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# A COMPARATIVE REASSESSMENT OF DEMOCRACY AND DEVELOPMENT PARADIGMS: A TALE OF THE KERALA AND THE GUJARAT MODELS IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA


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**GDP:** GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT

**$:** DOLLAR

**USD:** UNITED STATES DOLLAR

**INR:** INDIAN RUPEE

**PPP:** PURCHASING POWER PARITY

**EG:** ECONOMIC GROWTH

**PM:** PRIME MINISTER

**HD:** HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

**FDI:** FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT

**SEZ:** SPECIAL ECONOMIC ZONE

**GSDP:** GROSS STATE DOMESTIC PRODUCT

**BJP:** BHARTIYA JANTA PARTY

**NSDP:** NET STATE DOMESTIC PRODUCT

**TFR:** TOTAL FERTILITY RATE

**YoY:** YEAR ON YEAR

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# ABSTRACT

The relationship between **economic growth (EG)** and **human development (HD)** remains one of the most significant debates in development economics and democratic governance. While conventional growth-oriented theories advocate that economic expansion eventually improves social welfare through a **"trickle-down" effect**, human development approaches contend that investments in education, healthcare, and social welfare constitute the foundation for sustainable economic progress. This study examines this debate through a comparative analysis of India's two most prominent developmental paradigms—the **Gujarat Model** and the **Kerala Model**.

The research evaluates the democratic characteristics, policy priorities, and developmental outcomes of both models by analyzing their respective contributions to economic growth, industrialization, human development, social welfare, and institutional governance. It further explores the intellectual debate between **Jagdish Bhagwati and Arvind Panagariya**, who advocate a growth-first strategy, and **Amartya Sen**, who emphasizes human capability and social investment as prerequisites for long-term development.

The study also investigates the extent to which the Gujarat Model exhibits similarities with Singapore's developmental state and assesses the implications of this governance approach within the contemporary Indian democratic framework.

The findings suggest that neither model, in isolation, provides a complete framework for India's long-term development. While the Gujarat Model has demonstrated significant success in promoting industrialization, infrastructure development, investment, and economic growth, the Kerala Model has achieved remarkable outcomes in literacy, public health, gender development, and social equity through sustained public investment and participatory governance.

Accordingly, the paper proposes a **balanced developmental paradigm** that integrates the economic dynamism of the Gujarat Model with the inclusive human development orientation of the Kerala Model. It argues that India's future lies in pursuing rapid economic growth alongside

constitutional democracy, social justice, institutional accountability, protection of civil liberties, and equitable access to education, healthcare, and welfare. Such a synthesis represents the most sustainable pathway toward an economically prosperous, socially inclusive, and democratically resilient India.

## KEYWORDS

**Economic Growth; Human Development; Gujarat Model; Kerala Model; Democratic Capitalism; Illiberal Democracy; Development Economics; Amartya Sen; Jagdish Bhagwati; Inclusive Development; Constitutional Democracy; Balanced developmental paradigm; India**

## INTRODUCTION

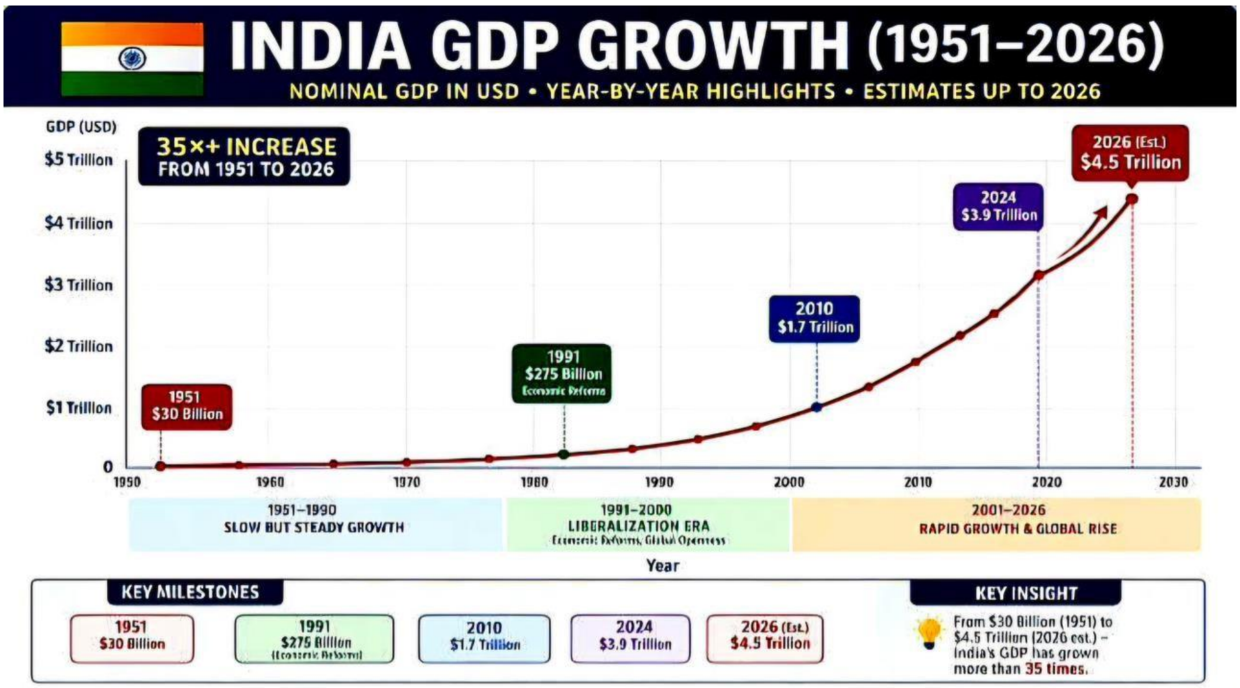
In 1980s, India's GDP was a meagre $271 billion, ranking below several worn-torn states across the globe. Whereas India's nominal GDP has seen a significant rise as estimated between $3.95 Trillion to $4.05 trillion for calendar year 2025. Whereas, for the fiscal year 2025–26, India's real **GDP growth** reached a robust **7.7%**, climbing from an estimated value of over ₹323 lakh crore.

From the mires of near stagnation under British colonial rule and the ensuing **Hindu rate of growth'** for many decades, India's recent success in economic growth (EG) is commendable

## KEY ECONOMIC INDICATORS (2025)

- **Nominal GDP (USD):** ~$3.96 trillion
- **Real GDP Growth Rate:** 7.7% (FY 2025-26 provisional annual estimates)
- **Nominal GDP (INR):** ~₹346.36 lakh crore (at current prices for FY 2025-26)
- **GDP in PPP Terms:** ~$19.88 trillion

**<u>HINDU GROWTH RATE:</u>** The "Hindu rate of growth" is an economic term coined by Indian economist Raj Krishna in 1978. It describes India’s sluggish annual Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate of roughly 3.5% to 4% from the 1950s through the 1980s.




**<u>FIGURE 1: GDP GROWTH OF INDIA (1951-2026)</u>**

However, the pace of improvement of **India’s human development (HD)** since 1980 is worrying; indeed, “the history of world development offers few other examples of an economy growing for so long (in per capita GDP terms), with such limited results in reducing human deprivations” *(Drèze & Sen, 2013: ix).*

Recent policy discourses exemplify this focus: the principal objective of India’s ‘Eleventh Five-Year Plan’ was to deliver “faster EG with inclusion” whilst the ‘Twelfth Five-Year Plan’ called for “faster, more inclusive and sustainable EG” *(Planning Commission, 2007; 2012).*

Whilst ‘lessons’ from successful developing countries (the ‘four tigers’ and post- reform China) are frequently cited in the Indian growth-development debate, increasingly, attention has turned to India’s internal diversity. India’s extensive regional variations, both in experience and achievement of development, “are a rich source of insights” *(Drèze & Sen, 2002:71)*.

The experiences of **<u>Gujarat</u>** and **<u>Kerala</u>** have been identified as two polar ‘**models**’ of development, which could inform a wider development policy.Both the Indian, and wider growth-development debate have polarized around the experiences of these two states.

## Advocates of the Gujarat 'model' evidence the fact that:

*"Gujarat is richer, enjoys faster GDP growth and a greater intensity of jobs and industry than India as a whole. Modi's reputation for economic competence rests on his record here. When Indians voted for him…last May, it was in large part because they wanted the country run as Gujarat is" (The Economist, 2015a).*

## Proponents of the Kerala 'model' argue:

*"Despite the fact that the economic growth of Kerala has been sluggish…it has been able to achieve tremendous results in important areas such as literacy, life expectancy, and mortality rates. The Indian government should try to emulate the Kerala experience" (Sen, 1993: 46).*


**FIGURE 2: MAP OF INDIA HIGHLIGHTING GUJARAT AND KERALA**

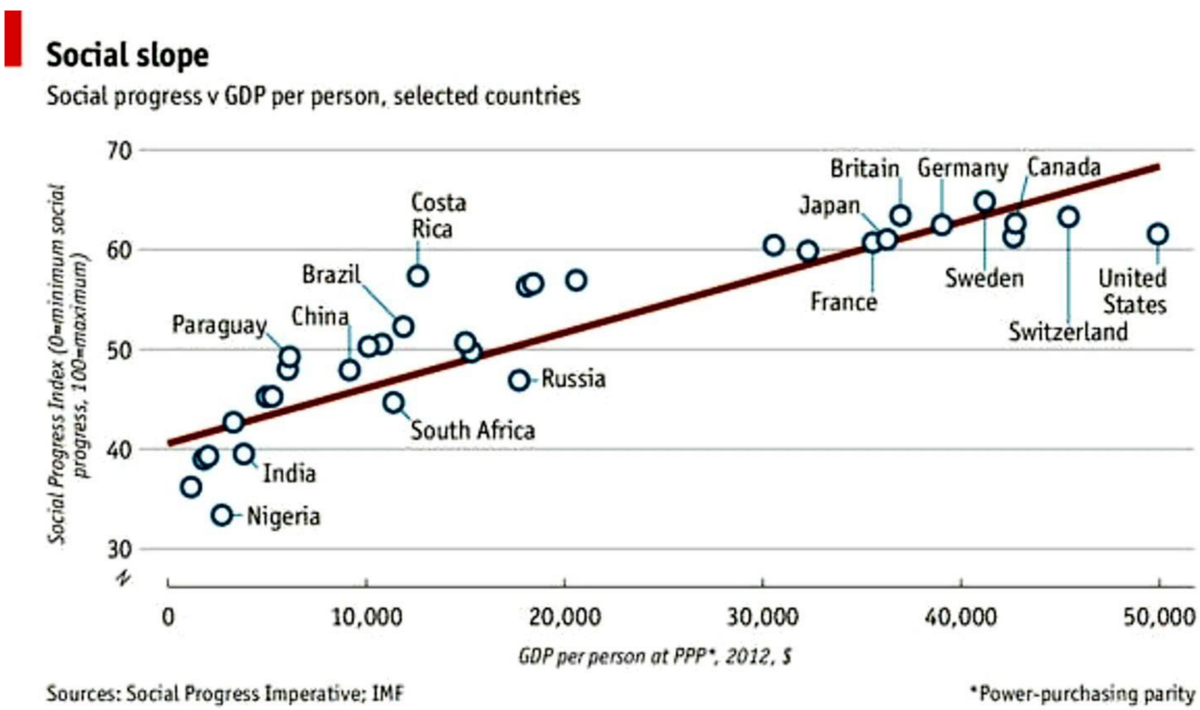
## Henceforth, my research objective is split into two enquiries:

*1. Comparative analysis of the democratic models of the two states.*

*2. Impact on the Economic Growth and Human Development on either of them.*

## CORRELATION BETWEEN ECONOMIC GROWTH AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

There exists a strong positive correlation between EC and HD. As *figure 2* illustrates, high per capita GDP is associated with high HD (measured here by the 'Social Progress Index'). India, however, is an outlier, sitting below the trend line; for India's per capita GDP, one would expect a higher level of 'Social Progress' (HD).




(*The Economist*, 2013)

**FIGURE 3: SOCIAL PROGRESS VS GDP PER PERSON**

Now, the two models are two major theoretical streams concerning the EG-HD relationship reflecting the **multi-directional nature of the correlation**.

• The Classical **'trickle-down'** theory assumes the benefits of EG will gradually pass through society, hence implying that *"EG is both a necessary and sufficient condition for the improvement of lives" (MacPherson & Lau, 1996:1)*.

Exponents of classical theory champion EG-led models of development. When HD replaced EG as the "ultimate objective of human activity" a second stream emerged.

• **'Trickle-up'** theories emphasize initial HD improvements by satisfying *"basic human needs like health and education" (Ramanathaiyer & MacPherson, 2000: 5),* arguing that such improvements promote subsequent EG. Advocates of this perspective support HD-led models of development.

*The figure below illustrates these theories diagrammatically.*

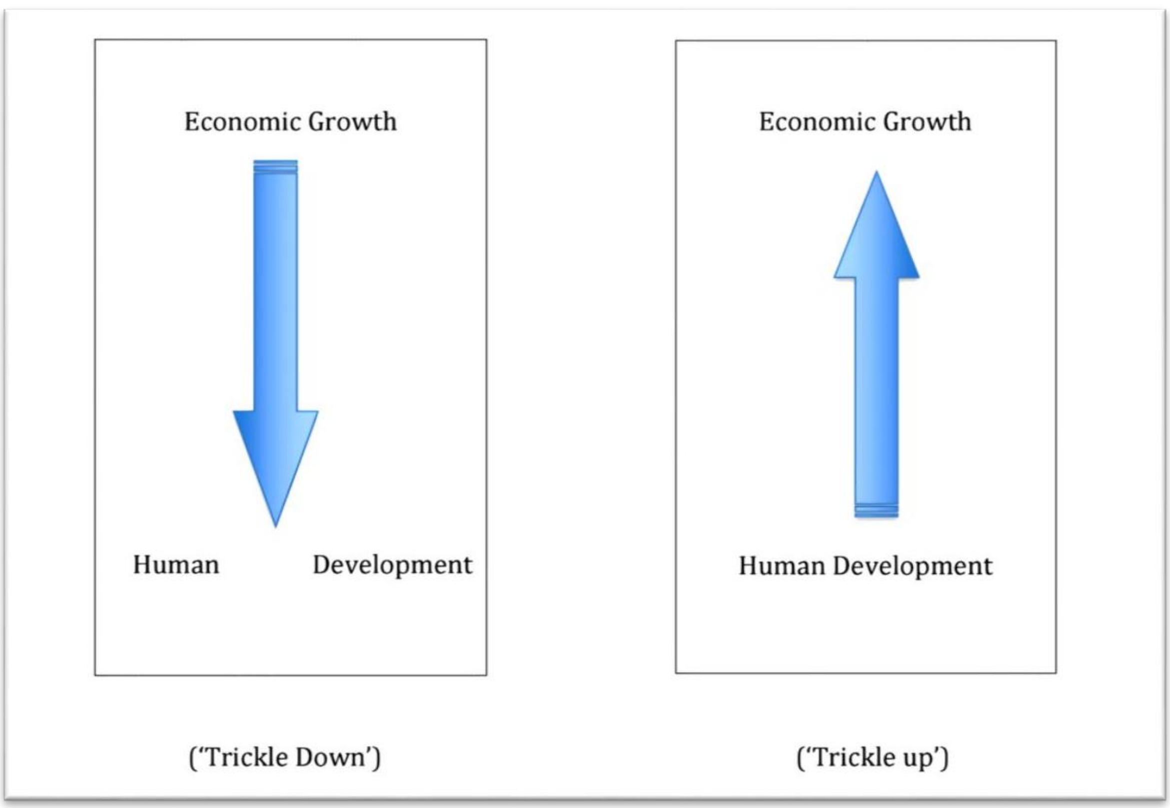



**FIGURE 4: TRICKEL DOWN AND TRICKEL UP APPROACHES**

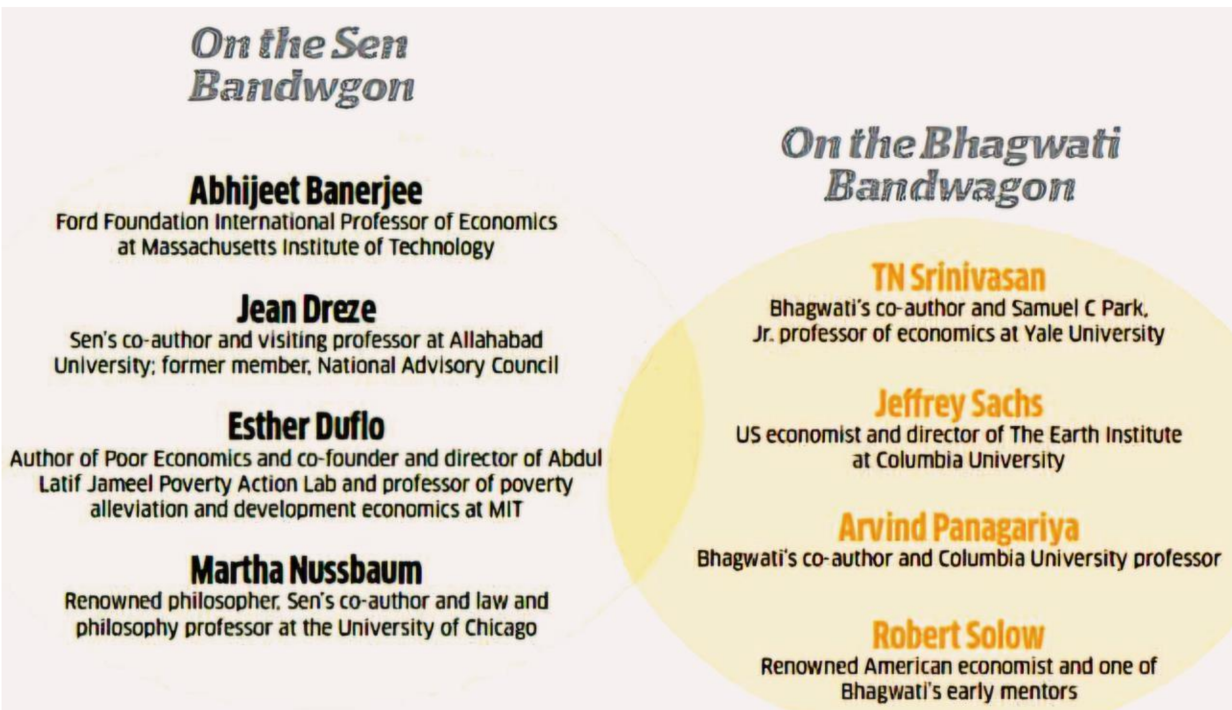
# AMARTYA SEN VS BHAGWATI: TWO ECONOMISTS DEBATING FOR TWO MODELS

In a polarized debate the truth gets buried somewhere, says Kunal Sen, professor of development economics and policy at Manchester University.

In an interview with the Economic Times, great economist, **Bhagwati** and his co-author **Arvind Panagariya** said that they admired **Gujarat's CM Narendra Modi** for his economic policies.

For them, he stood for what they called the Gujarat Model of development, which they reckoned was superior to the contrasting Kerala model of development. The two economists described the Gujarat model as a metaphor for a primarily growth and private entrepreneurship driven development and the Kerala model for a primarily redistribution and state-driven development.

For his part, Sen had upheld what he calls the "**Kerala experience**" --High social spending resulting in growth as a role model for other states to follow.




*(THE ECONOMIC TIMES, 2013)*

**FIGURE 5: LIKE MINDED ACADEMICS**

# GUJARAT'S DEMOCRATIC MODEL SHARE SIMILARITIES WITH SINGAPOREAN MODEL OF DEMOCRACY: PM NARENDRA MODI'S GUJARAT SHARES SIMILARITIES WITH LEE KUAN YEW'S SINGAPORE

The Singapore model of democracy was introduced and shaped primarily by **Lee Kuan Yew**, the **founding prime minister of Singapore**, who governed from 1959 to 1990. Singapore's political system is officially a parliamentary republic practicing representative democracy. Because political power is centralized and dominated by a single party with strict controls on civic space, political scientists frequently classify its governance model as an **illiberal democracy**, **hybrid regime**, or **soft-authoritarian** state.

The Singapore Model and the Gujarat Model demonstrate striking similarities in their developmental philosophy, emphasizing high economic growth through market-oriented reforms, industrialization, and an investment-friendly policy regime.

Both models accord primacy to the developmental role of the state by fostering a conducive business environment characterized by regulatory efficiency, policy stability, and proactive governance.

They prioritize large-scale infrastructure development, including world-class ports, transport networks, industrial parks, and special economic zones, to enhance competitiveness and facilitate integration into global production and trade networks. Export-oriented manufacturing, foreign direct investment (FDI), public-private partnerships, and ease of doing business constitute central pillars of both models.

Furthermore, each model is associated with strong and centralized political leadership that stresses administrative efficiency, rapid decision-making, and long-term strategic planning as prerequisites for economic transformation.

The Gujarat Model has frequently been viewed as drawing inspiration from Singapore's state-led developmental strategy, particularly in its emphasis on urban modernization, industrial competitiveness, and investor confidence.

Consequently, despite differences in constitutional structure, territorial scale, and welfare orientation, both models share a common commitment to growth-centric development, efficient governance, and economic modernization as the principal drivers of societal progress.

## Core Features of the Model:

• **Illiberal Democracy:** Holds regular elections but lacks robust civil liberties and true alternation of power.

• **Hybrid Regime:** Combines formal democratic procedures with authoritarian political dominance.

• **Soft-Authoritarian State:** Emphasizes strong leadership, social order, and meritocracy over Western-style liberal opposition rights.

• **Electoral Authoritarianism:** Uses competitive elections structured to maintain ruling party dominance.

• **Managed or Guided Democracy:** Highlights heavy state influence over public discourse and media boundaries.

• **Pragmatic Governance:** Combines regular, competitive democratic elections with strict state control.

• **Meritocracy and Anti-Corruption:** Focuses heavily on high administrative competence, competitive salaries for ministers, and zero tolerance for corruption.

• **Illiberal Elements:** Limits certain civic liberties like unrestricted public assembly and press freedoms in exchange for economic growth and social stability.

• **Export-Oriented Economy:** Development of ports, Special Economic Zones (SEZs), and industrial clusters to promote exports and global trade.

## STRENGTHS:

• Strong economic expansion, industrial base, infrastructure, formal job creation in certain sectors, and investor confidence.

• Supporters (including economists like Jagdish Bhagwati and Arvind Panagariya in comparative debates) argue that high growth is the most reliable route to broad poverty reduction. (*Economic Times)*

## CHALLENGES AND CRITICISMS:

• Social indicators (literacy gaps, especially gender; some health and nutrition metrics) have lagged relative to economic growth in comparative data.

• Critiques highlight unequal development across regions/classes/castes, environmental and labor concerns, capital-intensive projects favouring large business, limited role for local participatory institutions, and (in some analyses) overlaps with majoritarian politics.

*(Tandfonline)*


## FIGURE 6: MAP OF GUJRAT

# KERALA'S MODEL PRIORITIZING HUMAN DEVELOPMENT BEFORE ECONOMIC GROWTH

The Kerala Model prioritizes human capabilities before economic expansion, emphasizing universal access to education, healthcare, land reforms, gender development, and decentralized local governance.

The Kerala model of development is a unique socioeconomic strategy focused on achieving high human development and quality of life—such as universal literacy, long life expectancy, and low infant mortality—despite having a relatively low per capita income. It relies heavily on public welfare spending, wealth redistribution, and active grassroots of democracy rather than rapid industrial growth.

## Core Features of the Kerala Model of Development:

• **Human Development-Centric Paradigm:** Prioritizes the enhancement of human capabilities through substantial investments in education, healthcare, and social welfare, achieving exceptional social indicators despite moderate economic growth.

• **Redistributive Social Justice:** Characterized by progressive land reforms, egalitarian public policies, and extensive welfare interventions aimed at reducing socio-economic inequalities and promoting equitable access to resources.

• **Universal Social Provisioning:** Ensures near-universal access to quality education, comprehensive public healthcare, and social security through a robust state-supported welfare framework.

• **Democratic Decentralization and Participatory Governance:** Strengthens grassroots democracy by devolving administrative and fiscal authority to local self-governments, fostering participatory planning and accountable governance.

• **Inclusive and Gender-Sensitive Development:** Promotes social inclusion through affirmative policies, high female literacy, gender empowerment, and the active participation of marginalized communities in the development process.

• **Remittance-Driven Socio-Economic Sustainability:** Leverages overseas migration and remittance inflows to sustain household incomes, enhance consumption, and complement the state's human development achievements.

## STRENGTHS:

• Exceptional social outcomes and quality of life relative to income.

• Low inequality among citizens.

• Resilient public systems (e.g., effective early COVID response linked to social infrastructure in some analyses).

• Grassroots democratic innovations.

*(Sen and Drèze)*

## CHALLENGES AND CRITICISMS:

• High educated unemployment (especially among women).

• Heavy reliance on Gulf remittances.

• Relatively weaker goods-producing sectors (agriculture and manufacturing).

• Fiscal pressures (including declining tax efficiency and public enterprise losses in assessments).

• And difficulties sustaining high participation levels over time. Recent decades have seen higher growth and some shift toward private investment and infrastructure, but structural job creation remains a gap. *(sagepub)*

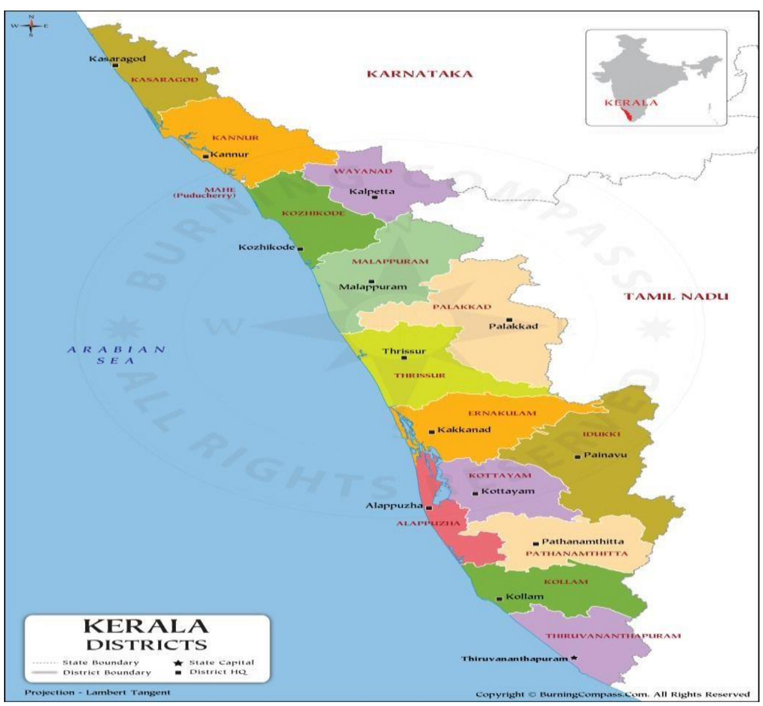
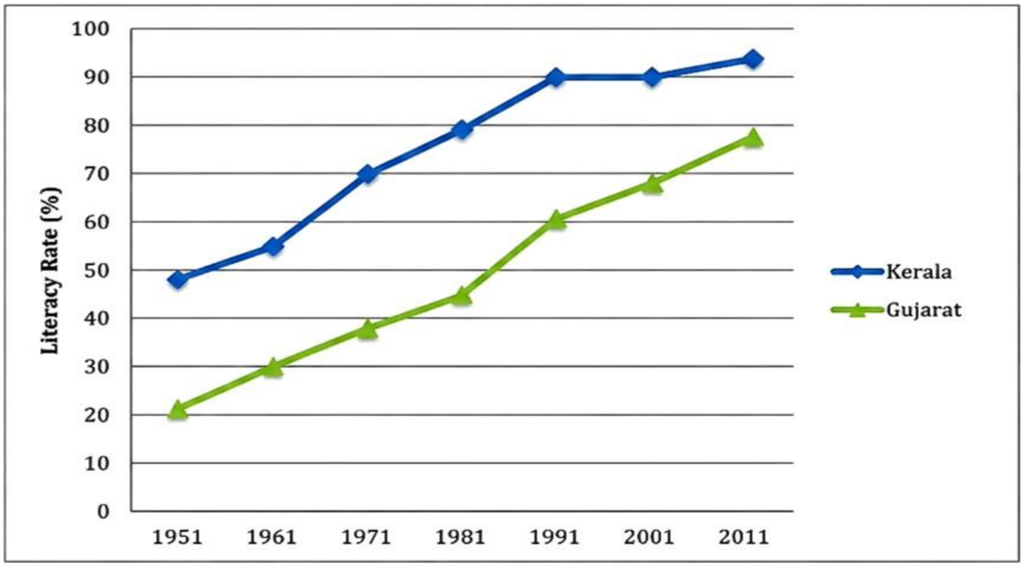



**FIGURE 7: MAP OF KERALA**




(GOI, 2011)

**CHART 1: LITERACY RATES OF KERALA AND GUJARAT (1951-2011)**

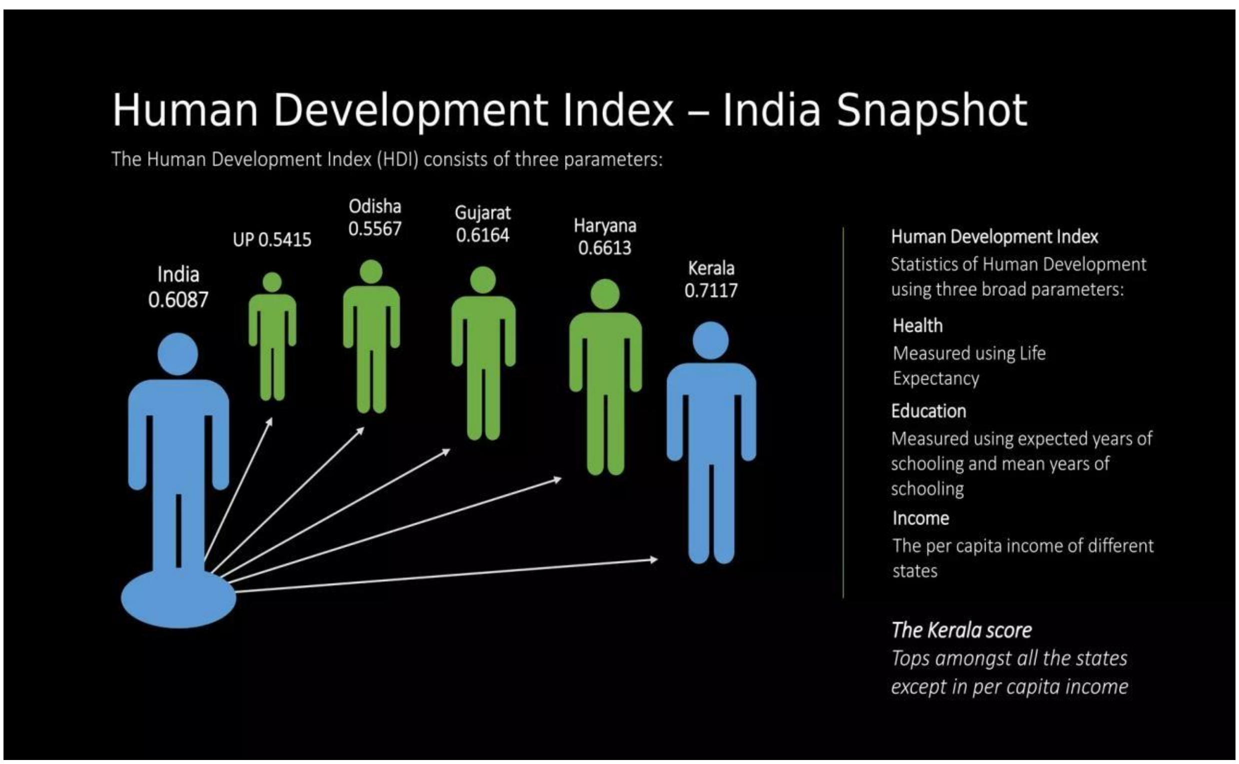



**FIGURE 8: HDI- SNAPSHOT OF INDIA**

## MoSPI (2018) – Human Development Index (HDI) of Indian States and Union Territories

| Rank | State / Union Territory | HDI (2018) |
|---|---|---|
| **High** | | |
| 1 | Delhi | 0.839 |
| 2 | Chandigarh | 0.827 |
| 3 | Goa | 0.806 |
| 4 | Kerala | 0.775 |
| 5 | Sikkim | 0.764 |
| 6 | Himachal Pradesh | 0.761 |
| 7 | Uttarakhand | 0.758 |
| 8 | Puducherry | 0.752 |
| 9 | Maharashtra | 0.750 |
| 10 | Mizoram | 0.747 |
| 11 | Punjab | 0.738 |
| 12 | Tamil Nadu | 0.738 |
| 13 | Haryana | 0.724 |
| 14 | Andaman and Nicobar | 0.707 |
| 15 | Karnataka | 0.706 |
| 16 | Telangana | 0.705 |
| 17 | Meghalaya | 0.704 |

| Rank | State / Union Territory | HDI (2018) |
|---|---|---|
| **Medium** | | |
| 18 | Gujarat | 0.698 |
| 19 | Daman and Diu | 0.695 |
| 20 | Lakshadweep | 0.687 |
| 21 | Manipur | 0.686 |
| 22 | Arunachal Pradesh | 0.684 |
| 23 | Nagaland | 0.678 |
| 24 | West Bengal | 0.674 |
| – | **India (All-India Average)** | **0.672** |
| 25 | Tripura | 0.667 |
| 26 | Dadra and Nagar Haveli | 0.662 |
| 27 | Jammu and Kashmir | 0.663 |
| 28 | Assam | 0.651 |
| 29 | Odisha | 0.649 |
| 30 | Andhra Pradesh | 0.648 |
| 31 | Rajasthan | 0.638 |
| 32 | Chhattisgarh | 0.629 |
| 33 | Jharkhand | 0.618 |
| 34 | Madhya Pradesh | 0.608 |
| 35 | Uttar Pradesh | 0.592 |
| 36 | Bihar | 0.551 |

**HDI Category (2018)**

| High | Medium | Low |
|---|---|---|
| 0.650 – 0.800 | 0.550 – 0.649 | 0.450 – 0.549 |

*Source: Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), Government of India (2018)*

**Legend**

| High | Medium | Low |
|---|---|---|
| 0.850–0.899 | 0.650–0.699 | 0.450–0.499 |
| 0.800–0.849 | 0.600–0.649 | 0.400–0.449 |
| 0.750–0.799 | 0.550–0.599 | 0.350–0.399 |
| 0.700–0.749 | 0.500–0.549 | 0.300–0.349 |
| | | 0.250–0.299 |
| | | ≤0.250 |

No information

**TABLE 1: HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDEX OF INDIA**

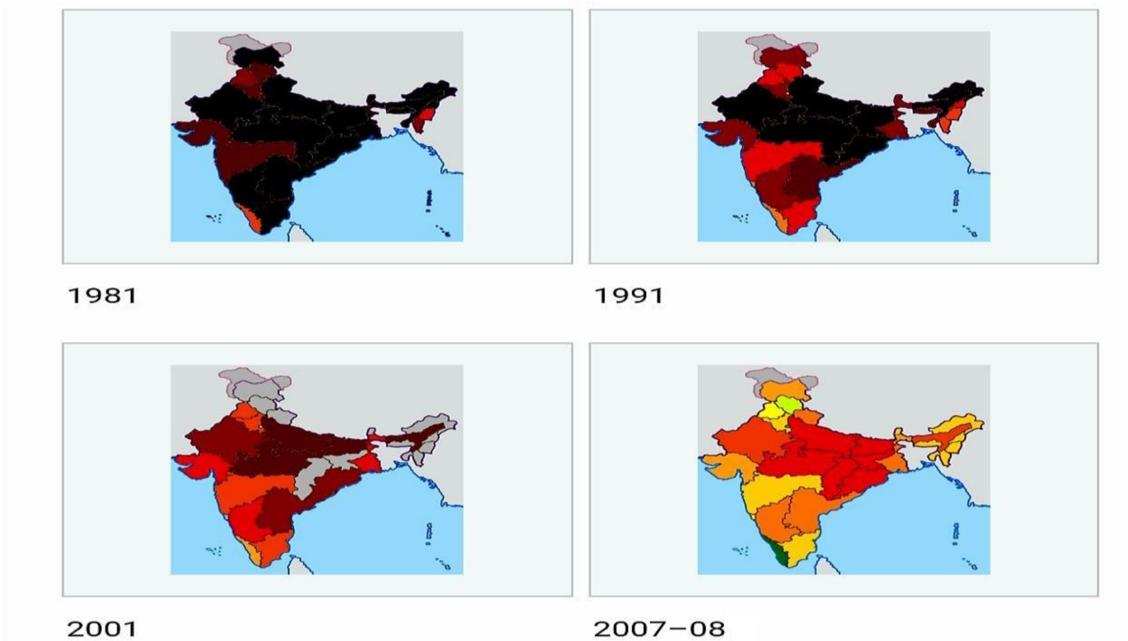



**FIGURE 9: HDI TREND (1981-2011)**

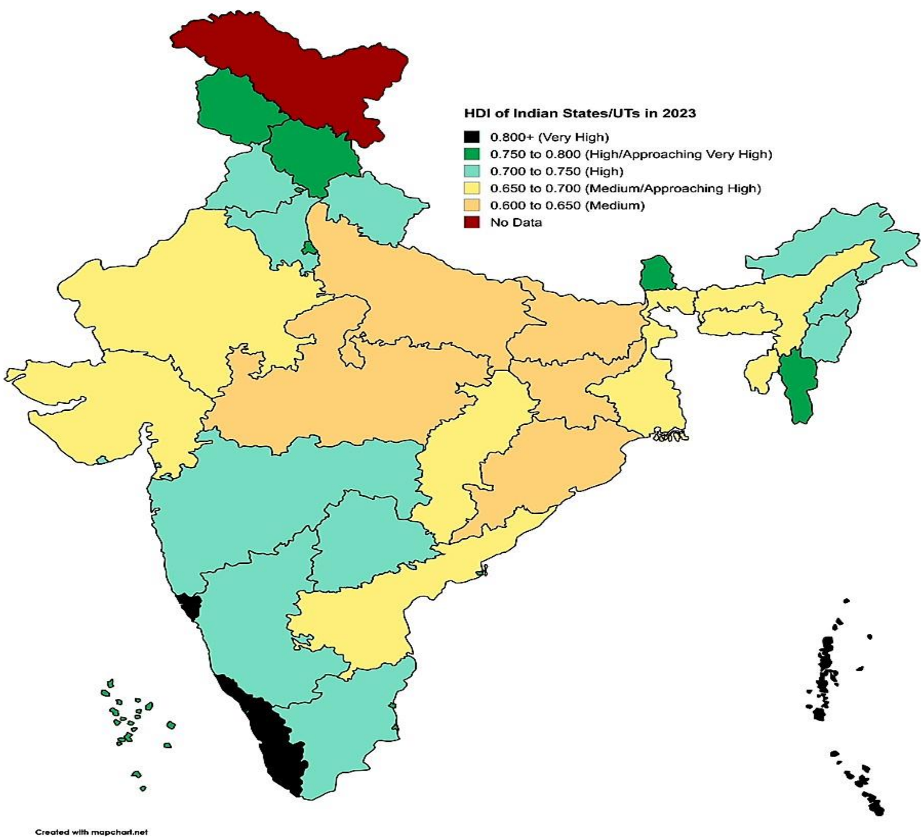



**FIGURE 10: MAP REFLECTING HDI OF INDIA**

# PEOPLE'S DILEMMA WITH INDIA'S CONTEMPORARY DEMOCRATIC MODEL: BETWEEN ILLIBERAL DEMOCRACY AND DEMOCRATIC CAPITALISM

An analysis of the contemporary Indian political landscape reveals an emerging debate regarding the **nature and trajectory of Indian democracy**. Concerns have increasingly been raised over issues such as the concentration of media ownership, the influence of the state over public discourse, and the narrowing of spaces for dissent and independent opinion. *These developments have prompted scholars and political commentators to question whether India's democratic institutions are undergoing a process of transformation.*

Drawing upon the case studies, empirical data, and documentary evidence presented in this research, it is argued that the current governance paradigm exhibits significant characteristics of a **development-oriented democratic model** in which **rapid economic growth, infrastructure expansion, ease of doing business, and the attraction of foreign investment** receive primary policy emphasis.

Within this framework, broader objectives such as **human development, social welfare, reduction of economic inequalities, and inclusive distributive justice** are comparatively accorded secondary priority, with the expectation that they will follow as outcomes of sustained economic expansion.

This governance orientation bears notable similarities to the developmental model often associated with **Singapore**, where **economic efficiency, administrative centralization, and investment-led growth** have historically been prioritized alongside comparatively greater state influence over political and public spheres.

In this context, the study contends that several policy directions pursued under the **Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)**-led government headed by **Prime Minister Narendra Modi** reflect elements of such a developmental approach.

While acknowledging the institutional and historical differences between India and Singapore, the research argues that the current trajectory of governance demonstrates a discernible inclination towards a model in which economic development assumes precedence, with social and welfare outcomes expected to emerge subsequently.

| Aspect | Kerala Model of Democracy | Gujarat Model of Democracy |
|---|---|---|
| Nature of Democracy | Participatory and welfare-oriented democracy | Representative and development-oriented democracy |
| Citizen Participation | High public participation through decentralization, local self-government, and people's planning | Greater reliance on elected leadership and administrative efficiency, with comparatively limited participatory mechanisms |
| Role of the State | Strong welfare state ensuring education, healthcare, and social justice | Facilitator of economic growth through infrastructure, industrialization, and investment |
| Development Priority | Human development, equity, and social inclusion | Rapid economic growth, industrial expansion, and job creation |
| Governance Style | Decentralized governance with empowered Panchayati Raj Institutions | Centralized and executive-driven governance emphasizing quick decision-making |
| Civil Society | Strong role of trade unions, cooperatives, social movements, and community organizations | Greater role of private sector, industry, and public-private partnerships |
| Economic Philosophy | Inclusive development with redistribution and social welfare | Market-led growth supported by pro-business policies |
| Social Justice | Focus on reducing inequalities based on caste, gender, and class | Focus on economic opportunities, with social welfare playing a secondary role |
| Accountability | Community monitoring, public consultations, and grassroots participation | Administrative accountability through performance and service delivery |
| Democratic Strength | Deepens democratic participation and social empowerment | Enhances governance efficiency and economic competitiveness |
| Major Criticism | Slower economic growth, fiscal pressures due to high welfare expenditure | Concerns over unequal distribution of growth, weaker grassroots participation, and social inequalities |

**TABLE 2: DIFFERENTIATION BETWEEN THE TWO MODELS IN VARIOUS ASPECTS**

# RESEARCH OUTCOME

## A Middle Path to Sustainable Economic Growth and Inclusive Development Synthesizing the Kerala and Gujarat Models: A Balanced Framework for India's Development

The comparative analysis of the Kerala and Gujarat models demonstrates that neither framework, in isolation, offers a comprehensive blueprint for India's long-term democratic and developmental aspirations.

While the **Gujarat Model** has been instrumental in accelerating **economic growth**, i**ndustrial expansion, infrastructure development, and investment-led prosperity**, the **Kerala Model** underscores the indispensable role of **human development, social welfare, public health, education, and distributive justice in fostering a resilient and equitable society**.

The evidence suggests that **sustainable national progress** cannot be achieved through an exclusive emphasis on either economic efficiency or social justice; rather, **it necessitates a judicious synthesis of both.**

**Accordingly, this study proposes a balanced developmental paradigm that reconciles robust economic expansion with substantive democratic and social commitments**.

India must continue to prioritize high economic growth, industrial competitiveness, innovation, and employment generation, thereby enhancing productivity, purchasing power, and overall prosperity.

However, **economic advancement should not be regarded as an end in itself, but as a means to secure broader human development and improve the quality of life for all citizens.**

Simultaneously, the State must reaffirm its **constitutional commitment** to **social justice**, **inclusive welfare, equitable access to education and healthcare, protection of minority rights, and the promotion of human dignity**.

**Democratic institutions** must remain **independent, transparent, and accountable**, ensuring that the **principles of constitutionalism, the rule of law, natural justice, and fundamental rights** are neither compromised nor subordinated to developmental objectives.

Equally vital is the preservation of a free and **independent press—the Fourth Estate of democracy**—which serves as an indispensable mechanism of public accountability, informed discourse, and institutional oversight. The **freedom of citizens to express** dissent and participate meaningfully in **democratic deliberation constitutes the very essence of a vibrant constitutional democracy.**

Furthermore, while a **capable and coordinated central government** is essential for effective governance and national development, such authority must operate within the constitutional framework of **separation of powers, cooperative federalism, institutional checks and balances, and decentralized democratic participation**.

Strong governance should reinforce, rather than diminish, the autonomy and accountability of constitutional institutions.

**In conclusion,** India's developmental trajectory should neither replicate the Gujarat Model nor the Kerala Model in their entirety. Instead, the nation must adopt a pragmatic middle path that integrates economic dynamism with social equity, democratic freedoms with administrative efficiency, and national growth with constitutional morality.

Such a model would not merely create a stronger economy but would also cultivate a more just, inclusive, and humane society—one in which development is measured not only by GDP or investment flows, but by the dignity, freedoms, capabilities, and well-being of every citizen. **This balanced approach represents the most viable pathway towards the constitutional vision of an economically prosperous, socially just, and democratically vibrant India.**

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