kerala by dividing the State Government's 1996 per capita State Domestic Product figure of Rs 9,066 (GOK 1997:3) by 35, the approximate number of rupees per dollar during that year. To this figure of $259, we added 25%, more than the maximum estimate of the value of overseas remittances to the Kerala economy. The figure of $324 thus represents the highest likely per capita income and therefore does not exaggerate the difference between Kerala's income and its quality of life achievements.

[c] Kerala's adult literacy rate for 1991 is taken from the 1991 Indian Census (Bose 1991:69), prior to the literacy campaign. By the end of 1991, Kerala's rate was near 100%, but weaknesses in the follow-up may have reduced the rate again.

[d] The Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) reflects local prices and makes the income figures more directly comparable: one PPP dollar has the same purchasing power over domestic GNP as a dollar in the US has over US GDP. See World Bank 1998/99:234.

[e] Figures are for 1996
[f] Figures are for 1995
[g] Figures are for 1993

The table gives only an inkling of Kerala's achievements in providing basic needs to its people. With a few important exceptions such as unemployment and suicide rates, Kerala leads the rest of India and all low-income countries of the world on just about every indicator we can come up with: wages and working conditions, nutritional status, overcoming caste discrimination, providing social security for the elderly, helping workers in the informal sector, increasing gender equality. Kerala enacted India's most successful land reform, its best enforced worker protection acts, the most effective school lunch program for the poorest children. If you travel throughout India as a tourist, you will be struck from the moment you walk through your first Kerala train or bus station: there are no beggars.

So what produced the Kerala Model of development? Some scholars have argued that Kerala's large Christian population is the answer. Others have developed complicated anthropological theories about the matrilineal kinship system of the Nairs: one of Kerala's main castes. I do not deny the importance of these factors, but I believe the evidence—as summarized in the book I wrote with Barbara Chasin—shows clearly that the main factor has been the democratic activism of Kerala's people, exerted over a century of protest marches, petition drives, letter-writing, mass meetings, union organizing, underground activities (when the British ruled India), and election campaigns that brought poor and ordinary people and their strongest supporters into the government. That is the explanation of the Kerala Model.

Of course this explanation begs the next question. Why did Kerala become such a hotbed of democratic activism? Someday the historians will tell us the full story; but for now, I must ask you who are interested to check out the sources posted with the longer, website version of this talk.

For now we can draw one simple conclusion: Kerala's people have learned through experience that participation, activism, sacrifice, volunteering, commitment, study, standing up to parasitic landlords, abusive bosses, corrupt politicians, building community—these are the tools with which ordinary people can fashion a better life. That is partly why so many of them joined a literacy campaign to bring the alphabet to a few thousand aging illiterates in Ernakulam.

But that is not the entire explanation. You see, the literacy campaign organizers had a plan for something beyond the alphabet. They had thought about Paulo Freire's ideas for a long time. Like him, they had pondered the consequences of connecting literacy with people's immediate lives. So they took Freire a step forward. They created a new concept of literacy. They called it *land literacy*.

3. The People's Resource Mapping Program: 1987-present

Every one of Kerala's 991 villages and 63 urban areas contains resources. How can these resources most efficiently be used? Who should decide how to use them and for what purposes? Trying to answer these questions in the late 1980s, geographers at Kerala's Center for Earth Science Studies, came up with an original idea: what if we train ordinary people to map the local resource base? The People's Resource Mapping Program was born.

After an initial experiment in mapping the area around their own institute, the geographers connected themselves to the Total Literacy Campaign. The People's Science Movement selected 25 villages for a test run; jathas, songs, and street theater created a festive atmosphere in which 5 development volunteers were recruited from each ward—there are about 10 wards per village—to become local mappers. The professional geographers trained the volunteers who then carried out most of the work themselves. In September 1993, I underwent training in Mundur village in Central Kerala as part of a UNDP program to extend the mapping program to other parts of India. Geographer Sreekumar Chattopadhyay walked us through a neighborhood, tape measure, notebooks, and copies of old British tax maps in hand. We plotted roads, houses, and rice fields. We measured the depth to the water table at each well. We picked up handfuls of dirt, crushed them and rolled the material in our hands, and decided which of three categories to classify them into. I was amazed at how much variation in soil and water table levels could occur in a short distance.

The real mapping campaign led to the creation of seven maps:

1. landform [Kalliasseri map slide?]
2. surface material
3. depth to bed rock
4. land use
5. depth to water table [Kalliasseri map slide?]
6. environmental appraisal [Kalliasseri map slide?] discuss?
7. action plan [Kalliasseri map slide?] discuss?

The village volunteers produced maps 1 to 5. The professional scientists supplemented these maps with 16 sample observations per square kilometer. The produced map 6 at the Centre for Earth Science Studies with the aid of computer programs, to combine maps 1 to 5. Map 6 went back to the village where local assemblies were called to explain it and encourage discussion of environmental problems and production possibilities. Based on the local discussions volunteers joined scientists to produce Map 7: it is intended to offer a visual display of the path to sustainable development.

Here we see the landform map produced in Kalliasseri village, the most successful of the resource mapping experiments. The environmental appraisal map shows.....

The action plan map led to several projects, among which:

- construction of an 825-meters long "people's canal" in a water-logged area reclaiming 40 acres of rice-producing land and reducing the mosquito hazard in the rainy season.[7] [show location on map and also slides of the canal?] 350 volunteers built the canal in 24 hours on March 19, 1995. It is shown here being maintained and improved in January of 1997.

- an all-women's soil conservation project of the Ward 6 Mahila Samajam—women's organization on an endangered hillside. The women found that cattle grazing could be integrated with lemon grass, pineapples, and cashew trees,

when proper trenches and terraces had been constructed.[8] They have formed an all-woman cooperative to manage the reclaimed area. [photos? from Kalliasseri Jan 97]

- a dry season vegetable scheme that employs out-of-work youth on fields farmers have traditionally not planted on in the dry season. A local socio-economic survey had alerted the mappers to the large amounts of vegetables imported to the local market. Activists turned to their depth to water table maps to find the most desirable locations for these plots. In 1993 21 working groups totaling 2,500 youth grew vegetables on 6 acres of land. They broke even that year but in 1994 they made a profit. When Barbara Chasin and I visited Kalliasseri again in 1997, we found that additional work groups had been formed and that individual households were also starting to grow dry-season vegetables. [slides?]

So far Kalliasseri's experience has been replicated in only a few Kerala villages. Various political and historical events upset the plans for a large-scale people's resource mapping program throughout the state. But Kalliasseri does show why the Total Literacy Campaign was so important, why it was practical to bring literacy to those low-caste elderly female learners. You see, many of the most environmentally degraded and inefficiently used plots of land are in the neighborhoods where such people live. They are the people most likely to live on the steep slopes with the barest soils or in the valley areas with the most waterlogging. To generate sustainable development, their lands and resources are crucial; to create the land literacy necessary for sustainable development of their lands, they have to be able to read and write words so they can participate in mapping; for them to work with the professional geographers they need the self-confidence that comes with literacy. Freire would have welcomed this situation: by democratizing access to education, Kerala's activists not only offered people richer individual lives; they laid a basis for solving practical problems.

4. The People's Campaign for the Ninth Plan Campaign: Democracy as a Tool for Development

In March 1996, Kerala's literacy and mapping activists suddenly faced a dilemma: the political coalition to which most of them belonged—the Left Democratic Front—won a solid 20 vote majority in the legislative assembly. For the next five years they would have to decide how to spend the state budget.

Their campaign experiences over the years had taught them some important lessons: move swiftly, put your trust in ordinary people, dare to do something big, and throw into it all the energy you've got. Since it was time for India's ninth 5-year plan to be developed, they decided to focus their efforts around the plan. And because two recent amendments to the national constitution mandated greater power for local communities, they decided to make that local power real. They decided to launch a statewide movement for local planning and community development. They call it the "People's Campaign for the Ninth Plan," and it involves granting 35% of the state development budget to local elected councils to spend as they choose on local projects. The slogan is "power to the people."

The People's Campaign for the Ninth Plan is probably the largest democratization project underway in the world today. Thirty million people in Kerala are affected by the campaign, and so far more than three million of them have participated in one or more of the campaign's activities. Neighborhood assemblies made lists of grievances and complaints, elected volunteers to collect local data, wrote reports about their villages, discussed these reports in seminars [Pallichal and Balaramapuram slides?], elected volunteers to write up project proposals, and handed these over to the elected village councils to prioritize into a village development plan. Each village plan was sent to a block level grouping of villages where plans were integrated, and then to a district council where another set of elected representatives consolidated the plans. In 1996-97 people wrote up over 100,000 project proposals over a 12 month period; by 1997-98 they had learned to carry out the process in four months. Despite many difficulties and shortcomings, the ninth plan campaign has resulted in some definite achievements:

- In 14,147 voting ward assemblies involving over 2.3 million participants, not one act of violence took place.

- All of Kerala's villages and towns produced detailed self-study reports. In my opinion, this alone is one of the remarkable achievements in democracy in the modern world: people have collected and analyzed information about their own communities in a way that leads to serious and meaningful discussions about how to make things better.

[slides of Calicut exhibition and/or Panjal and one or two other reports?]

- Real development plans emerged from the local communities.

- On the average, people donated labor and materials that added 10% to the resources given by the state government.

- Public accountability in the use of government funds was greatly increased by the public and participatory nature of the campaign.

- More funds than ever before reached the lowest caste and tribal groups, traditionally the most exploited and least helped by economic development in India.

This month, communities should be preparing their third year plans, and enough data will be available to make an evaluation of what they accomplished in the first two years. My colleague, Dr. Thomas Isaac—one of the leading activists and thinkers in the campaign—was here in November and December, putting together just such an evaluation which we hope to publish later this year. Our analysis already indicates that local planning has resulted in greater emphasis on education, sanitation, safe drinking water, improved housing, and environmental protection than had been the case under the previous eight, more centralized 5-year plans. And the variations in emphasis among the communities suggest that people are attempting to adjust the planning to their needs—just what the campaign organizers had hoped.

5. Other Lessons in Democracy and Development

Kerala's experience in using democracy as a tool for social change is unusual in the 3rd world, but not unique internationally. A first-world experiment has occurred in the Italian region of Emilia-Romagna. That region has Italy's highest voter turnout, highest newspaper readership, highest social and sports club membership, and highest union membership, among other features.[9] It also has the most effective government as measured by 12 indicators and the highest degree of citizen satisfaction according to opinion polls.[10] What is particularly interesting is that from 1970 to 1988 Emilia-Romagna experienced the biggest per capita income growth in all of Europe,[11] a jump which political scientist Robert Putnam explains as a direct result of the strong civic engagement.[12]

In Brazil's impoverished northeast, the state government of Ceará briefly became a mini-Kerala in 1987. Introducing a public health program with 7,300 rural women who had never before worked in this sector, by 1992 Ceará had reduced infant mortality by 36%, tripled polio and measles vaccinations to 90%, and managed to visit 850,000 households per month—65% of the population to whom they brought information on and assistance with oral rehydration therapy, growth monitoring, and breastfeeding.[13] The key to this success was democratic participation by ordinary people a response to the trust placed in them by the state government.[14]

And 200 miles southwest of the Brazilian metropolis of São Paulo, the city of Curitiba stands as the world's urban lone victor over the automobile. Reconfiguring streets, linking transportation to land use plans, choosing a bus system over a subway system—much cheaper despite what you may think—Curitiba has managed a 30% traffic decline since 1974 even while population doubled.[15] And Curitiba has not forgotten Paulo Freire: the city created a Free University for the Environment, sited in an abandoned quarry and built out of recycled tires. Courses teach the environmental implications of people's jobs—you can't get a city taxi license without a degree from this school.[16] Curitiba has also developed an extensive recycling program with 70% of the population involved, compared to New York City's 10-15%.[17] Curitiba street light covers are made from recycled glass bottles.[18]

On the other side of South America idealistic scientists created an astonishing experiment in the eastern llanos or savanna of Colombia. In 1971 a KSSP-type engineer named Paolo Lugari founded the village of Gaviotas.[19] He attracted engineering graduate students from Bogotá, recruited more professors, and worked with local peasants and Indians to build an egalitarian community that eventually invented palm leaf gaskets, several types of improved solar collectors, a new type of water pump, hydroponic greenhouses that used rice husks as soil, a windmill that lasted years without repair, and hundreds of other appropriate technology devices. True to their utopian ideals, Gaviotans refused to patent their inventions, offering them to all the world freely and encouraging cooperatives rather than profit-based companies.

Finally, the new democratic South Africa has begun experimenting with Kerala-style democratic participation. An experiment in local planning in Durban led to community struggle around what kinds of development should take place after apartheid: convention centers or more job-sustaining development?[20] Last year the ruling African

National Congress sent a large, multiracial delegation to Kerala for an extended and detailed look at the Kerala model.[21]

6. Why Does the World Need Lessons in Democracy?

You might be asking: In a world in which democracy has supposedly been recently expanding, why do we need more lessons in democracy? My answer is in two parts. Firstly, we are not solving the problem of poverty and we are not effectively protecting and preserving the earth's environment. And secondly, greater democracy of the Kerala type offers the best hope of solving these two big problems.

First the problem of poverty. Let's consider just one indicator. Worldwide in 1996 (the most recent year for which I could get data), over 11 million children died before reaching age 5. Here's a gruesome way to absorb this figure emotionally: imagine that every day 89 jumbo jets full of 360 children crash, killing all their passengers. I am not considering the cost of the airplanes. UNICEF estimates that 55% of the children who died, about 6 million, were lost to direct or indirect effects of malnutrition.[22] I bring up malnutrition because of a recent, startling report from the National Sample Survey (NSS), a statistical service of the Indian government that is widely regarded as one of the best in the 3rd world. NSS data show that average calorie intake for all of India dropped 5% in rural areas and declined slightly in urban areas as well between 1972 and 1994.[23] Despite the small percentage drops, this trend is important because 21% of Indian children are already described as "severely malnourished," meaning that they fall 3 standard deviations below international weight for age norms.[24] These are the children who tend to die. Only two Indian states showed an increase in calorie intake in both urban and rural areas: West Bengal and Kerala.

There is more to this statistical story than I can present here. But I bring these numbers to your attention for two reasons. India's northwest state of Punjab has led for years in per capita income. But Punjab experienced a 31% *loss* in calories in the period I am describing.[25] Kerala experienced a 15% *increase*.[26] Punjab now has 14% of its children severely malnourished, compared to Kerala's 6%, despite the fact that Punjab has 2.7 times Kerala's per capita income.[27]

So why do people who are supposedly better off see their children die while poor people can see their children live? The answer is: democracy. You see, in Kerala, poor people have won the power to bring food to their children while in Punjab only the better off have this power. In Punjab the rich children live while the poor children die; in Kerala life chances are more equal.

I have chosen this small contrast between two Indian states for another reason as well. You see, most grains in India are produced with water from aquifers. In recent years these aquifers have been drained twice as fast as they refill. In Punjab, water tables are dropping by 1 to 3 meters (3 to 9 feet) per year.[28] As these water tables fall, more energy has to be purchased to bring it to the surface where it can irrigate the crops. Punjab is widely regarded as India's breadbasket and its greatest agricultural success story. But as the cost of producing food goes up, the poor have less access. Combined with inequality, declining water availability helps explain why calorie intake is dropping and so many children are severely malnourished in a region where neither phenomenon

should occur.

Punjab's falling water table and declining food intake is an early warning sign for a far more serious and extensive problem. Unregulated, unplanned, profit-oriented, market-driven economic growth has recently pushed many of the earth's ecosystems beyond thresholds from which recovery will be difficult. Here are a few of these thresholds:

- Per capita grain production peaked in 1984 and has declined almost every year since then. In 1997 it was down by 6%.[29]
- International grain stocks which peaked in 1987 are now 19% below the minimum necessary to hold food prices stable in case of a major drought anywhere in the world.[30] This decline is especially significant because it occurred in spite of the abolition of cropland subsidies in the United States: we now have *no* reserve lands held back from production.[31]
- Falling water tables of the Ogallala aquifer in the United States have resulted in the loss of 11% of the arable land base in Texas between 1982 and 1992.[32]
- From 1980 to 1994 Saudi Arabia increased its wheat production 20 times. Suddenly, the aquifer was nearly depleted; within two years, production dropped by more than half.[33] Lucky they have oil.

I could go on about forest loss—1% per decade of the remaining forest cover—decline of the world's fish catch—11 of 15 major fishing grounds are seriously depleted,[34] or other problems such as global warming, failure to improve sanitation, or the loss of biodiversity.[35] But you get the picture.

These and other threats to the environment are not just issues for vegetarians, earth-firsters, and idealist animal lovers. As Worldwatch Institute director Lester Brown puts it, 20th century production is "Overwhelming the Earth,." He goes on to say that we need a "New Economy for a New Century." I agree, but I think we also need a new politics. We need a new democracy: a set of participatory, egalitarian, community-oriented practices to develop solutions to this crisis. In short, we need what people in Kerala are trying to do.

7. Lessons for Us?

I think Kerala's many programs and achievements hold important lessons for developing countries around the world. I have attempted to get my books and articles about Kerala published where they have the best chance of being read by the intellectuals and activists most likely to apply them. I am also interested in Kerala's abstract academic significance—for theories about modernization, imperialism, "dependent development," the so-called "embedded state," "civic culture," the "routinization of charisma," social movement "goal displacement," historical conjunctions, "zero sum" game analysis, rent-seeking interest groups, neo-Marxist ideas of comprador versus national bourgeoisies, World Bank basic needs approaches, Amartya Sen's notion of "entitlements," and philosopher John Rawls' theory of justice. If you want information on these theories, go to the web site announced at the beginning of this talk and get ready for some heavy reading.

But before concluding, I want to go back to what I wrote in the brochure announcing this talk. I said that Kerala State constitutes a giant experiment in the uses of democracy to solve problems and that we can derive some possible lessons on how to overcome poverty and protect the environment. I invited you to come and hear what these lessons might be. Here they are:

Lesson 1. Democracy is more than voting. Democracy is more than an abstract ideal. It is a means to a better life as well as an end to strive for. Kerala's recent experiments are a reminder that democratic activity can be a mechanism for solving problems. It does not assure their solution, but it mobilizes the most powerful force available: the knowledge and energy of the largest possible number of people.

Lesson 2. Democracy requires the greatest possible degree of equality among all members of society. The power of money and wealth corrupts democracy and renders it ineffective. Despite formal structures of democracy in the United States, we witness low levels of citizen participation. In Kerala voting alone runs between 60% to 80%, with turnouts often the highest for local elections. Here in New Jersey the press has recently been highlighting the way in which the next senate candidates of the two major parties will be chosen: whoever can raise big money will run. Corporate and upper class power over candidate selection—which is several times as great as that of organized labor, the only other contender—limits political debate and turns people away from the system. In Kerala, access to the media and to other campaign resources is far more egalitarian.

Lesson 3. Democracy should be fun and should involve a spirit of optimism. Kerala People's Science Movement activists have discovered that people participate more, put more energy into their actions, and produce more effective results when they see their actions as enjoyable rather than as "civic duty." The uses of popular art forms and dramatic events helps to draw people into participation they might otherwise avoid as too much of a drag. Many Americans see politics as something to stay away from. This is a danger to our society because staying away from politics actually constitutes a major political decision—a decision to hand over power to those who don't stay away.

Lesson 4. Democracy means activism and participation. Kerala's experience shows that people can improve government accountability by raising the level of participation in their communities. This does not have to be a punitive, negative type of participation. Suppose we emulated Kerala's 9th plan campaign in this area. Imagine 1.8 million metropolitan area residents meeting in hundreds of groups for six hours, arguing, electing problem-solving working groups to plan strategies for overcoming local problems. Imagine thousands of them continuing to meet for weeks, collecting data about their communities, writing community self-evaluations, and hammering out local plans for which large portions of federal and state funds would be allocated. Imagine technically trained retired people in our communities forming associations to help make the plans technically sound. Or—imagine our university professors and our students providing this expertise. This leads to my next lesson.

Lesson 5. Effective democracy requires detailed knowledge of one's local community. Kerala's village self-studies are an inspiration for the whole world. By

gathering information about their communities for the reports, ordinary people started to learn about their problems in systemic, general ways, going beyond personal opinions and individual gripes. As with the people's mapping campaign, the writing of local development reports generated awareness that makes democratic decision making possible. A few communities in the United States have done local self studies. Pierce County Washington and Seattle Washington are among them. [slides of Pierce and Seattle reports here?]

8. A Role for Montclair State University?

Finally lessons in democracy from Kerala lead us back to our own university. What more ideal place than a public university with an intellectually outstanding faculty that is also dedicated to community service. And what better student body than our own, made up mostly of people from working-class families who are already intuitively aware of many of the problems of their communities? I don't have a formula for how to proceed; the lessons from Kerala are there for all of us to ponder and act on in our own most creative ways. But here is one small beginning. This year the Anthropology Department has joined with the newly-formed Institute for Community Studies to build a small library of local community self-studies. We are collecting information on existing studies such as the Seattle report I mentioned a few moments ago. We hope that these reports, together with some other materials we are collecting, will provide a starting point for both our Practical Anthropology program students and students from other departments who work with the Institute to gain experience with academic and theoretical issues such as how to choose the most appropriate indicators and how to analyze trends along with more practical issues such as how to work with community organizations to frame policies and positions and how to realize those policies.

To avoid a possible misunderstanding, in conclusion, I want to emphasize one point here that I believe is obvious to most people: a community-oriented university can only succeed if the basic intellectual, academic, scientific, and liberal arts programs are maintained or even strengthened. There should not be a separation between the academy and the real world. Kerala's scientist- and teacher-activists do good literacy programs because they understand Freire's theories. The work they've done so far could be an inspiration for all of us. Now—we have to decide where that inspiration will lead us.

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Notes:

[1] KSSP 1991:18.
[2] KSSP 1991:20
[3] The near 100% levels were reached in 1992. All-India rates in 1995-96 were 96% for TB, 89% for DPT, 90% for polio, and 81% for measles (UNICEF 1998:25). Public health and information campaigns in Kerala have also held down malaria rates despite widespread travel by Kerala's people to malaria-infected regions of the world. The all-India malaria rate is 240 per 100,000 (UNDP 1996:161) compared with the Kerala rate of 36 for 1997 (computed from GOK 1998:103 and S240). For details of several health paradoxes of Kerala, see Franke and Chasin 1994:vi-vii.
[4] Freire 1973 and 1994.
[5] Tharakan 199:45 and 81-82.
[6] Gupta 1991:80
[7] IRTC 1995:98-99
[8] IRTC 1995:101
[9] Putnam 1993:86-120
[10] Putnam 1993:76-81. A detailed attack on Putnam's statistical procedures appears in Jackman and Miller 1996:636-45.
[11] Putnam 1993:154.
[12] Putnam 1993:155-59.
[13] Tendler 1997:21-22, 45. The infant mortality rate dropped to 65 per thousand, still far above Kerala's.
[14] Tendler (1997), who describes the process, is not able to explain why this particular state leadership innovated in this way at this particular time. Instead, she limits herself to a critique of Putnam and other civic culture theorists. See her conclusions on pp. 135-65.
[15] O'Meara 1998b. The bus system cost $200,000 per kilomoter compared to $60-70 million per kilometer of subway. A general overview of Curitiba appears in McKibben 1995:57-115. McKibben's book also contains a chapter on Kerala.
[16] O'Meara 1998b.
[17] Pedriera, Mauricio and Carol Goodstein. 1992. Blueprint for an eco-safe city. *Americas* 44(4):6-16.

[18] Herbst and Allor 1992.
[19] The name Gaviotas means "river gulls," a bird found in the area (Weisman 1998:36)
[20] Maharaj and Ramballi 1998.
[21] Other possibly interesting experiments in participatory democracy include Bolivia, Mali, and Ethiopia. Data about these countries appear to be sparse. See Wright 1997.
[22] UNICEF 1998:2, 19. The actual figure given is 11,694,000. 2.7 million, or 23% were Indian children.
[23] Rural Indians got 2,266 calories per person in 1972-73, and 2,153 in 1993-94. In urban areas, the drop was from 2,107 to 2,071, a decline of 1.7% . The data are reported in a paper in *Sarvekshana*, the journal of the NSS Organization, 21(2) (Swaminathan and Ramachandran 1999:109). Comparisons are to the 50th round of July 1993-June 1994 and the 27th round conducted in 1972-73.
[24] Swaminathan and Ramachandran 1999:111.
[25] A drop of 1,075 from 3,500 in 1972-73 (Swaminathan and Ramachandran 1999:110).
[26] I computed this from the graphs in Swaminathan and Ramachandran 1999:110-11. There is much more to the Kerala-Punjab and Kerala-India comparisons in food intake, nutrition, and infant survival. See Franke 1993 and Franke and Chasin 1994: 5 and Franke and Chasin 1999 for details and references.
[27] I used inflation-controlled per capita domestic product in 1986-87—a year near the middle of the malnutrition comparison—in which Punjab had Rs 1,702 compared to Kerala's 639 (Nath 1991:2941).
[28] Brown and Flavin 1999:12, citing research by David Seckler.
[29] 322 kg per person vs. 342 in 1984, a drop of 5.8%. Computed from Brown, Renner, and Flavin 1998:29.
[30] In 1987, there were 104 days surplus, but in 1998 only 57 days were available. The number of days considered minimally necessary is 70 (Brown, Renner, and Flavin 1998:39).
[31] Brown, Renner, and Flavin 1998:38.
[32] Brown 1998:6.
[33] Brown 1998:6.
[34] On forest decline, Abramovitz 1998:125; on the fish catch, Strauss 1998:34.
[35] On global warming, Dunn 1998, and O'Meara 1998a; on sanitation, Gardner 1998; on biodiversity, Tuxill 1998.