



Jeffrey Charles Alexander (born 1947) is an American sociologist, and one of the world's leading social theorists. He is the founding figure in the contemporary school of cultural sociology referred to as the "strong program". Alexander distinguishes between the sociology of culture and cultural sociology. He worked at the University of California, Los Angeles, from 1974 until joining Yale University in 2001, where he is the Professor of Sociology and co-Director of the Centre for Cultural Sociology. Alexander has authored or co-authored ten books. He was one of the editors of the journal *Sociological Theory*, and he is currently co-editor of the *American Journal of Cultural Sociology*.

In an interview, exclusively for Kerala Calling, Jeffrey C Alexander speaks broadly on diverse areas such as cultural trauma and civic sphere. Also, he speaks voluminously about the secular and progressive mindset of the Keralites.

The ambitious theoretical model of "cultural trauma" build a new understanding of how social groups interact with emotion to create new and binding understandings of social responsibility and the theory of civil sphere explains how do real individuals live together in the real societies in the real world. Could you explain the inter relationship between cultural trauma and civic

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sphere? Are they mutually influencing?

I think that at some moment the construction of a cultural trauma can help the civil sphere to expand. It can also be an opportunity to contract the civil sphere. And make it worse too. For example, Progressive movements and organisations try to construct and symbolise immigrants as untruly suffering people who fled from other countries, as refugees who deserve the sympathy of people in the society. So they say that immigration is a crisis and they try to make it positive, ie, a cultural trauma that the whole country should be concerned with. Efforts are made to create more identifications like, the pictures of the little boy who died in the process of migration and him lying on the sand or the starving mother who tells stories about the country from which she came from are successful to create cultural trauma that can expand the identification between the national group and the out group.

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What is your opinion about the complaints of nations that migration results in economic crisis for the host countries?

It is an illusion that migration undermines a country's economic situation. It is not true. Most of the studies show that migration, overall, add to the wealth of the country. Because migrants do jobs that other people don't want to do and at less expense. So, the problem of migration really is that it displaces some groups inside the country. Government has to develop a policy to handling the displacement of workers. But on the whole both of the countries are partly related to its population and to the value-added

migrants as you see are also adequately valued and are more motivated than other people. They are more energetic, they have more to prove, they work on extra hours, they want to send money back home. These are many ways in which migrants are ideal. Kerala is an example for better labour relations, wages, labour rights and like for the migrants.

Kerala, a state of India, is different from the rest of the country, have you noticed any difference?

I have noticed many differences. The state of Kerala is seeming to be much more well organized, it is much greener, the people seems much healthier, seems to be less poverty here. I see it is more like the cities in Europe.

You mention that “traumas can be re - imagined and re - presented. The collective identity will shift. There will be a searching re - remembering of the collective past. Solidarity can be expanded and much needed civil repairs can be made”. In the present scenario, how would you like to see this?

I have written a book about the Egyptian upraise in 2011. Inside the upraise, there was a microcosm of the civil sphere. So I think that there would be the trauma of the partition and the recent incidents will create a connection to that traumatic past.

What is the role of digital media and internet and digital devices in strengthening the civil society movements and the civil sphere?

In India and elsewhere, it has helped a lot. But we have to remember that there is an overemphasis on the world of the digital and social media. Social movements have always existed. Every social movement had a news

paper. We also have to remember that the internet and digital technology can be used in very anti civil way. The television, the computer, the radio, everything can be thought of in the same way.

Kerala provides an empirical example to show how it is possible to achieve both growth and improved income distribution through human development. What is your opinion about this?

Kerala is a wonderful example of democratic socialism and planning. When it is committed to social democracies, it can be a very progressive governing force and I think many western people understand that. The challenge is that where does the money come from to continue this. Is it possible for a very progressive state like Kerala also to be a dynamic capital? At the same time, it should have thriving and successful IT business. I came to know that IT people working here in special economic zones and they can make much money. Anyway, I think that the challenge for the future is, you can have a dynamic private sector and a very progressive economy. Countries like US has very dynamic, tremendously dynamic system but with very weak social democratic controls. We have higher education but we do not have equal education for the average person. We don't have a good retirement system, we have lot of poverty, and we have an underclass, African Americans, who have treated terribly by society. So, I think, you have US on one side and Kerala on the other side and maybe you have Denmark or Sweden in the middle.

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