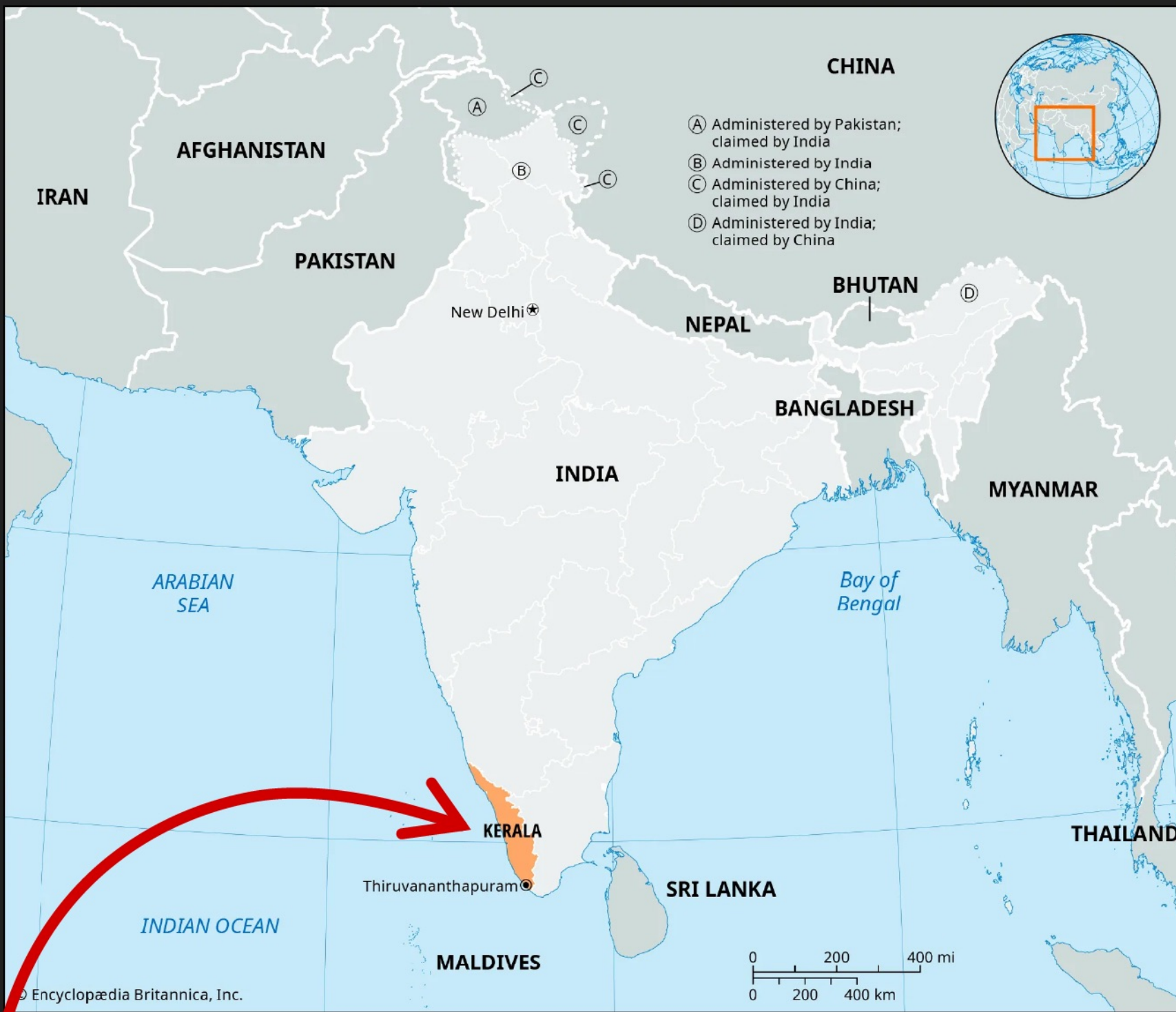


The Communist Party of India (Marxist)

PARTIES OF THE PEOPLE
PT. 5/6



Pinarayi Vijayan



On November 1st, Pinarayi Vijayan, the Keralan Chief Minister of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), or CPI(M), announced that **the state of Kerala had eradicated extreme poverty.**

Through the leadership of the CPI(M), Kerala has undergone a decades-long transformation **from one of the poorest states in India to a beacon of social prosperity.**

Let's unpack the CPI(M)'s remarkable journey →

History

The Communist Party of India (CPI) was founded on October 17th, 1920. By organising masses of peasants, workers, and students, the **CPI was instrumental in liberating India from centuries of British colonial rule.**



In 1957, the peasantry and working class powered the CPI to victory in Kerala's first state assembly elections. The CPI used its political power to nurture its class base, pursuing an ambitious programme of land reform and public investment in healthcare and education.



Formation of the CPI(M)

In 1964, the CPI split over debates about the class character of the post-independence Indian state and its leader, Jawaharlal Nehru of the ruling National Congress party. The faction opposed to cooperation with the National Congress formed the CPI(M), while those in support of cooperation retained the CPI name.

The CPI(M)-led Left Front would go on to win elections in the state of West Bengal (1977) and the state of Tripura (1978). As in Kerala, these left governments focused on land reform, education, and healthcare, especially in service of Dalit (“untouchable”) caste and Adivasi (indigenous) communities, which constitute the poorest parts of Indian society.



The Kerala Model

Many consider Kerala to be the “heartland” of the Indian communist movement. This is due to the immense social progress that the CPI(M) and wider left* has achieved over decades of struggle, including:

- **Near-universal access to health and education**
- **Highest literacy rate in India (96.2%)**
- **Highest life expectancy in India**
- **The lowest infant mortality rate in India**

The recent eradication of extreme poverty sits squarely within this legacy of CPI(M)-led socialist development, which economists call the “Kerala Model.”

***Note:** The CPI(M) has historically led an electoral coalition in Kerala known as the Left Democratic Front.



Serve the People

Every member of the CPI(M) must pledge to “selflessly serve the working class and the toiling masses and the country.” It is this spirit which underpins the people-first nature of the CPI(M)-led Extreme Poverty Eradication Project (EPEP):

Data-Driven:

A door-to-door survey led by local institutions and Kudumbashree, a women’s cooperative network with over four million members, mapped poverty in Kerala.

Decentralised:

Participatory local assemblies created micro-plans for each of the 103,000 people* identified as living in “extreme deprivation.”

Tailored Support:

Anti-poverty measures included immediate relief (food kits, emergency healthcare), short-term action (temporary housing, employment aid), and long-term solutions (skills training, permanent housing).

Note: For context, the population of Kerala is well over 33.4 million people.

Socialism Leads the Way

This sophisticated mass-line approach closely tracks China's Targeted Poverty Alleviation programme, which mobilised 3 million Communist Party of China cadre to the countryside to help lift 98.99 million people out of extreme poverty.

Upon completion of the EPEP, Xu Feihong, the Chinese ambassador to India, said: *"to eliminate poverty is the common mission of humanity."*

Socialism's ability to root out poverty stands in marked contrast to capitalism's inability to meet people's basic needs. Over 2 billion people worldwide, mostly in the Global South, still face food insecurity, while in the US – the wealthiest country in human history – over 40% of people are poor or low-income.



Modern Development

Beyond extreme poverty alleviation, the CPI(M) is also experimenting with modern forms of development, like the **Kerala Fibre Optic Network**, which provides free or affordable high-speed internet to marginalised communities, **and the Haritha Kerala Mission**, which encourages sustainable practices like rainwater harvesting and organic farming.

The CPI(M) is able to deliver on development despite the contradictions of working within bourgeois political structures. Its constitution mandates that elected officials remain “in strict conformity with the line of the Party, its policies and directives...to devotedly serve the masses.”

Opposing the Far Right

The CPI(M) is actively organising against the rise of fascistic Hindutva* forces, represented by the paramilitary organisation Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, and its political-electoral arm Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), to which President Narendra Modi belongs.

In 2021, the CPI(M) drew on the mass support of the people, including Muslim constituencies, to win re-election in Kerala, breaking the “incumbency curse.” This shows the popular backing of the CPI(M) as a real opposition to the BJP.

Indeed, in their constitution, the CPI(M) identifies “religious fundamentalism, obscurantism, communalism** and casteism” as structures that need to be tackled head on in the wider process of socialist construction.

***Note:** Hindutva is right-wing political Hinduism.

****Note:** Tricontinental defines “communalism” as the “idea that religious communities are political communities with secular interests that are opposed to each other.” Communalism often leads to violence waged against other religious groups.





This is part 5 of 6 in our series analysing leftwing parties from around the world.

Harness the state:

Draw on your social base to win the state and advance your political programme.

Mass-line approach:

Go to the people, identify their needs, and address them in a way that increases their political agency.

Combat the right:

Use a people-first approach to construct a broad front against fascistic forces.

Protracted struggle:

Recognise that the struggle for socialism is long and difficult, with many peaks and valleys.

**The CPI(M)
provides many
lessons for
organisers seeking
to build an effective
mass left party:**