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World Development Vol. 39, No. 2, pp. 282–293, 2010

0305-750X/$ - see front matter

doi:10.1016/j.worlddev.2009.11.025

We-ness and Welfare: A Longitudinal Analysis of Social Development in Kerala, India

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Summary. — This paper challenges the conventional wisdom that ethnic diversity negatively influences public goods provision through a longitudinal study of the Indian state of Kerala, which has attained exceptional levels of social development despite high fragmentation along religious and caste lines. This paper argues that it is not objective diversity but a subjective sense of "we-ness," which is the key determinant of the level of public goods provision and social development. A historical analysis of Kerala illustrates how a cohesive subnational community generates progressive social policy as well as societal monitoring of schools and clinics, which together give rise to relatively high levels of education and health outcomes.

Key words — ethnicity, subnationalism, public goods provision, social development, South Asia, Kerala

1. INTRODUCTION

The received wisdom from an influential and extensive body of research is that ethnic diversity negatively influences public goods provision (Alesina, Baqir, & Easterly, 1999; Miguel & Gugerty, 2005; Banerjee & Somanathan, 2007, p. 289). [1] In recent years, these studies have been exhaustively critiqued for their decision to measure ethnic diversity via the Ethnolinguistic fractionalization index on the grounds that it violates key constructivist findings about the fluid, multidimensional, and socio-politically manufactured nature of ethnicity (Chandra & Wilkinson, 2008; Laitin & Posner, 2001). Independent of the specific shortcomings of the ELF index, however, this body of work is plagued by the deeper problem of content validity—a mismatch between the content of the concept and the indicator used to measure it (Adcock & Collier, 2001, p. 538). A close reading shows that the underlying theoretical construct in these studies is not in fact ethnic *diversity* but ethnic *divisions*. The two broad sets of mechanisms by which ethnicity is hypothesized to dampen public goods provision—by generating conflicting preferences (Alesina *et al.*, 1999) and/or impeding collective action (Miguel & Gugerty, 2005)—are both driven not by heterogeneity but by polarization. This literature tends to assume that ethnic fragmentation, a demographic measure, necessarily implies ethnic polarization, a political concept.

This is brought out strikingly in Alesina, Baqir, and Easterly's introduction to their influential piece, where they claim that "This paper argues that certain public goods...supplied by US cities are inversely related to *ethnic fragmentation* in those cities. In cities where *ethnic groups are polarized*...the share of spending that goes to public goods is low" (1999, p. 1243, emphasis added). Similarly, in their seminal work on Africa's growth tragedy, Easterly and Levine ask "Do higher levels of *ethnic diversity* encourage poor policies, poor education, political instability, inadequate infrastructure, and other factors associated with slow growth?." In response they cite "an assortment of political economy models" which "suggest that *polarized societies* will...have difficulty agreeing on public goods like infrastructure, education, and good policies." They favorably note that "Alesina [1994, p. 38] recently argued that "*society's polarization and degree of social conflict*" are key factors underlying policy decisions" (1997, pp. 1205–1206, emphasis added).

This article simultaneously challenges and builds on this scholarship. It questions the economistic tendency to read off the politics of identity from population counts but develops the insight that societal polarization is likely to lead to low levels of public goods provision. I argue that it is not so much objective diversity but the extent to which people share a subjective sense of belonging, which has no necessary relation to objective diversity, that is the key determinant of public goods provision.

I hypothesize that a shared identity can generate a politics of the common good. Laboratory as well as field experiments in social psychology have consistently and robustly demonstrated that once people feel part of a group, their affect towards that group and its members becomes more positive (Transue, 2007, p. 9). A closer identification with a group reduces the perceived distance between members such that they are less likely to make a distinction between their own and others' welfare and more likely to view each other as having common goals (Brewer, 1979; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Philosophers, specially from the "liberal nationalist" school, argue that a "we-feeling" generates a web of mutual obligations, which makes people more willing to work toward common ends (Miller, 1995; Tamir, 1993). Members of a cohesive political community are, therefore, more likely to support the provision of public goods. Public support for social welfare especially on the part of elites, serves as a powerful impetus for governments to prioritize the social sector. A strong affinity with the political community also encourages citizens to be more politically conscious and active. In a cohesive political

* I would like to thank Atul Kohli, Evan Lieberman, Deborah Yashar, Patrick Heller, Ashutosh Varshney, and Steven Wilkinson for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper. I would also like to acknowledge the financial support from the American Institute of Indian Studies and the Princeton Institute of International and Regional Studies and logistical support at the Center for Development Studies (CDS), Trivandrum and the Center for Policy Research (CPR), New Delhi. My greatest debt of gratitude, is to James Thanickan, whose insights were the inspiration for this paper. Final revision accepted: November 12, 2009.

community, people are consequently more likely to avail of and monitor the social services provided by the state. In this way, a cohesive political community fosters both a more progressive social policy and a greater popular involvement with the public goods provided, which combine to give rise to higher levels of social development.

In this article I develop and test this argument through a historical analysis of social development, conceptualized in terms of education and health, in the Indian province of Kerala.[2] Kerala, which has a population of 32 million, equal to that of Canada, has attained levels of education and health far ahead of the Indian national average and equivalent to those in upper-middle income countries such as Argentina and Serbia. What is especially striking about Kerala's exemplary social gains is that they have occurred in a context of high ethnic heterogeneity and low levels of economic development. Kerala has the highest score of all Indian states on the ELF index for religion, widely recognized to be the most divisive ethnic cleavage in the country (Varshney, 2002; Wilkinson, 2008, p. 284). Conventional wisdom has it that the richer the political unit, the higher its levels of social development. This insight about the positive relationship between economic and social development has its theoretical roots in modernization theory and has been empirically supported through various cross-national studies. Kerala's *per capita* GDP, however, was significantly lower than the Indian average and at about the same level as that of sub-Saharan African nations during the 1950s–80s when the state witnessed its most important improvements in education and health indicators (Heller, 1996, p. 1055).

This article undertakes a longitudinal comparison of education and health policies and outcomes in Kerala from the mid-19th century to the present period with the aim of specifying how the growth of a cohesive subnational political community generated high levels of social development in the state.[3] Such an analysis also allows for an assessment of the validity of prominent rival explanations that have been put forward to explain this phenomenon. The ability of qualitative research to provide a distinct source of leverage for causal inference is well established (Achen, 2005; Brady, Collier, & Seawright, 2004, p. 8; Ragin, 2004). A number of studies also make the case that contrary to conventional wisdom, conducting careful, historical analysis of a single unit is a more powerful strategy for both causal inference and adjudicating between alternative explanations than the addition of units (Lieberman, 2001).

The historical analysis of social development in Kerala in the next section is structured loosely around an institutional origins strategy (Lieberman, 2001). I compare three time periods corresponding to the absence, emergence, and strengthening of subnationalism, which in turn led to low, increasing, and high levels of education and health provision and development. In the first sub-section, I show that until the 1890s, in the absence of any sense of a shared identity, the princely government paid minimal attention to the social sector and the state was consequently characterized by high rates of illiteracy and mortality. In the second sub-section, which focuses on the period from the late 19th century to the end of colonial rule, I show that the emergence of subnationalism triggered popular demands for collective welfare, which led the princely state to prioritize the social sector. A progressive social policy was introduced and an improvement in education and health outcomes occurred only after and as a consequence of the emergence of a cohesive subnational community. In the third sub-section I show how in the post-independence period, from the 1950s onward, a cohesive subnationalism generated consistently high state expenditures on education and health as well as active societal monitoring of schools and clinics, which together led to sharp increases in social development. After establishing the causal impact of the varying degrees of subnationalism on social development in Kerala, in the next section, I assess the applicability of three of the most prominent alternative explanations for the phenomenon. I conclude with the policy and scholarly implications of this study.

2. SUBNATIONALISM AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT IN KERALA

This section delineates the causal impact of the degree of cohesion of the subnational political community, or subnationalism, on the level of social development in Kerala through an analysis of three time periods—until the 1890s, from the 1890s to the 1950s, and from the 1950s onward. The modern state of Kerala was formed in 1956 by uniting the two princely states of Travancore and Cochin, which were ruled by native kings, who were under the suzerainty of the British and the northern district of Malabar, which was a part of Madras Presidency that was ruled directly by the British. The discussion of the colonial period in the first two sub-sections focuses on the largest and the most populous of these three units, the princely state of Travancore, but also includes references to the broadly similar trajectory of socio-political developments in the adjoining, relatively tiny princely state of Cochin.

(a) *Upto the 1890s: absence of subnationalism fosters low social development*

The regions that came to constitute Kerala have historically been characterized by a set of shared symbols, such as a common language, culture, myths, and values (Cohn, 1967, p. 22). Until the late 19th century, however, these shared symbols remained latent. The socio-economic and political life of the region was structured around the identities of caste and religion.

By almost all accounts, the caste system in Kerala was the most orthodox and oppressive of all Indian states. A tiny minority of Brahmins were separated from the rest of the *Sudra* population by rigid and ruthless rules of pollution based not only on touch, like in the rest of India, but also on proximity. There were strictly enforced injunctions on the use of public facilities, such as roads, wells, temples by lower castes, and elaborate specifications of the physical distance allowed between Brahmins and various 'Sudra' castes. The social reformer Swami Vivekananda famously termed Kerala "a madhouse of caste" (Desai, 2005, p. 463; Franke & Chasin, 1989, p. 75). Not only was there clearly no sense of a common identity between various Hindu castes but members of different religions also did not share a conception of larger Malayali political community.

In the absence of a common identification, there was little support for collective welfare and virtually no demands for the provision of social services. Consequently, until the 1860s, the state took "little interest…in the education or health of the people" and "spent practically nothing on the social services," directing its expenditure instead to the ideal categories laid down in the ancient Hindu books on polity—religious functions, the upkeep of the palace, army, and civil administration[4] (Singh, 1944, p. 9).

The limited social services available to the people were on account of indigenous schools, which were mostly open only to higher caste students, private physicians who practiced the traditional *ayurvedic* form of medicine, as well as the activ-

ities of the Christian missionaries. Protestant missionaries who had arrived in the region in the early 19th century considered education to be a necessary prerequisite for their religious work (Tharakan, 1984, p. 1920). Missionaries provided the lower castes, toward whom their proselytizing activities were targeted and whom they converted in large numbers, their first access to a systematic education. They provided all castes and religions in the region their first access to Western education. Missionary societies also opened the first allopathic dispensaries and hospitals toward the middle of the 19th century and provided instruction in hygiene and public health (Ramachandran, 1998, p. 268).

The threat of annexation by British authorities on account of charges of misrule pushed the government to take some limited initiatives in the social sector in the 1860s–90s. [5] Notably, the Travancore government introduced a grants-in-aid policy, which provided financial support to private educational institutions. In 1865, the Maharajah of Travancore acknowledged the state's duty to provide medical assistance to its people and in 1894 a special sanitary department was established (Aiya, 1906, p. 499). It is important to note however, that even the meager social services provided by the state were confined almost exclusively to the higher castes. Until the end of the 19th century, lower castes were denied access to government schools and were not allowed full access to health care facilities (Jeffrey, 1976, p. 81; Tharakan, 1984, p. 1923).

In the context of state apathy, private charitable and religious efforts in education and health could generate only very limited gains. According to the census of 1875, only 5.7% of the population of Travancore was literate (Ramachandran, 1998, p. 257). In 1870–71, the Chief Medical Officer reported that "Travancore was afflicted with a high rate of mortality arising from preventable disease and that the occurrence of these was due to the almost total absence of all sanitary precautions or observances both as regards the state and the individual" (Singh, 1944, p. 342).

(b) *1890s–1950: the emergence of Malayali subnationalism triggers social development*

A set of key developments in the social, economic, and political realm, some of which had been initiated in earlier decades, came together in the closing years of the 19th century and the early decades of the 20th century to make this a period of unprecedented dynamism in Travancore. In the words of a noted historian of Kerala "a society which had remained fundamentally unchanged for 700 years came unhinged" (Jeffrey, 1976, p. 225).

To start off, the missionaries' message of equality of all before God struck at the creedal bedrock of the caste system and paved the way for the questioning of this religiously sanctioned hierarchy. In addition, the missionaries actively espoused lower caste causes and aided lower caste rebellions. Due to a combination of pressure from a British administration sympathetic to the Christian missionaries' petitions, as well its own fear of large-scale lower caste conversions, the Travancore *sirkar* (government) had undertaken a set of reforms, beginning in the 1860s, which resulted in the gradual abolition of a number of caste-based restrictions by the closing years of the 19th century. [6] These developments in the social sphere were accompanied by key economic changes, notably the abolition of caste-based agrestic slavery, the state's granting of ownership rights to tenants, the move to commercial farming, and the rapid rise in foreign trade, which fostered unprecedented economic mobility across caste lines.

These social and economic changes triggered the emergence, across castes and religions, of an upwardly mobile elite that had taken advantage of the opportunities for "western" education provided by the Christian missionaries and now sought political advancement. The administrative reforms, initiated by the young and revolutionary Dewan Madhav Rao, which emphasized merit rather than ritual status as the key criterion for recruitment to the *sirkar* service, presented precisely such an opportunity. For the first time in the history of the state, political power was now potentially accessible to members of all castes and communities, and elites from politically un/under-represented groups, specially the Nayars, Syrian Christians, and Izhavas competed zealously and at times, bitterly, to stake their respective claims. Ultimately, however, all these elites found their access to political power blocked by a common, powerful enemy—a tiny minority of non-Malayali Brahmins, who exercised supremacy over the political and socio-economic life of the state. The primary axis of political competition in the late 19th century, therefore, became the Malayali—"foreigner" divide. Nayar, Christian, and Izhava elites did not give up their caste or religious affiliations; they continued to organize around these identities, but their competition with the "outsider," the non-Malayali Brahmins pushed them to come together under an overarching Malayali identity (Jeffrey, 1976, p. 147). Elites drew on the shared symbols of language, culture, and history, mentioned in the previous section, to emphasize an encompassing Malayali identity.

These first stirrings of Malayali subnationalism, albeit at the elite level, are brought out strikingly in the "Malayali Memorial," a petition demanding greater native representation in public services submitted to the Travancore government in 1891, which had over 10,000 signatories and "claimed to express the grievances of all Malayalis—Nambudris, Nayars, Syrians, other Christians and Izhavas" (Nair, 1976, p. 168). Many of these communities had submitted petitions to the Travancore government on previous occasions but the Malayali Memorial was the first "united protest" that "embodied not merely the grievance of a section of the people, but that of the community as a whole" (Koshy, 1972, pp. 31–32). A leading historian of Kerala writes that "by the beginning of the 20th century caste-communal unification became. . .a reality" (Cherian, 1999, p. 476). A number of organizations in Travancore, Cochin, and Malabar took on a pan-Kerala identity (footnote 6). Periodicals published from places as distant as Kozhikode in the north and Thiruvananthapuram in the south adopted names such as *Kerala Patrika* and *Kerala Chintamani*.

By the early decades of the 20th century, these subnational stirrings had billowed into a powerful demand for a united Malayali homeland. The *Aikya Kerala* movement, the campaign for the consolidation of all Malayalam-speaking regions into a single state of Kerala, which began around the 1920s, played a key role in transmitting Malayali subnationalism to the masses. The tremendous popular response to signature campaigns as well as public rallies exemplified the emergence of a "Kerala-wide consciousness of shared community" (Chiriyankandath, 1993, p. 650).

The growth of Malayali subnationalism fostered the recognition of a "concept of equal rights for all" (Koshy, 1972, p. 45). There developed an emergent societal consensus, espoused equally by members of lower as well as upper castes, on the need for the extension of educational and health facilities to all Malayalis, irrespective of religion, class, or caste. A powerful sense of Malayali subnationalism fostered the understanding that the well-being of all sections of the population was the collective responsibility of all Malayalis. This appears to have enhanced the willingness of upper castes and classes to

move beyond narrowly defined self-interest and work for the good of other members and of the subnational community as a whole. The representatives of lower castes were obviously the key proponents of the eradication of caste disabilities and the equitable provision of social services to all communities, but it is notable that members of the upper castes were equally involved in, and committed to these movements. The famous Vaikom Satyagraha of 1924 and other agitations, which were instrumental in securing lower castes the right to access temples from which they had hitherto been prohibited, were, for example, spearheaded by Brahmins, Nairs, and members of other upper castes. The Malayali press, controlled primarily by upper castes, espoused the "eradication of social disabilities of the downtrodden classes with unabated vigor" (Koshy, 1972, p. 45). As early as 1890, the *Malayala Manorama* wrote an editorial urging the education of the *Pulayas*, a former slave caste (Nair, 1986, p. 3). The Sri Mulam Popular assembly, a partially representative but predominantly upper caste body established in the early 1900s, undertook "incessant and relentless efforts. . .for securing more rights and opportunities for the backward sections of the population" (Nair, 1976, p. 33). "Members of the Popular assembly and other public men vociferously pleaded for social justice" (Koshy, 1972, p. 46). The emancipation of all, including the lowest sections of Malayali society, came to be seen as central for ensuring the welfare of the subnational community as a whole.[7]

This public support for collective welfare brought out by the rapidly growing number of petitions to the government for the establishment of hospitals and schools served as an important impetus for the introduction of a range of education and health care policies (Kabir, 2002, p. 147). As Figure 1.1 shows, in the late 19th century the Travancore governments' expenditures on education and health increased sharply. Figure 1.2 shows the steady rise in the number of state educational institutions from the late 19th century onward. In contrast to the primarily elitist state initiatives of the 19th century, mass education and health programs were introduced and executed in a systematic fashion in Travancore and Cochin beginning in the 1900s. In 1904 the government accepted in principle that the education of all children in the state, irrespective of caste, creed, or race, was its responsibility and declared that it would defray the entire cost of primary education in the state (Kabir, 2002, p. 126). In 1911 the restrictions on the admission of untouchable children to departmental schools were removed and through the 1920s–30s the princely states introduced a range of affirmative action policies for lower castes, such as fee concessions and scholarships. In the 1940s, the Travancore government introduced the provision of midday meals to all students in government primary schools. This scheme constituted a significant intervention in both the fields of education

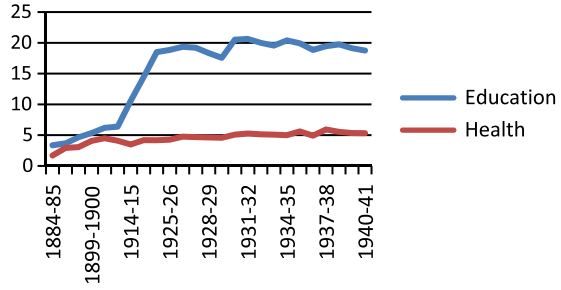

Figure 1.1. *Expenditure on education and health as proportion of total expenditure in Travancore (1884/85–1944/45). Source: Based on data in Singh (1944).*

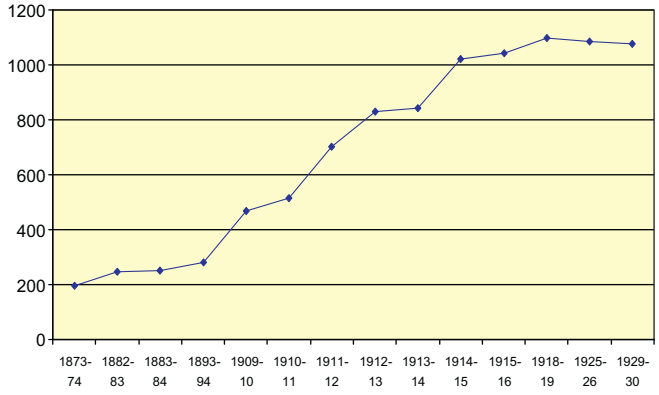

Figure 1.2. *Increase in number of state educational institutions in Travancore (1873–1930). Source: Based on data in Singh (1944).*

and health and continued uninterrupted in post-independence Kerala and was significantly expanded in the 1990s.

The expenditure on medical and public health, while lower than that on education, increased sixfold from 1900 to 1945. During this period, vaccination programs were extended to all castes and a range of sanitation programs aimed at the eradication of infectious diseases were introduced. In 1941–42, 25% of the total expenditure on the medical department was allocated toward measures designed to stem the outbreak of diseases such as cholera and smallpox, which had been one of the main causes of high mortality, particularly among the depressed castes, in the previous century (Singh, 1944, p. 434). It is important to note here that while pressure from the British had been a powerful motivation for the adoption of social reforms in Travancore in the previous period, welfare legislation in the 1900s was often passed in *opposition to the Raj*, which came to hold the view that the princely states were going too far in their commitment to welfare.[8]

The new political consciousness initiated by the anti-caste movements and furthered by subnationalist mobilization encouraged people to monitor the growing range of social services provided by the state. Complaints about the inaction of medical authorities in checking the spread of epidemics or about the quality of teaching in the local school became commonplace (Kabir, 2002, p. 147).

By the 1940s, as a consequence of the state's progressive policies supplemented by the growing popular involvement, which ensured the effectiveness of government services, Travancore and Cochin had established themselves as forerunners in the field of social development. They were not only ahead of all other states in educational and health expenditures, but had also gained a lead on most developmental indicators, including literacy rates (Figure 2.1), infant mortality rates (Figure 2.2), and life expectancy (Figure 2.3).

It is important to note that despite its preeminent position among Indian provinces, the absolute levels of social development in Kerala in 1947 were quite low. More than half the population was illiterate. In 1930, a man in Travancore was expected to live an average of 29.5 years, only a couple of years longer than a man in India (Ramachandran, 1998, p. 225). Moreover, the social development gains in the state were not equally distributed across different demographic groups and geographic regions. Even though lower castes had made significant gains in education in the early 20th century, according to the 1921 census only a very small proportion of the so-called "depressed castes" was literate. Illiteracy and infant mortality rates in Malabar, which had been under direct British control as part of the Madras presidency,

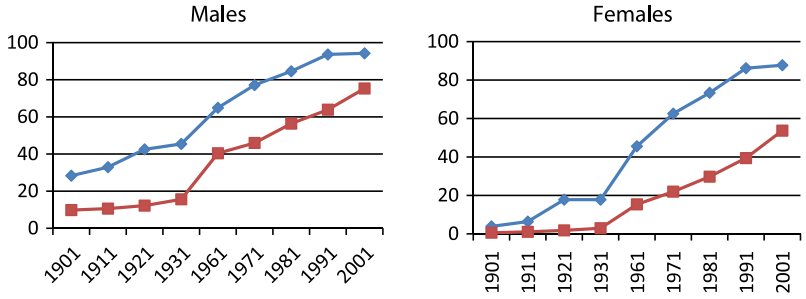

Figure 2.1. *Literacy rates in Kerala and India (1901–2001). Source: Based on data in Ramachandran (1998, pp. 257–258).*

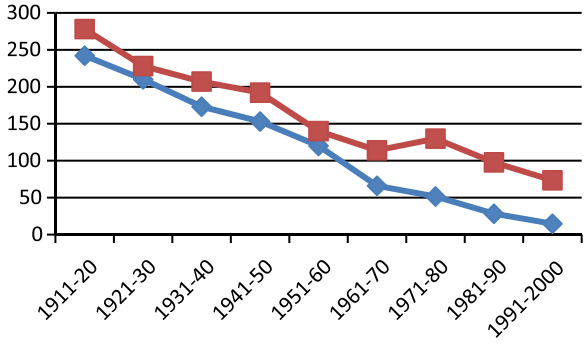

Figure 2.2. *Infant mortality rates in Kerala and India (1911–2000). Source: Based on data in Ramachandran (1998, p. 230).*

were significantly higher than those in the princely states of Travancore and Cochin.

The post-independence years marked a critical period in Kerala's developmental history. With the establishment of democratic institutions in the state in the 1950s, there emerged a pattern of very tightly contested electoral races between the Communists and the Congress party. Close political competition both bolstered Malayali subnationalism and reinforced its causal impact on social development by making governments more responsive to public opinion. Close competition with the Communists who were vociferous proponents of Malayali subnationalism pushed the Congress to also take a subnationalist stance. The uncertainty of tenure increased the risks of non-responsiveness to popular pressures. Both Communist and Congress governments were, therefore, more likely to act upon the subnationalism-generated mass demands for social welfare. Under the supplementary influence of close political competition, in the post-independence years, an increasingly cohesive Malayali subnationalism led not only to unprecedented increases in education and health outcomes but also to their marked equalization across gender, ethnic, rural-urban, and regional lines.

(c) *1950s onward: powerful Malayali subnationalism leads to high social development*

Subnationalism in Kerala reached a crescendo during the 1950s, with the leadership of the increasingly powerful *Aikya Kerala* movement being taken over by the Communist party, defined by its leader, EMS Namboodiripad, as Kerala's "national party" (Harrison, 1960, p. 195). The Communist party's victory in the first state elections in Kerala in 1957 can be explained, according to Harrison "above all, by its ability to manipulate the regional patriotism of all Kerala" (1960, p. 193). The exigencies of political competition appear to have motivated the Congress, who found themselves locked in a pattern of tight electoral races with the Communists, to also espouse Malayali subnationalism.[9] In recent years, Kerala's history of a powerful and inclusive subnationalism has become established enough to be showcased as a model in a speech by the Indian Prime Minister.[10]

As Malayalis' identification of themselves as members of a single, distinctive subnational community became stronger, so their sense of obligation toward ensuring the welfare of their compatriots was further developed. This is evident from an examination of the petitions submitted by the *Aikya Kerala* campaign to the States Reorganization Commission (SRC), a body appointed by the Indian government to assess the demands for the formation of linguistic states in the early 1950s, which reveals that a "United Kerala State" was seen as an essential condition for ensuring the "cultural, democratic

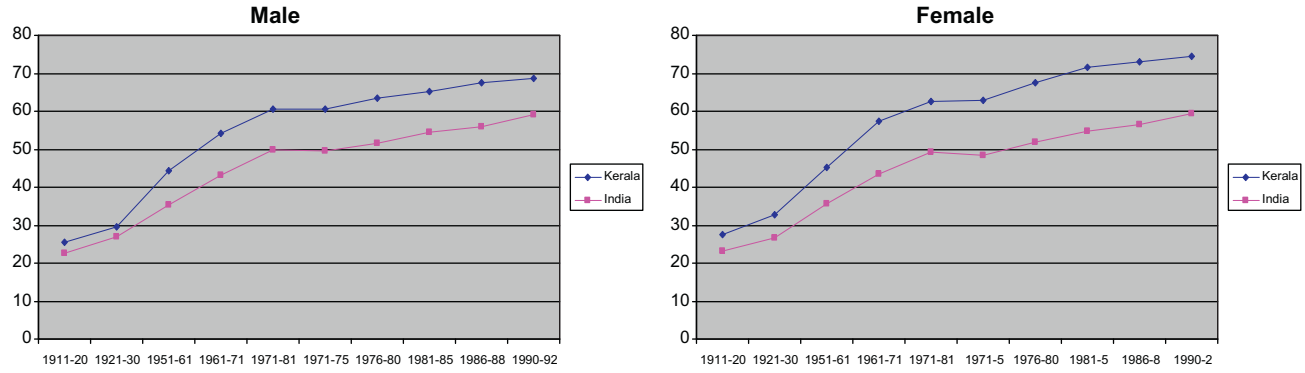

Figure 2.3. *Life expectancy at birth in Kerala and India (1911–92). Source: Ramachandran (1998, p. 225).*

and economic development of the Malayalees" (Raja, 1954). The memoranda echoed a belief that the coming together of people who had long yearned for unity would "unleash unharnessed energy, highly potential in its psychological impact" (Revolutionary Socialist Party, 1954); "an attachment to the land and the people, which very often rises stronger and higher than reason and probably life itself" (Lauren and Bava, 1954) would lead Malayalis to toil for Kerala's development. The memoranda submitted to the SRC by organizations and individuals in Malabar were flush with the idea that the government of Kerala, composed of co-nationals, would be obligated to look after their welfare, which had been neglected by the "foreigners" in the Madras government. [11] For example, a memorandum stated that "The feeling of the people of Malabar generally is that the district has suffered greatly being part of the Madras state. . .*Malabar can come into her own only as a part of Kerala state*" (Pocker Sahib, Uppi Sahib, *et al.*, 1954). The Memorandum of the Wynad Taluk Aikya Kerala Committee argued that "*development can only materialize in an Aikya Kerala*, as has been found by the people of Wynad who have had their plentiful share of wanton disregard of the current administration. *If Wynad is left out of Kerala, the backwardness of this rich land would only be prolonged for decades*" (1954). The campaigners for a United Kerala from Travancore to Cochin, in turn, seemed more than willing to take up this responsibility and vehemently refuted the not empirically unfounded argument that Malabar's relative backwardness would constitute a liability, pointing out instead that "Malabar has immense possibilities for development. . .this is possible only in an *Aikya Kerala*" (CPI, 1954, p. 3).

Since the establishment of democratic institutions. The rhetoric of the Communist Party has been infused with strong subnationalist–welfarist overtones. This is exemplified by their "Development-defined ideal vision of a unified Malayalee people" (Devika, 2002, p. 53). The Communists' election manifestoes have pushed voters to choose "a Government That Will Take Care of the Malayalee Country" (Harrison, 1960, p. 193). The Communists claimed to stand for the well-being of all Malayalis and have justified their periodic demands for increased state autonomy as necessary for ensuring "Malayali welfare," which they claimed was "neglected" by New Delhi.

Malayali subnationalism has been most powerfully articulated by political elites but it has deep popular roots. Table 1 shows that in successive rounds of the National Election Studies (NES) survey a very high proportion of people polled in Kerala agreed with the statement that "we should be loyal to our own region first, and then to India" as compared with respondents in other states. Survey data also seem to suggest an association between a strong loyalty to Kerala and the more highly developed obligations between fellow Malayalis. In the 1996 round of the NES survey, the first round for which such data are available, 91% of Hindus, the dominant religious community in Kerala, believed that it was the duty of the government to protect the rights of religious minorities as compared with 60% of Hindus across India. 66% of upper caste respondents in Kerala agreed with the statement that "backward castes should have reservations in government jobs" as compared with 56% of all upper castes surveyed in India.

As in the late colonial period, a powerful Malayali identity generated public support for collective welfare. Social and political associations in Kerala frequently submitted written demands to higher officials for improved educational and health care facilities that were widely publicized in the vernacular press (Nag, 1989, p. 418). Failure to meet these demands often resulted in public agitations—"in some cases, officials have been *gheraoed*, or surrounded by protesters who do not allow them to leave their office until demands have been met" (Franke & Chasin, 1989, p. 46). In the democratic period, close political competition exemplified by very tight electoral races and alternation in power between Congress and Communist-led regimes heightened government responsiveness to popular pressures, thereby bolstering the influence of subnationalism on social policy. Social welfare in fact emerged as a key area of competition between political parties in Kerala as each government attempted to outdo the other in the extension of the social security net (Venugopal, 2006).

From the 1950s onward, Kerala has been characterized by an extensive social policy with a pronounced redistributive emphasis. Even though Kerala has had a lower GDP *per capita* than the national average for most of the post-independence period, its *per capita* expenditure on education and health has consistently been higher than that of all Indian states. In the 1970s, the Communist-led government in Kerala implemented one of the most radical and successful set of land reforms in the world. [12] The introduction of massive public health and education schemes to benefit the relatively deprived sections of Malayali society—the poor, women, scheduled castes, residents of rural areas and of socially backward Malabar—has also been a critical, if less emphasized aspect of the state's redistribution policies (Franke & Chasin, 1989, p. 21). Successive state governments in Kerala, both Communist and Congress, have focused their attention overwhelmingly on the provision of primary education and basic health care, which catered to the needs of the poorest Malayalis. This was in marked contrast to other Indian states, where education expenditures were targeted toward secondary or higher education, which was of disproportionate benefit to the elite sections of society who had already completed basic schooling. The state also initiated a range of schemes for members of scheduled castes and women, whose social indicators had historically lagged behind those of the general population. There was a major redirection of funds toward the extension of social services in the rural areas, which remained less developed than urban areas, and also toward the northern Malabar region which had significantly lower levels of social development than other regions at the time of the creation of Kerala. The commitment of successive state governments—Communist and Congress—to the social sector is brought out by the striking fact that no major public service or redistributive program in Kerala has *ever* been reversed, despite a precarious financial position and a decline in central financial support (Heller in Ray & Katzenstein, 2005, p. 82).

The dynamism of social policies during this period was matched by societal activism, which fostered an efficient and well-utilized network of public goods. While left mobilization was also an important contributory factor, a strong identification with their state was critical in generating a high degree of political consciousness among the people of Kerala. [13] Table 2 shows that as measured by the NES surveys in 1967, 1996, and 2004, Malayalis report significantly higher political interest than Indians as a whole. Politically aware Malayali citizens bound by ties of solidarity have tended to act collectively on a range of issues, including the monitoring of the functioning of schools and health centers. [14] This is brought out by village-level studies of Kerala as well as by my own field research. [15] Anthropologist Joan Mencher who has been conducting field investigations in rural South India from the 1960s notes that physician absence at a health center prompted "a massive demonstration at the nearest collector [regional government office]" in Kerala, but not in neighboring Tamil Nadu (1980, p. 1782). Similarly, Kathleen Gough recounts an incident in 1962 when angry neighbors dragged a physician from a

cinema and forced him to go to the hospital to deliver the baby of a woman who was in great pain (cited in Franke and Chassin (1989, p. 45)). Such public vigilance has been essential in ensuring the effective functioning of health centers and primary schools in Kerala (Drèze & Sen, 2002, p. 92).[16] A study of health centers in Kerala in the 1980s found that "all the staff were regularly at work" (Franke & Chasin, 1989, p. 46). A UNICEF educational survey conducted in 1999 found that Kerala had one of the lowest rates of teacher absenteeism in the country (Mehrotra, 2006, p. 264).

The combination of top-down state policies and bottom-up social activism has generated remarkable social gains in Kerala in the post-independence years. Literacy rates increased sharply during the 1950s–60s—characterized as the "education breakthrough period" (Mehrotra, 2000, p. 15)—and have risen today to over 90%, which is 25% above the literacy rate for India and equivalent to the average for all middle-income countries. The spread of education, especially among women, contributed to greater awareness of health problems and fuller utilization of health facilities and has fostered striking improvements in Kerala's health indicators (Ramachandran, 1998, p. 233). As Figure 2.2 shows, until 1950 Kerala's IMR was not substantially lower than India's, but in the next couple of decades it declined far more steeply than for India. Today a child in Kerala is almost five times more likely to live beyond her first birthday as compared to a child in any other state in India. Kerala's IMR puts it among the top 33% of all countries of the world. In a global ranking it is placed roughly between Argentina (15) and Serbia (13). Kerala's life expectancy of 74 years is 10 years higher than the Indian average and puts it among the top 30% of the countries in the world, equivalent to Macedonia and Bahrain.

Such gains in social indicators are remarkable in themselves. In order to fully appreciate the "miracle" of Kerala's development (Mencher, 1980, p. 1781), however, it is important to note the equity of improvements in education and health across class, gender, caste, and religious and regional lines. Through the post-independence period, education and health indicators for the poor, women, scheduled castes and tribes, religious minorities, and rural residents have been significantly higher in Kerala as compared with their counterparts in other Indian states. Moreover, while there do remain some differentials in levels of well-being across groups within Kerala, these are minimal compared to the yawning gaps within communities in other Indian states. Various surveys suggest that income has not been a major determinant of access to better health facilities in the state.[17] While the average Indian rural female is expected to live 8 years less than her urban counterpart (59 vs. 67 years), in Kerala, life expectancy for rural and urban females is almost equal at a high of 75 years. It is notable that Kerala bucks the national trend of relative backwardness of Muslims. With a 90% literacy rate, Malayali Muslims are are as likely to be able to read and write as Malayali Hindus and about 30% more likely to be literate than the average Indian Muslim. A rural scheduled caste female is more than twice as likely to be literate if she lives in Kerala as compared to any other state in India. A member of the Scheduled Tribes is almost 20% more likely to be literate in Kerala than another Indian state (Census of India, 2001). Social indicators in the northern Malabari districts, which were at a distinct development disadvantage at the time of Kerala's formation, are now virtually equivalent to the rest of Kerala.

Table 1. "*Loyalty to region*" *in Kerala versus other Indian states (1967, 1996). Source: CSDS (1967, 1996)*

	Respondents agreeing with "We should be loyal to our own region first and then to India" (%)	
	1967	1996
Kerala	82.4	79
India	67	53.5

Malayalis are justly proud of their social achievements. State government reports and newspaper articles frequently showcase educational and health gains as the key accomplishments of the state. An observer of contemporary Kerala politics cannot, therefore, be faulted for wondering whether it might not in fact be that the state's impressive social development has generated a sense of shared pride and identity among Malayalis rather than vice versa. It is certainly likely that educated and healthy citizens with easy access to efficient public services are more likely to have a stronger identification with their state. Kerala's development successes have, in all likelihood, reinforced Malayali subnationalism. The thesis that subnationalism in Kerala emerged as a consequence of Malayalis' pride in their development achievements, however, is difficult to sustain in the wake of substantial evidence that neither Malayalis nor external observers thought of the region as "developed" at least until the late 1960s. The signatories of the Malayali Memorial of 1891, one of the first clear indicators of the emergence of Malayali subnationalism, argued that Malayalis were underdeveloped, as compared with the people in the neighboring Madras Presidency as well as the rest of India.[18] At the turn of the century, Kerala was described as "a body that was seldom washed and was full of dirt and filth" (Koshy, 1972, p. 53). In the 1930s, in a work entitled the "The future of the Malayalees," noted Malayalam journalist, Kesari A. Balakrishna Pillai, wrote that "the Malayalee's position, when compared to that of others, is very backward... There is the possibility that in independent India of the future, Malayalees may...gradually decline, becoming slaves to other peoples" (cited in Devika (2002, p. 55)). Devika notes that "The discourse of Development" within India classified areas "as closer to or farther from Development, and the Malayalees were identified early enough as 'underdeveloped'" (2002, p. 27). Despite the overwhelming popular demand, the States Reorganization Commission voiced reservations in recommending the creation of a single Malayali state in the 1950s because of fears of its economic "unviability".[19] The SRC eventually supported the formation of a unified Kerala; the then Chief Minister of Travancore–Cochin, Panampilli Govinda Menon, while expressing his approval for this move, however, felt compelled to write to Prime Minister Nehru to forewarn him that the new state is likely to be a "'problem state' among the many proposed states."[20]

Subnationalism in Kerala was initiated through a process of elite competition, which activated a historic but latent set of shared symbols, notably a common language and culture. In the late 19th century, socio-economic changes fostered the emergence of a set of elites from various castes and religions, who evoked an overarching linguistic and cultural Malayali identity in order to effectively challenge the political dominance of the "foreign" non-Malayali Brahmins. The growth of the *Aikya Kerala* movement in subsequent decades was critical in transmitting Malayali subnationalism to the masses. In more recent years, pride in the state's social achievements might certainly have "fed back" to reinforce it, but the historical evidence strongly suggests that the emergence of Malayali subnationalism was prior to exogenous to the improvements in education and health indicators.

Table 2. *Political consciousness in Kerala versus other Indian states (1967, 2004). Source: CSDS (1967, 1996, 2004)*

	Respondents with "Somewhat" or "Great deal of Interest" in election campaign (%)			Respondents with "Somewhat" or "Great deal of Interest" in politics & public affairs (%)		
	1967	1996	2004	1967	1996	2004
Kerala	73	49	53.4	53	50	49
India	35	32	43	34	35	43

3. ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS

The "Kerala Model" has attracted considerable scholarly attention. In this section I will critically analyze three of the most prominent theories—the policies of princely states, the significance of left parties and mobilization, and the role of Christian missionaries—that have been proposed to explain Kerala's exemplary social achievements. Recent debate on Kerala has tended to focus on the differences between the first two schools of thought (Chasin & Franke, 1991; Sen, 1990, 1991). I see the emphases on the agency of an enlightened monarchy in the colonial period and left governments in the post-colonial period, however, as essentially complementary arguments about the significance of state commitment for social development. I seek to push forward these theses by showing that progressive state policies—undertaken by native rulers before 1950 and by left and non-left governments post-1950—have been driven primarily by an underlying, powerful Malayali subnationalism. I also seek to realign the focus of the extensive scholarship on the contribution of Christian missionaries to Kerala's social development away from the conventional emphasis on missionaries as providers of public services to instead concentrate on their pioneering role in initiating key social changes that triggered the emergence of Malayali subnationalism.

(a) *Policies of princely states*

The attribution of Kerala's social development to "the public policy of 'enlightenment'" beginning "as early as 1817" (Sen, 1991) exaggerates when and why the princely rulers of Travancore and Cochin took steps for the diffusion of education. The Royal Proclamation issued by the young queen of Travancore in 1817, which Sen highlights as evidence of the princely rulers' commitment to education, was in fact drafted by the British resident Colonel Munro (Tharakan, 1984, p. 1918) and "was not seriously implemented for nearly a century" (Krishnan, 1995, p. 6). As noted earlier, the state paid minimal attention to the social sector until the close of the 19th century. In 1870–71, the British administration urged Travancore to cut down "palace expenses" to release money for more "useful" purposes like public works and education, but this advice went mostly unheeded (Kawashima, 1998, p. 26). From 1880s–1900, the proportion of expenditure on education in Cochin was lower than most other Indian provinces, while that of Travancore was equal to Madras (Singh, 1944, p. 406).

When the state did expand social services, it did so less because of the enlightened initiative of the rulers and more often as (an initially reluctant) response to growing popular pressure and increasingly less gentle nudges from the British.[21] The Travancore government's first major initiative in the education sector, the introduction of a large scale grants-in-aid system in the late 1870s, targeted primarily toward Christian Missionary schools for lower castes was, for example, not the result of an edified princely edict but instead, a compromise—"the best possible option" for a state that was "not to ready deal with...the education of the lower castes" but faced increasingly vociferous demands to do so (Kawashima, 1998, pp. 99–100). The fickleness of princely rulers' commitment to the social sector is illustrated by the government's decision in 1921 to reduce its health budget on the grounds that it had "placed medical relief within fairly easy reach of all the people." It was only when this "tall claim" of the government was powerfully challenged by the people through petitions and representations that the government withdrew its decision 2 years later (Kabir, 2002, p. 149).

Like Sen, I emphasize the contribution of princely rulers in giving Kerala its head start in social development at the time of Indian independence. Unlike Sen, however, I locate the expansion of a systematic system of state education not "nearly two centuries ago" (Sen, 1990) but in the late 1800s and argue that it was driven less by the "enlightenment" (Sen, 1991) of princes and more because of an increasingly cohesive Malayali identity.

(b) *Left parties and mobilization*

A second prominent set of arguments explain Kerala's education and health achievements as a product of left politics—Communist governments and the longer history of class-based mobilization (Franke & Chasin, 1989). The association between rule by left parties and higher levels of social expenditure is well-established in the literature on the welfare state in Western Europe, and has been articulated best in the Indian context by Kohli (1987). Communist party rule in Kerala has indeed been characterized by generous social outlays and the introduction of creative schemes to target the most deprived sections of society. The Communists' commitment to the social sector, however, has been matched by that of Congress regimes.[22] The levels of social expenditures and rates of improvement in social development indicators have remained nearly equivalent across periods of Communist and Congress rule in Kerala. It is also notable that the Indian state of West Bengal, which has a far longer record of Communist rule than Kerala, has not been able to achieve similar developmental gains.

A variant of such left arguments traces Kerala's developments to its history of class mobilization. The most sophisticated such analysis—Heller (1996, 2000)—argues that class-based movements and associations have generated social capital, which has fostered Kerala's high levels of social development. Class mobilization does not necessarily promote "norms and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit" (Putnam, 1995, p. 67). Left movements in other parts of India have tended to be divisive and violent. So what is special about class mobilization in Kerala? Heller repeatedly stresses the "solidaristic" nature of class movements in Kerala (1996, pp. 1060, 1066 and 2000, pp. 515, 519). He notes that the "encompassing" nature of class associations in Kerala have been "the exception to the rule" in the Indian context (2000, p. 494).

My analysis traces this peculiar "solidaristic politics of the left" (2000, p. 515), which Heller takes as a starting point for his argument, to the intimate historical connection between Communist mobilization and Malayali subnationalism. The left movement in Kerala took root in the context of a growing Malayali identification. For a combination of instrumental and ideological reasons, class associations quickly came to champion the subnational cause. Trade union and students' movements were, from their very inception, organized on a pan-Kerala basis.[23] Left groups played a critical role in the *Aikya Kerala* movement—organizing massive public meetings and submitting petitions to the SRC. Left writers penned emotive paeans to their motherland, which became subnational anthems.[24] The Communist party was established on an explicitly subnationalist basis and has retained a strong Malayali identity. It is this unique embeddedness in Malayali subnationalism, which has given class mobilization in Kerala a distinctive "universalistic character" (1996, p. 1066) and led it to support "cooperative and inclusionary social policies" (2000, p. 519). Subnationalism is therefore, I believe, the implicit but essential subtext to Heller's class mobilization thesis.

(c) *Christian missionaries*

Virtually all studies on Kerala emphasize the significance of the provision of social services by the Christian missionaries for the state's development achievements. I seek to present a novel and more nuanced account of the role of the missionaries in Kerala's development, not merely as providers of public services but, further back in the causal chain, as the initiators of key social changes that triggered the emergence of Malayali subnationalism.

Christian missionaries are commonly described as pioneers in the field of social development (Gladstone, 1984; Mathew, 1999). This is by no means incorrect but it is critical to be precise about the nature of their contributions. Firstly, the missionaries were the first to introduce "western" education and health.[25] Secondly, the missionaries were the first to make a systematic education available to lower castes and women. This model of service provision certainly boosted Kerala's social development but in so far as the percentage of people educated in English as well as literacy rates for lower castes and women were very low in the early 20th century, it is important not to overestimate the extent of that contribution.[26]

Moreover, the missionaries could provide the social services that they did only because of the support of the Travancore government. The Hindu state not only followed a "semi-official policy of religious tolerance" (Kawashima, 1998, p. 27), allowing the Christian missionaries to set up shop in the first place but also provided financial support in terms of grants of money and land, which was essential for the missionaries, as well as the caste associations that developed in the early 1900s, to be able to provide the social services that they did. Even with extensive state support, the missionaries and the caste associations did not have the ability (or arguably, the motivation) to launch the large-scale interventions in education and health, such as universal literacy campaigns and immunization drives that were critical for Kerala's exemplary social gains.

The experience of many other Indian states, such as neighboring Tamil Nadu, which have achieved social outcomes that compare favorably with those of Kerala in the absence of equivalent service provision by Christian missionaries, would also suggest the limitations of emphasizing missionary education and health facilities as a necessary condition for the state's development achievements.

The truly pioneering aspect of the missionary activities in Kerala, I argue, lies instead in their ideological and material undermining of the centuries-old, rigid, and oppressive caste hierarchy. Through their preaching of the equality of humans before God, the missionaries' questioned the creedal bedrock of caste. In addition they initiated and abetted caste rebellions and successfully petitioned the state to remove a range of caste-based discriminations. The Missionaries' specific model of service provision—western education for lower castes—did contribute, though not to the degree that most accounts stress, to the raising of the over-all educational levels of the states, but I believe that their more critical contribution was in triggering a challenge to the caste system and providing a set of politicized, economically mobile members of lower castes with an English education, which allowed them to contest the non-Malayali Brahmins' hegemony over the state bureaucracy. As discussed earlier, it was in the course of this elite competition for political power towards the end of the nineteenth century that Malayali subnationalism emerged.

4. CONCLUSION

A longitudinal analysis of the Indian state of Kerala, which is highly fractionalized along religious and caste lines but has attained exceptional levels of social development, challenges the pessimistic conclusion of an influential set of studies that greater ethnic diversity leads to worse lower public goods provision.[27] It shows that ethnic diversity need not be a deal breaker for social development.

This finding - the primary empirical contribution of this study rests on a theoretical distinction between the objective and subjective aspects of identity. The political economy literature takes the size and distribution of ethnic groups as a proxy for the nature of ethnic relations. It tends to assume that ethnic homogeneity implies ethnic harmony and ethnic heterogeneity signifies ethnic divisions. In contrast, this article seeks to separate the objective diversity of group membership from subjective feelings of cohesion or division. It grants an independent causal role to the *politics* of identity, rather than simply reading it off demographic indicators. The central theoretical contribution of this study is to show how the cohesiveness of a political community, a subjective feeling of belonging to a common polity, which need not be related to ethnic demography, can be a driver of public goods provision and levels of social development.[28] Whether or not members of different ethnic groups have conflicting preferences as regards social services or can act collectively to fill in gaps in state welfare provision, the two mechanisms by which political economy scholars most commonly hypothesize that ethnicity influences public goods provision, both hinge crucially on whether or not they share a broader, encompassing identity. The case study of Kerala illustrates how a sense of one-ness among ethnic groups fosters support for collective welfare and makes residents more likely to work together to monitor social services. It illustrates how a powerful subnationalism can mitigate the potential negative influences of a high degree of ethnic fractionalization. This study, therefore, suggests a refocusing of scholarly attention away from the conventional question of the impact of a heterogeneous ethnic demography on public goods provision toward an exploration of the factors that promote a subjective sense of cohesion, which can moderate the influence of ethnic diversity.

NOTES

1. This is part of a larger body of research that suggests a negative association between ethnic diversity and developmental outcomes such as public infrastructure (Khwaja 2002) and maintenance of the commons (Baland & Platteau 1998, Dayton-Johnson 2000).

2. This analysis is based on a larger book- length study on the causes for the variation in social development across Indian states in which the subnationalism argument is developed through a comparative historical analysis of four Indian states, including Kerala, and tested statistically, across all major Indian states from the 1960s to 2006.

3. The state is the appropriate unit of analysis in so far as both during the colonial and post-Independence periods, the primary responsibility for developmental policies in India has rested with the state (or provincial) rather than the national government. Since Indian independence, states have played the key role in the formulation and execution of policies regarding both education and health, and account for nearly 90% of total government expenditure on these sectors.

4. In 1871, the British government in Madras claimed that state upkeep of temples was "an unnecessarily heavy charge on the state" and ordered "a careful scrutiny of this expenditure with a view to its reduction." The Travancore rulers were also advised to cut down on such wasteful expenses to release money for more "useful" purposes like social services (Kawashima, 1998, p. 26).

5. Jeffrey notes that in the 1850s, "by all admissions, Travancore was misgoverned." He points out that numerous complaints about maladministration led the Madras government to "favor some form of direct interference in Travancore's internal affairs" (1976, p. 64). Lord Dalhousie wrote the Maharaja of Travancore an ominous letter, which stated that "unless averted by timely and judicious reforms, annexation of Travancore is a distinct possibility" (Tharakan, 1984, p. 1961).

6. Slavery and forced labor (*uriyam*) had been abolished by the 1860s. Restrictions on the styles of life (clothing, housing) of lower castes were gradually repealed. In 1870 all courts of law were made accessible to lower castes. In the early 1880s, a government circular opened most public roads to all castes and communities. Many of these policies met with opposition and remained a dead letter but "there is no doubt that these disabilities gradually diminished towards the end of the 19th century" (Kawashima, 1998, p. 153).

7. Gopala Menon's *Samudayolkkarsham* (1924), for example, encouraged individuals to "actively contribute to and cooperate with the efforts of the state to facilitate the self-development of every individual... Individuals were advised to desist from activities that could impede the self-development of others" (Devika, 2002, p. 23).

8. For example, J. Andrew, the Resident of Travanacore during 1903–04, noted that "Travancoreans are willing to pay for the education of their children...and *I do not see why Primary Education should now be made free*" (cited in Nair (1981, p. 42); emphasis added).

9. This is manifested most strikingly in the Congress government's patronage of Malayali arts and culture, and their decision to introduce state-sponsored celebrations of Onam, a unique Malayali festival celebrated by all castes and religions, which they subsequently declared as the "national festival" of Kerala (Kurup, 1966).

10. In a speech in 2005, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh stated "That every Malayali, irrespective of religion and creed, shares common cultural bonds through music, dance, cuisine and language is an inspiring example of 'Unity in Diversity'. Historically, Kerala was perhaps one of the earliest examples of . . .pluralism and inclusiveness. It has fostered a culture of tolerance. . .accommodation, of give-and-take, of inclusiveness, of cosmopolitanism" (Prime Minister's Office, 2005).

11. One petitioner from Malabar, for example, argued that "The Madras government was predominantly a Government of the Andhra and the Tamil people. . .the needs of (the Malayali) districts were of minor consideration for the Madras Government. They feel they [were] given only a step-motherly treatment" (Nair. 1954).

12. The enactment and implementation of these land reforms was a long and fraught process that generated considerable socio-political conflict. However, the very fact that such a comprehensive redistribution of income could occur (in contrast to other states in India where far more limited land reforms were thwarted by powerful interests) and that too with a relatively limited degree of violence could be seen as a testament to the cohesiveness of the Malayali political community, but this is a point worthy of a separate, more detailed analysis.

13. Kerala has recorded the highest average electoral turnout of all Indian provinces in state legislature elections through most of the post-independence period. The average turnout in Kerala has been 75% as compared with 69% in West Bengal. According to the 1967 NES, 72.5% of respondents in Kerala said that they cared very much who won in their constituency as compared with 47% in West Bengal and 40% in India. Secondary studies, for example, by Nag (1989) note the higher levels of political consciousness in Kerala as compared with West Bengal. The significantly lower degree of political awareness and involvement in West Bengal, which has a much longer record of Communist rule, brings out the limits of an argument that attributes Malayalis' heightened political awareness purely to left mobilization.

14. Franke and Chasin (1997) document numerous instances of collective action among Malayali citizens on a range of other social issues. In 1997, for example, 300 households in Chapparapadavu district contributed toward the building of a bridge, in order to enable the village students to more easily access a government school on the other end of the river. In Methala, a village assembly organized monetary contributions of Rs. 12,000 and several hours of volunteer labor to build a one-room house for a homeless, low-caste widow and her young daughter (Franke & Chasin, 1997).

15. In a focus group interview in 2006, residents of Muvattupuzha municipality of Ernakulam district told me that the openings of government schools and health centers were occasions of massive public involvement. The local elected representatives and party activists, government officials, local teachers, doctors and nurses, village elders, as well as numerous people from the village, including many women, debated issues such as the location of the school or clinic and logistics such as the provision of the noon-meal.

16. Cherian notes that "The higher quality of life in Kerala is not merely the result of provisioning of services by the state in the form of physical facilities. . . It is equally important to recognize the growth of awareness among the masses and collective action by them to ensure that these facilities are utilized fully and well" (1995, p. 73).

17. Ramachandran (1998, p. 232), for example, cites an all-Kerala study by the Kerala Shastra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP), which showed that the incidence of vaccine-preventable diseases was not significantly concentrated among low-income families.

18. Comparing Travancore and Malabar, the Memorial claimed that "there is little or no difference as to the extent to which education has spread in the respective countries" (Koshy, 1972, p. 84), even as the

Census records of 1901 indicate that literacy in Travancore was in fact discernibly higher than in Malabar.

19. The Report of the SRC stated that "There have been some suggestions that considering its size, the density of population, which is the highest in India, and the menacing problem of unemployment, it would be best for the whole of Kerala area to be united with Madras to form a South Indian state. A further argument in favour of this proposal is that Travancore–Cochin, deprived of its Tamil taluks and yoked with economically backward Malabar, would not constitute a viable unit" (1955, pp. 86–87).

20. Letter from Panampilli Govinda Menon to Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, dated November 3, 1955. Views of the Government of Travancore on the Report of the States Reorganization Commission. National Archives of India, File no. 20/1/55 SR.

21. Drèze and Sen argue that Travancore and Cochin could prioritize the social sector because by virtue of being "formally outside British India. . .they were not subjected to the general lack of interest of Whitehall officialdom in Indian elementary education." A closer reading of the historical evidence suggests that at least until the late 19th century it was the consistent pressure from the British administration to introduce "modernizing reforms" that pushed the princely states of Travancore and Cochin to expand state education and health services (Desai, 2005, p. 460; Kawashima, 1998, p. 100). Drèze and Sen suggest that the princely rulers could introduce "pioneering" educational initiatives because they were not bound to bring their policies in line with the more regressive social policies in the rest of India under the Raj (2002, p. 99). On the basis of a detailed historical comparison, Tharakan, however, shows that the social policies of Travancore–Cochin in fact "broadly conformed to those prevailing in British India" (1984, p. 1919).

22. A newspaper editorial noted that "The defining feature of the (Kerala) paradigm is the centrality of political agency, *irrespective of the fronts that occupied office*, in the development process" (Lal, 2006). Kutty points out that "Investment in education and health infrastructure has been a consistent policy of all elected governments in Kerala, *whatever their political leaning*" (2000, p. 103 emphasis added).

23. An All Kerala Workers' Conference was organized in Kozhikode in May 1935 and again, in Thrissur in 1937. The Kerala Students Federation was formed in 1937 (Thanickan, 2006, p. 8).

24. Communist P. Bhaskaran's powerful poem, 'One Language, One Nation', which begins "Over the fields, singing aloud, let us move, to sound the horn of united Keralam" became a rallying cry for the *Aikya Kerala* movement.

25. As I have noted earlier, prior to the arrival of the Protestant missionaries in the early 19th century, there were fairly extensive systems of indigenous education and health in place in Travancore. *Ayurvedic* hospitals and clinics in fact continue to constitute a key component of health service delivery in Kerala today.

26. As late as 1911, only 1.5% of the male population and 0.2% of the female population of Travancore possessed a knowledge of English. In 1921, the literacy rates of the three main "depressed communities," the Kuravas, Pulayas, and Parayas were 3.5, 4, and 10 for males and 1, 1.4, and 5 for females respectively. In 1901, the female literacy rate in Travancore was less than 4% by 1931, just over 15% of females in the state were literate.

27. This supports the interesting but under theorized finding in Alesina, Devleeschauwer, Easterly, Kurlat & Wacziarg (2003) that religious fractionalization is positively correlated with various measures of good governance.

28. It is important to note that I am not suggesting that objective diversity and a subjective sense of one-ness are unrelated. Similarity can certainly foster integration. Linguistic homogeneity, for example, was an important starting point for the construction of a cohesive political community in Kerala. My point is that it is theoretically problematic and often empirically incorrect to conflate homogeneity with harmony and diversity with divisions. Ethnic homogeneity might aid the emergence of a cohesive political community but it is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition. Other Indian states, which were as linguistically homogeneous as Kerala, for example, did not develop a cohesive subnationalism. Similarly, states have managed to develop a powerful subnational identity even in the context of linguistic heterogeneity.

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