Reviving the Kerala Model of Development

Why in news?

The Kerala Model which seemed to show impressive levels of human development indicators in health, education and quality of life has been questioned at present.

What are the concerns of the model?

- The focus in the new debates on Kerala seems increasingly on its failures.
    - low employment
    - low levels of food intake
    - low incomes
    - accompanied by high levels of alcoholism
    - the nation's worst suicide rate
    - exporting the unemployment
    - over-dependent on remittances
- After decades of robust social spending and participatory governance, the Kerala model is now under threat from emerging social and environmental risks.
- Some of the very strengths of Kerala's approach have become sources of vulnerability.
    - For instance, its high life expectancy is translating into a high death rate from COVID-19.

What is the status of human development and economical growth in Kerala?

- Kerala has India's highest literacy rate.
- Kerala was India's first digital State with the highest share of households with personal computers and Internet connections, mobile phone penetration, and digital literacy.
- It ranks only the ninth-highest in per capita income among 28 States.
- Severely hit by COVID-19, Kerala's Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) contracted over 2019-20 and 2021-22.
- The unemployment rate was at 9% which is much higher than the 6% national average.
- The fiscal deficit was also high constituting around 4% of GSDP.

How to revitalise the Kerala model?

- The difficulties could be meaningfully mitigated by
    - smarter socio-economic investments
    - attention to good governance
    - better stewardship of the environment
    - development as a knowledge economy
    - improve the quality of higher education
    - vocational training to meet the requirements of a modern workforce

    - build on successes in tourism and hospitality services
- **Education-** Basic education should continue to be a priority, but it is higher education that presents a pivotal opportunity on the global stage for Kerala.
- Played right, Kerala could become a regional centre for tertiary education in areas such as marine biology, health care, and digital technology.
- **Digitalisation-** Digital approaches such as e-Sanjeevani (a telemedicine portal), can be expanded, for instance, Singapore's new generation of health apps and technologies.
- **Health system-** The infections and deaths skyrocketed in 2021, as the population is highly mobile and Kerala let its guard down in key areas of surveillance but testing has been widespread, which helped reveal infections more transparently.
- Sustaining the edge on health care should be high on the policy agenda.
- **Governance** - **The Public Affairs Index 2020** ranked Kerala as the best-governed large State in 2019 on the basis of 50 indicators reflecting equity, growth and sustainability.

The Public Affairs Index is a scientific, data-based framework that measures and ranks the quality of governance of states and Union Territories based on 3 dimensions of sustainable development- Equity, Growth and Sustainability.

It is released by the Public Affairs Centre annually.

- Decentralised governance, a strong grass-roots-level network of Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA) and Kudumbashree members helped in pandemic management.
- Kerala needs to be more responsive in public expenditure on health and developing local self-delivery systems.
- **Ecological degradation**- Decades of ecological degradation amplified the impact of the 2018 floods in Kerala.
- It is vital that the **Madhav Gadgil Committee** report is adopted with the minimal necessary modifications to protect vulnerable populations.
- Investments need to be made to repair forests, river systems, water bodies, and flood plains.
- The State needs a bold programme of forest restoration in keeping with the commitments on forest protection from over 130 nations at COP26.
- Kerala urgently needs to revive its network of rivers, their tributaries and streams and sand mining needs to be stopped.
- Water management calls for the periodic release of water from the dams, as indicated by the World Commission on Dams together with desilting of dams.
- Water quality and people's health are hurt by domestic waste and industrial effluents, calling for better water treatment.

Madhav Gadgil report (2011) also known as Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel divided the Western Ghats into 3 ecologically sensitive zones - ESZ1, ESZ2 and ESZ3. It suggested that ESZ1 and ESZ2 would be largely no-gone zones.

What will be the possible impacts of the revival in the model?

- A new strengthened Kerala model will recognise the symbiotic links among social outcomes, environmental management, and participatory governance.

- It will aid in achieving the goal of achieving sustainable development.
- Sree Narayana Guru famously said, “matham ethayalum, manushyan nannayal mathi — whatever his religion, it is enough that a man be good.”
- Similarly, Kerala must say, “rashtriyam ethayalum, rashtram nannayal mathi — whatever the politics, it is enough that the country be better.”

References

1. https://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-opinion/reviving-the-kerala-model-of-development/article38404888.ece
2. https://www.indiaspend.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/PAI-2020-summary-report.pdf

SHANKAR IAS PARLIAMENT
Information is Empowering