

COOPERATIVES IN INDIA: A FACTUAL ELUCIDATION

BY

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Abstract

The present study is a descriptive one based on secondary data. This research aims to describe the history and evolution of cooperatives and tries to explain the structure of cooperatives in India. Further, the study attempts to provide a factual description of the various cooperative sectors and the total number of societies present in India. The study also gives a description of cooperative sector in Kerala. All data used in this study is collected from the National Cooperative Database (NCD). The study identifies that there are in all thirty cooperative sectors are in India and 8,44,330 cooperative societies are functioning in these thirty sectors. This study also finds that the cooperative sector in India comprises of primary cooperatives, cooperative federations, cooperative banks and multi-state cooperative societies. The study further identifies that, there are 29,12,80,275 active members are there in these thirty cooperative sectors. It is evident from the data that cooperatives in India operate across a wide range of sectors, including agriculture, credit, housing, dairy, fisheries, marketing, education and more, helping millions of people, particularly small farmers, workers, women and marginalised communities and gain access to resources, finance and markets.

Keywords: *structure of cooperatives, cooperative sectors, national cooperative database*

Introduction

Cooperatives first started during British rule as a way to deal with the problem of rural debt. Over the years, cooperatives expanded rapidly with strong support from the government. This support came through policies, funding, and organisations set up to help cooperatives grow. The government sees cooperatives as a way to create fairer economic opportunities, reduce poverty and promote social justice. The cooperative movement in India has been an important part of improving rural life and supporting communities that often face challenges. It is based on the principle 'cooperation' and

ideas like helping each other, working together and making decisions as a group. Over time, cooperatives have grown to play a big role in areas like farming, banking, dairy, fishing, housing, tourism, women's welfare and consumer services. They help people come together to share resources, get loans, negotiate better deals and share profits fairly. This paper generally looks at how cooperatives began in India, how they work, and why they matter today. The present study is a descriptive one based on secondary data. This research aims to describe the history and evolution of cooperatives and tries to explain the structure of cooperatives in India. Further,

the study attempts to provide a factual description of the various cooperative sectors and total number of societies present in India. The study also gives a description of cooperative sector in Kerala. All data used in this study is collected from National Cooperative Database (NCD), Ministry of Cooperation, Government of India.

History and Evolution of the Cooperatives in India

The cooperative movement in India started in the early 1900s to help rural people who were struggling financially. At that time, many farmers, artisans and workers had to rely on moneylenders who charged very high interest, which pushed them deeper into debt and poverty. To solve this problem, the British government introduced the Cooperative Credit Societies Act in 1904. This was the first step toward forming organized cooperatives in the country. These cooperatives were owned by their members and were meant to give small and poor farmers access to low-cost loans, while encouraging mutual support and shared decision-making. In 1912, a new law called 'the Cooperative Societies Act' was passed, which widened the role of cooperatives beyond just providing loans. It allowed cooperatives to take part in other activities like farming, marketing, production, buying and selling goods. This law also gave cooperatives a proper legal system for registering and running their operations. By the time India became independent in 1947, cooperatives had started to grow in different parts of the country, but most of

them were still focused mainly on giving loans in rural areas and their reach was quite limited.

After India became independent, the government saw cooperatives as an important way to improve the economy and bring positive change to rural areas. The country's Five-Year Plans gave a lot of importance to growing cooperatives in areas like farming, small industries and community services. In 1954, the All India Rural Credit Survey Committee made key suggestions that led to big changes in cooperative sector, like involvement of the government in cooperatives, linking credit with marketing and setting up a proper cooperative banking system. As a result, a three-level credit structure was created. At the village level, there were Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS), followed by District Central Cooperative Banks (DCCBs) at the district level and State Cooperative Banks (SCBs) at the top. This system helped organise how rural people could get access to finance and financial support more easily. Over time, cooperatives in India expanded into many different areas like dairy, housing, sugar production, fishing, handloom weaving and consumer goods. To support this growth, organisations such as National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC) and National Cooperative Union of India (NCUI) were set up. These bodies helped cooperatives by offering financial aid, policy

guidance and training. As a result, cooperatives became important for creating jobs, providing rural loans and promoting self-reliance.

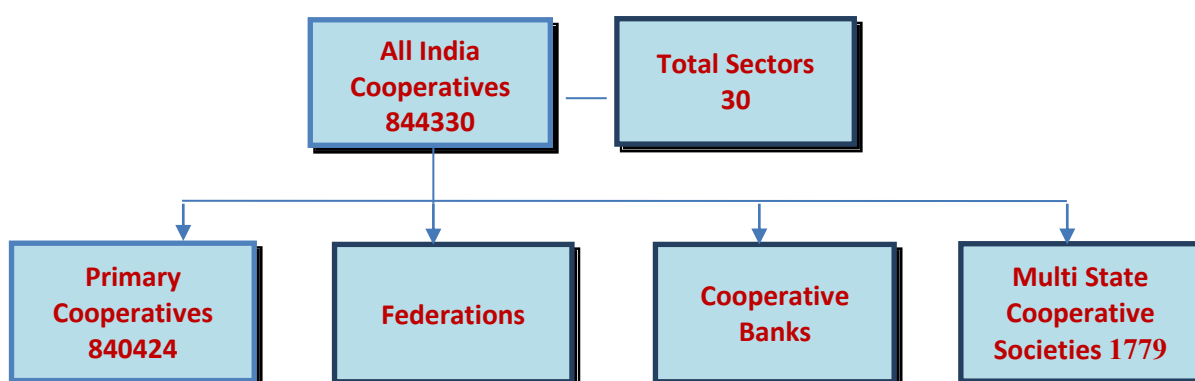
However, when India opened up its economy in the 1990s, cooperatives faced new difficulties. They had to deal with more competition, weak management, political influence and poor governance, which affected their performance. To fix these problems, committees like the Vaidyanathan Committee suggested reforms that included giving cooperatives more independence, improving professional management and restructuring their finances. A major turning point came in 2011 with the 97th Constitutional Amendment, which gave constitutional status to cooperatives. This crucial change ensure that cooperatives are run democratically, have regular elections and operate transparently. In 2021, the Government of India created a separate Ministry of Cooperation to show its

renewed focus on supporting cooperatives with better policies and coordination. Today, India has over 800,000 cooperative societies working in various fields and serving more than 250 million members. A detailed factual sketch of cooperatives in India is depicted below.

The Structure of Cooperatives in India

In India, cooperatives are set up in a three-level system to serve people better at different levels, i.e., village, district and state. At the village level, there are Primary Cooperative Societies that directly work with local members. These are supported by Cooperative Federations at the district level and above them are the State or National-level Cooperative Organisations. This setup helps cooperatives stay well-organised, share resources and support each other, making it easier to meet the needs of their members effectively. Figure 1 depicts the basic structure of cooperatives in India.

Figure 1. Structure of Cooperatives in India



Source: National Cooperative Database, 2023

State-wise Total Number of Cooperative Societies and Membership

The cooperative sector in India plays a vital role in promoting economic and social

development at the grassroots level. The number of cooperative societies and their membership varies widely across states, reflecting regional differences in

cooperative activity and participation. The details of state-wise total number of cooperative societies and membership is given below;

Table 1. Total Number of Cooperative Societies and Membership (State-wise Data)

Sl. No.	State/ Union Territory	Total Number of Societies	Total Membership
1	Andaman and Nicobar Islands	2215	144584
2	Andhra Pradesh	7803	9597143
3	Arunachal Pradesh	1197	89545
4	Assam	11148	4318231
5	Bihar	26640	15998540
6	Chandigarh	476	49721
7	Chhattisgarh	9171	4731974
8	Delhi	5943	1569276
9	Goa	5439	1578643
10	Gujarat	81432	16873870
11	Haryana	32466	5464638
12	Himachal Pradesh	5140	1825892
13	Jammu and Kashmir	8778	896054
14	Jharkhand	11455	2093817
15	Karnataka	44854	33501183
16	Kerala	6103	27325326
17	Ladakh	260	25197
18	Lakshadweep	35	84393
19	Madhya Pradesh	51787	13443329
20	Maharashtra	222069	57973552
21	Manipur	11256	829340
22	Meghalaya	2656	240205
23	Mizoram	1229	49466
24	Nagaland	8118	310933
25	Odisha	7578	8709507

Sl. No.	State/ Union Territory	Total Number of Societies	Total Membership
26	Puducherry	458	463802
27	Punjab	19061	3434928
28	Rajasthan	35942	11075332
29	Sikkim	3793	116193
30	Tamil Nadu	21833	23934636
31	Telangana	60112	14300725
32	Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu	530	46633
33	Tripura	3142	511559
34	Uttar Pradesh	43558	18478449
35	Uttarakhand	5318	1601973
36	West Bengal	31208	9591686
Total		790203	291280275

Source: Compiled by the authors from National Cooperative Database, 2023

The table 1 presents data on the number of cooperative societies and their total membership across all States and Union Territories in India. As per the data, there are a total of 790203 cooperative societies functioning in the country, with a combined membership of 291280275 individuals. Maharashtra has the highest number of cooperative societies at 222069 and also the largest membership, with 57973552 members. It is followed by Gujarat with 81,43 societies, Telangana with 60112 and Karnataka with 44854. In terms of membership, Kerala ranks third with 27325326 members, despite having only 6103 societies, indicating a high average membership per society. Tamil Nadu also shows a large membership count of 23934636, with 21833 societies. Among

the smaller states and Union Territories, Ladakh has the fewest societies (260), while Lakshadweep records the smallest membership (84393). Other regions like Sikkim, Mizoram and Chandigarh also report lower figures due to their smaller populations. The data demonstrates that cooperative societies are widespread across the country, with notable variations in their distribution and scale of membership. States with larger populations and stronger cooperative traditions generally report higher figures in both societies and members.

State-wise Distribution of Primary Cooperatives in India

This part of the discussion gives a clear picture of how 'primary cooperative

societies' are spread across different states and union territories in India. It shows the total number of cooperatives and how many

people are part of them, dividing the data into urban and rural areas.

Table 2. Primary Cooperatives in India (State-wise Data)

Sl. No.	State/Union Territory	No of Cooperatives	Total Members	No of Cooperatives (Urban)	Members (Urban)	No of Cooperatives (Rural)	Members (Rural)
1	Andaman and Nicobar Islands	2234	62865	557	16567	1677	46298
2	Andhra Pradesh	17885	7652485	3539	1595415	14346	6057070
3	Arunachal Pradesh	1454	52407	306	17343	1148	35064
4	Assam	11887	3398230	1648	423640	10239	2974590
5	Bihar	29310	16109921	4111	402229	25199	15707692
6	Chandigarh	476	34977	476	34977	N/A	N/A
7	Chhattisgarh	11170	5102843	2759	1220003	8411	3882840
8	Delhi	5944	1282427	5944	1282427	N/A	N/A
9	Goa	5525	1556787	2490	894510	3035	662277
10	Gujarat	85335	18987443	37492	9493685	47843	9493758
11	Haryana	34051	4113858	14289	1161459	19762	2952399
12	Himachal Pradesh	5503	1783880	646	180375	4857	1603505
13	Jammu and Kashmir	10410	429068	2726	97329	7684	331739
14	Jharkhand	11892	2736650	1636	186246	10256	2550404
15	Karnataka	45926	23657775	13875	10737631	32051	12920144
16	Kerala	19664	63024241	5066	21781682	14598	41242559
17	Ladakh	274	31789	34	7919	240	23870
18	Lakshadweep	43	74783	N/A	N/A	43	74783
19	Madhya Pradesh	53980	9531169	16921	3119233	37059	6411936

Sl. No.	State/Union Territory	No of Cooperatives	Total Members	No of Cooperatives (Urban)	Members (Urban)	No of Cooperatives (Rural)	Members (Rural)
20	Maharashtra	223749	79746861	151900	52525584	71849	27221277
21	Manipur	11578	572374	3092	135462	8486	436912
22	Meghalaya	3306	268221	243	38078	3063	230143
23	Mizoram	1333	53194	409	15300	924	37894
24	Nagaland	8031	129869	1163	11558	6868	118311
25	Odisha	7617	9614597	790	1057849	6827	8556748
26	Puducherry	462	396600	232	218274	230	178326
27	Punjab	19661	3042739	4845	417534	14816	2625205
28	Rajasthan	41576	11342054	6262	1525520	35314	9816534
29	Sikkim	3780	85068	219	10917	3561	74151
30	Tamil Nadu	22817	18468162	5966	6642629	16851	11825533
31	Telangana	60822	10297810	17420	2463847	43402	7833963
32	The Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu	569	50145	314	31548	255	18597
33	Tripura	3146	532116	1035	52956	2111	479160
34	Uttar Pradesh	40653	19212179	9299	5315982	31354	13896197
35	Uttarakhand	6262	1693189	787	470669	5475	1222520
36	West Bengal	32043	9472548	11239	1407666	20804	8064882
Total		840368	324601324	329730	124994043	510638	199607281

Source: Compiled by the authors from National Cooperative Database, 2023

The table 2 shows the data on the number of primary cooperative societies and their total membership across all states and union territories in India, with a distinction between urban and rural areas. According to the data, there are 8,40,368 cooperative societies in total, with a combined membership of 32,46,01,324 people. Out of

these, 3,29,730 cooperatives operate in urban areas, serving 12,49,94,043 members, while 5,10,638 cooperatives function in rural areas with a membership of 19,96,07,281. Maharashtra has the highest number of cooperatives (2,23,749) and the largest membership base (7,97,46,861). Kerala follows in terms of total membership with over 6.3 crore members, even though it has fewer cooperatives (19,664). Gujarat has a significant number of societies (85,335) and a large membership (1,89,87,443), with urban and rural figures nearly equal. Karnataka also shows a strong presence with 45,926 societies and more than 2.36 crore members. States like Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, and Madhya Pradesh also report high numbers in both cooperatives and members. On the other hand, smaller states and union territories like Lakshadweep, Ladakh and Chandigarh have relatively fewer societies and members, which aligns with their smaller

population sizes. Some regions such as Chandigarh and Delhi have cooperative activity limited to urban areas, while others like Lakshadweep and many north eastern states, show primarily rural participation. The data highlights the widespread presence of cooperatives across both urban and rural India, with notable variations in the level of activity and participation among different regions.

Sector-wise Distribution of Primary Cooperatives in India

The sector-wise distribution of primary cooperative societies in India reveals the number of cooperatives and their total membership across various functional areas. It also breaks down the data into urban and rural segments, offering insights into how different types of cooperatives operate and engage members in different parts of the country.

Table 3. Primary Cooperatives in India (Sector-wise Data)

Sl. No	Sector	No of Cooperatives	Total Members	No of Cooperatives (urban)	Total Members (urban)	No of Cooperatives (rural)	Total Members (rural)
1	Agriculture and Allied Cooperative Agro Processing	27863	8245696	3219	3974746	24644	4270950
2	/ Industrial Cooperative	23575	2227233	11816	1185090	11759	1042143
3	Bee Farming Cooperative	349	47136	50	8629	299	38507
4	Consumer Cooperative	23234	10140478	15296	5793619	7938	4346859

Sl. No	Sector	No of Cooperatives	Total Members	No of Cooperatives (urban)	Total Members (urban)	No of Cooperatives (rural)	Total Members (rural)
5	Credit & Thrift Society	83505	53051703	46103	36816284	37402	16235419
6	Dairy Cooperative	149988	13021983	3848	787178	146140	12234805
7	Educational & Training Cooperatives	1593	4567440	474	1249948	1119	3317492
8	Farmers Service Societies (FSS)	560	1888430	92	323412	468	1565018
9	Fishery Cooperative	26879	3737529	3611	865115	23268	2872414
10	Handicraft Cooperative	5182	91062	2064	37996	3118	53066
11	Handloom Textile & Weavers Cooperative	19556	1635416	8719	722709	10837	912707
12	Housing Cooperative Society	193938	26489895	177566	24949317	16372	1540578
13	Jute and Coir Cooperative	71	4746	38	3376	33	1370
14	Khadi Gramodyog	20	5164	13	4370	7	794
15	Labour Cooperative	46576	9096843	16310	3124730	30266	5972113
16	Large Area Multipurpose Society (LAMPS)	5807	7739310	202	417952	5605	7321358
17	Livestock & Poultry Cooperative	16953	1128113	1775	138562	15178	989551
18	Marketing Cooperative Society	10060	3744246	3083	2251106	6977	1493140
19	Miscellaneous Credit Cooperative Society	7569	5616037	2049	2526831	5520	3089206
20	Miscellaneous Non Credit	34933	11455075	11346	4246503	23587	7208572
21	Multipurpose Cooperative	21449	3072960	8151	1860402	13298	1212558

Sl. No	Sector	No of Cooperatives	Total Members	No of Cooperatives (urban)	Total Members (urban)	No of Cooperatives (rural)	Total Members (rural)
22	Primary Agricultural Credit Society (PACS)	102685	130015979	4666	16753776	98019	113262203
23	Sericulture Cooperative	559	78428	96	8884	463	69544
24	Social Welfare & Cultural Cooperative	2512	685682	1242	382293	1270	303389
25	Sugar Mills Cooperative	290	3878431	64	733987	226	3144444
26	Tourism Cooperative	608	40120	170	17238	438	22882
27	Transport Cooperative	4235	136297	1951	83643	2284	52654
28	Tribal-SC/ST Cooperative Urban	2060	1385166	275	546826	1785	838340
29	Cooperative Bank (UCB)	1463	15281872	1356	14463871	107	818001
30	Women Welfare Cooperative Society	26295	6092845	4084	715641	22211	5377204
Total		840367	324601315	329729	124994034	510638	199607281

Source: Compiled by the authors from National Cooperative Database, 2023

Table 3 gives a sector-wise distribution of cooperative societies in India, detailing the number of cooperatives and their total membership across urban and rural areas. A total of 8,40,367 cooperative societies are reported, with a combined membership of 32,46,01,315 individuals. Out of these, 3,29,729 cooperatives operate in urban areas, having 12,49,94,034 members, while 5,10,638 cooperatives are located in rural areas, accounting for 19,96,07,281 members. Among the sectors, the Primary Agricultural

Credit Societies (PACS) form the largest group with 1,02,685 cooperatives and over 13 crore members, the majority of which are in rural areas. Housing cooperative societies are also substantial, numbering 1,93,938 and serving around 2.64 crore members, most of whom are in urban regions. Credit and thrift societies are another major sector, with 83,505 cooperatives and over 5.3 crore members, spread across both urban and rural areas. Dairy cooperatives show a strong rural presence, with 1,49,988

societies and over 1.3 crore members. Similarly, sectors like agriculture and allied cooperatives, fishery cooperatives, and labour cooperatives also show a larger presence in rural India. On the other hand, urban cooperative banks are predominantly urban, with 1,356 of the 1,463 banks located in cities and serving over 1.44 crore urban members. Sectors such as educational and training, women welfare, multipurpose and marketing cooperatives are also notable for their widespread presence and significant membership. Other specialised sectors like sericulture, handicrafts, handlooms, tribal cooperatives and sugar mills contribute to regional cooperative activity. Overall, the data reflects the diversity of cooperative functions across India, with variations in scale and membership between sectors and between urban and rural areas.

State Cooperative Banks (SCBs) in India

State Cooperative Banks (SCBs) are apex institutions at national level. The distribution of the number of branches of the State Cooperative Banks (SCBs) operating in each state and union territory across India offers an overview of how these branches are distributed regionally, highlighting variations in presence and coverage.

with a total of 2,060 branches operating nationwide, SCBs cater the credit needs of a mass population. Kerala has the highest number of branches of SCBs at 769, which is significantly higher than any other state, indicating a dense presence in that region.

Himachal Pradesh follows with 218 branches and Jharkhand ranks third with 105. Other states with a notable number of branches include Assam with 67, Tripura with 66, Maharashtra with 55, Goa with 54 and Karnataka with 52. Several states such as Delhi, Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh also have branch counts around or above 40. On the lower end, states like Bihar (13), Chhattisgarh (14), Odisha (14) and Sikkim (14) have fewer branches. Some union territories like Chandigarh (18), Puducherry (25) and Andaman and Nicobar Islands (41) also maintain a moderate number of branches despite smaller populations or geographic size. The distribution shows considerable variation among states.

District Central Cooperative Banks (DCCBs) in India

District Central Cooperative Banks (DCCBs) are operating at the district level and catering the credit needs of Primary Agricultural Credit Cooperatives and other individual members. The table 5 presents data on the number of districts and the corresponding number of District Central Cooperative Banks (DCCBs) registered in various states. It provides a snapshot of how DCCBs are distributed in relation to the total number of districts, highlighting the extent of cooperative banking coverage at the district level across different regions.

A total of 392 DCCBs are operating in 606 districts across India. Uttar Pradesh has the highest number of districts at 75 and also has a significant number of DCCBs, totalling

50. Maharashtra follows closely with 36 districts and 31 DCCBs. Madhya Pradesh has 55 districts and 38 DCCBs, while Tamil Nadu, with 38 districts, has 24 DCCBs. Kerala stands out with a unique structure, having only one district-level entity but the highest number of DCCBs at 54. This is because of the reason that the Government of Kerala formed Kerala Bank and all DCCBs except Malappuram DCCB was merged in Kerala Bank. Later (as on 12 January 2023), Malappuram DCCB was also merged in Kerala Bank. States like Bihar and Rajasthan have 23 and 29 DCCBs respectively, spread across 38 and 41 districts. Some states like Jharkhand and Himachal Pradesh have very few DCCBs, i.e., only 1 and 2 respectively, despite having 24 and 12 districts. Similarly, Jammu and Kashmir has 20 districts but just 3 DCCBs. Overall, the distribution of DCCBs does not always correspond proportionally with the number of districts, indicating variations in cooperative banking structure and coverage across different states.

Urban Cooperative Banks (UCBs) in India

Urban Cooperative Banks (UCBs) are banks that mainly serve people living in cities and towns. They offer banking services like savings accounts, loans, and deposits, especially to small businesses, workers, and the middle-income group. These banks are set up as cooperative societies and follow cooperative principles. The factual data on UCBs in India shows that, in total, there are 1,463 UCBs in the country. Maharashtra has the highest number of UCBs at 448, followed by Karnataka with 279 and Gujarat with

212. Tamil Nadu also has a significant presence with 102 UCBs, while Telangana has 70 and Kerala has 45. Some states and union territories have very few UCBs. For instance, Bihar and Jharkhand each have only 2, while Himachal Pradesh and Goa have 5 each. States like Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh and union territories such as Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Ladakh, Lakshadweep and Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu do not have any UCBs. Other notable figures include Uttar Pradesh with 55 UCBs, Andhra Pradesh with 39, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh with 38 each, and West Bengal with 43. Delhi has 17 and Odisha has 10 UCBs. In all, the distribution shows that UCBs are concentrated more in certain states, particularly in the western and southern regions of India.

State Cooperative Agriculture and Rural Development Banks (SCARDBs)

State Cooperative Agriculture and Rural Development Banks (SCARDBs) are long-term rural credit cooperatives were formulated for providing funds for long term investment in agriculture (including land development, farm mechanisation and minor irrigation), rural industries and housing. This structure consists of 14 State Cooperative Agriculture and Rural Development Banks (SCARDBs) operating at the state level.

The data on SCARDBS reveals that Uttar Pradesh has the highest number of branches at 323, although no membership data is

reported. Gujarat follows with 194 branches but also has no members recorded. Tamil Nadu has 180 branches, matching its reported number of members at 180. Bihar has 151 branches but only one member and Tripura, with just 5 branches, has the highest membership at 955,706. Haryana has 19 branches and a significant number of members at 730,556. Himachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir both have 51 branches but report very few or no members. Karnataka has 25 branches and 181 members, while Puducherry, with just one branch, has 20,525 members. Rajasthan has 36 branches and the same number of members. West Bengal reports 11 branches with 24 members. Altogether, the total number of branches across all listed states is 1,048, serving around 1,707,300 members.

Primary Cooperative Agriculture and Rural Development Banks

Primary Cooperative Agriculture and Rural Development Banks (PCARDBs) are catering the long-term credit needs of agriculture, industrial and housing needs and operating at the district or block level to cater the needs of rural population.

Totally 529 PCARDBs are functioning in India. Tamil Nadu has the highest number with 176 PCARDBs, followed closely by Karnataka with 181. Punjab also has a significant presence with 89 PCARDBs, while Rajasthan has 36 and West Bengal has 24. Haryana has 19 PCARDBs, Uttar Pradesh has 3, and Himachal Pradesh has only 1. These figures show that some states have a well-

developed network of primary-level cooperative banks focused on agricultural and rural development, while others have a limited presence.

National Cooperative Federations in India

National cooperative federations in India are apex-level organisations that represent and support the interests of cooperatives across various sectors at the national level. These federations act as coordinating bodies, providing policy guidance, training, financial assistance, and advocacy for cooperative societies throughout the country. They help unify state and district-level cooperatives, promote cooperative values, and ensure that the voice of the cooperative movement is heard in national policymaking.

There are 19 national cooperative federations in India. Together, these federations account for a total of 84,568 members across various sectors. The Indian Farmers Fertiliser Cooperative Ltd (IFFCO) has the highest membership, with 35,549 members. This is followed by the Bharatiya Beej Sahakari Samiti Limited (BBSSL) with 22,995 members and the National Cooperative Exports Limited (NCEL) with 11,034 members. Krishak Bharati Cooperative Limited (KRIBHCO) also has a significant membership count at 9,470. Some federations, such as the National Federation of Urban Cooperative Banks and Credit Societies Ltd. (NAFCUB), have 1,767 members, while the All India Handloom Fabrics Marketing Cooperative Society Ltd

(AIHFMCS) and the All Indian Federations of Cooperative Spinning Mills Limited (AIFCOSPIN) have 1,099 and 242 members respectively. Several federations have relatively smaller memberships. For instance, the National Cooperative Organics Limited has only 5 members, and the National Cooperative Housing Federation of India has 28. Other organisations, such as the National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India (NAFED) and the National Federation of Cooperative Sugar Factories Limited (NFCSF), have 994 and 269 members respectively. This data reflects the wide reach and diversity of cooperative federations in India, covering areas such as agriculture, dairy, fisheries, textiles, housing, marketing and banking.

Multi-State Cooperative Societies (MSCs) in India

Multi-State Cooperative Societies (MSCs) in India are cooperative organisations that operate across the boundaries of one state, serving members in two or more states. They are registered under the Multi-State Cooperative Societies Act, 2002 and are governed directly by the Central Registrar of Cooperative Societies under the Ministry of Cooperation, Government of India. These societies are formed to promote the economic and social interests of their members through collective efforts in areas like agriculture, credit, housing, dairy, marketing, and more and follows cooperative principles. The all India data regarding MSCs are depicted below;

In total, there are 4,498 MSCs operating throughout the country. Maharashtra has the highest number with 804 MSCs, followed by Karnataka with 612 and Uttar Pradesh with 362. Tamil Nadu and Delhi also have a large presence, with 245 and 242 MSCs respectively. Other states with notable numbers include Madhya Pradesh with 259, Gujarat with 234, and Rajasthan with 204. Some smaller states and union territories have significantly fewer MSCs (Ladakh and Lakshadweep each have only one, while Sikkim and Nagaland have 9 MSCs each). The Andaman and Nicobar Islands have 7 and Mizoram has 8. States like Bihar, Kerala and Haryana have a moderate number of MSCs with 149, 154 and 167 respectively. Odisha, Punjab and Puducherry each have around 77 to 80 MSCs. Even in the north eastern region, states like Assam and Tripura have 48 and 20 MSCs respectively. Overall, the data shows that Multi-State Cooperative Societies are present across all regions of India.

From the above discussions, it is evident that Kerala is one of the prominent state in terms of the development of cooperative atmosphere, no of cooperatives from various sectors and equitable utilisation of cooperatives. The Kerala model of cooperative development is thus an adoptable one to other states with less cooperative development. It is in this context, the present study tries to dive into the cooperative scenario of the state of Kerala.

Cooperative Movement in Kerala: an Inclusive Development Model

The cooperative movement in Kerala has a long and rich history, shaped by the state's unique social and political background, high literacy levels and active public involvement. It began during the British rule with the Cooperative Credit Societies Act of 1904, which allowed people to form cooperatives to fight rural debt. The first cooperative society in Kerala was set up in 1914 in the Cochin region. In the early days, cooperatives grew slowly and mainly focused on rural credit, but they laid the groundwork for community-based support and economic improvement.

After the state of Kerala was formed in 1956, the cooperative movement grew much faster. The new government saw cooperatives as a key part of rural development, poverty reduction and fair distribution of resources. Cooperatives expanded into many areas, including farming, dairy, consumer stores, housing, handloom weaving and fishing. They are not limited to villages, cooperatives were also set up in cities, involving women, poorer communities and small producers. Kerala's high literacy and strong awareness of social equality helped more people get involved and take ownership in the movement. To give cooperatives a clear legal structure, the 'Kerala Cooperative Societies Act' was passed in 1969. This law supported democratic management, transparency and financial accountability. Several top-level cooperative institutions were created to help

local societies, like the Kerala State Cooperative Bank (now Kerala Bank), CONSUMERFED, HANTEX (for handlooms) and MILMA (for dairy). These organisations provided loans, marketing support, training and other services to help cooperatives grow stronger. Another important change was the creation of Kerala Bank in 2019, which merged the State Cooperative Bank and District Banks to improve the credit system and scale efficiency of cooperative banks.

Today, Kerala has one of the most active and widespread cooperative networks in India, with over 16,000 working societies in different sectors. Cooperatives are deeply connected to people's daily lives and continue to play a major role in both social and economic progress. With a strong base, dedicated members and government support, Kerala's cooperative movement stands as a shining example of people-led development and community strength. The cooperative movement in Kerala is a great example of how development can include everyone. Based on values like working together, shared ownership and democratic decision-making, cooperatives in the state have helped improve the lives of people from all walks of life. Kerala has always had a strong culture of public involvement and social reform, which made it easier for cooperatives to grow. After independence, the movement picked up speed with strong support from the state government and local bodies. Cooperatives help people join hands, share resources, get loans, and earn a better living.

What makes Kerala's cooperative system special is how deeply it is connected to local communities. Women, small farmers, workers and disadvantaged groups are all included and have a say in how things are run. The state also focuses on running cooperatives in a professional and transparent way, giving more control to the people at the local level. Kerala has shown that cooperatives can do more than just support the economy, but they can also help create fair and equal development for everyone. By building a strong network of cooperatives and focusing on social justice, the state has made sure that even the most disadvantaged people get a chance to grow. This inclusive way of working has made Kerala's cooperative movement a model that other states and regions in India can learn from.

Cooperative sector in India is broadly classified into credit and non-credit sector (NCD, Ministry of Cooperatives, Government of India). In line with the same, this study

used the same classification to elucidate the cooperatives in Kerala. The credit cooperatives consists of Credit and Thrift Societies, Urban Cooperative Banks, Primary Agricultural Credit Cooperatives, Kerala Bank and Miscellaneous Credit Cooperative Societies. Non-credit cooperatives consists of Agricultural and Allied Cooperatives, Agro Processing/Industrial Cooperatives, Consumer Cooperatives, Dairy Cooperatives, Educational and Training Cooperatives, Farmers Service Societies, Fishery Cooperatives, Housing Cooperatives, Labour Cooperatives, Large Area Multipurpose Societies, Marketing Cooperative Societies, Miscellaneous Non-Credit Cooperative Societies, Miscellaneous Non-Credit Cooperative Societies, Multipurpose Cooperatives, Social Welfare And Cultural Cooperatives, Tourism Cooperatives, Transport Cooperatives, Tribal-SC/ST Cooperatives and Women Welfare Cooperative Societies. The district-wise basic data of the presence of these cooperatives are given below;

Table 4. District-wise Distribution of Cooperatives from the Credit Sector in Kerala

Sl. No	Sector	Alappuzha	Ernakulam	Idukki	Kannur	Kasaragod	Kollam	Kottayam	Kozhikode	Malappuram	Palakkad	Pathanamthitta	Tiruvananthapuram	Thrissur	Wayanad	Total
1	Credit and Thrift Societies	181	21	81	204	41	223	177	178	87	228	64	227	212	56	1980
2	Miscellaneous Credit Cooperative Societies	6	483	8	63	80	59	88	12	134	27	42	288	78	26	1394

3	Primary Agricultural Credit Cooperatives	168	160	72	142	61	122	135	107	133	94	107	113	152	32	1598
4	Urban Cooperative Banks	1	4	2	4	1	4	4	5	7	3	2	4	3	1	45
5	Kerala Bank	56	66	55	66	45	64	58	64	55	46	61	92	59	36	823
Total		412	734	218	479	228	472	462	366	416	398	276	724	504	151	5840

Source: Compiled by the authors from National Cooperative Database, 2023

The table 4 presents data on various cooperative institutions operating across the 14 districts of Kerala from credit sector. The total number of cooperative units listed across all districts are 5,840. Credit and Thrift Societies form the largest group, with 1,980 societies across the state. Palakkad has the highest number in this category with 228 societies, followed closely by Kollam, Kannur and Thrissur. Wayanad has the lowest number with 56 societies. Miscellaneous Credit Cooperative Societies number 1,394 in total. Ernakulam alone has a significant concentration with 483 such societies, which is by far the highest in the state. Malappuram and Thiruvananthapuram also have relatively high numbers, while Alappuzha, Idukki and Wayanad have fewer. There are 1,598 Primary Agricultural

Credit Cooperatives across Kerala. Thrissur has the highest number at 152, while Wayanad has the fewest with 32. Most other districts have between 100 and 160 such cooperatives, showing their widespread presence. Urban Cooperative Banks are limited in number, with only 45 across the state. Malappuram has the most with 7, while several districts such as Alappuzha, Kasaragod, Pathanamthitta and Wayanad have only one or two. Kerala Bank, which operates district-level branches has a total of 823 branches across the state. Thiruvananthapuram has the highest with 92 branches, followed by Ernakulam and Kozhikode. Wayanad has the fewest at 36. Overall, Kerala has a relatively strong cooperative credit structure.

Table 5. District-wise Distribution of Cooperatives from Non-credit Sector in Kerala

Sl. No	Sector	Alappuzha	Ernakulam	Idukki	Kannur	Kasaragod	Kollam	Kottayam	Kozhikode	Malappuram	Palakkad	Pathanamthitta	Tiruvananthapuram	Thrissur	Wayanad	Total
1	Agricultural and Allied Cooperatives	2	1	7	10	4	10	4	1	3	8	3	15	16	1	85

2	Agro Processing/Industrial Cooperatives	2	0	0	2	0	3	8	1	1	0	2	1	1	1	22
3	Consumer Cooperatives	39	9	5	99	80	97	44	12	161	145	41	116	65	13	926
4	Diary Cooperatives	245	319	190	219	148	325	246	254	251	328	174	356	245	55	3355
5	Educational and Training Cooperatives	2	1	3	114	42	54	215	5	169	22	138	6	159	71	1001
6	Farmers Service Societies	1	3	0	1	2	3	5	1	1	1	1	8	12	0	39
7	Fishery Cooperatives	74	74	7	15	19	51	31	107	11	6	5	95	31	2	528
8	Housing Cooperatives	1	7	8	7	4	11	2	9	0	5	0	1	5	0	60
9	Labour Cooperatives	7	8	19	9	13	33	8	103	19	4	17	28	21	28	317
10	Large Area Multipurpose Societies	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	9	0	10
11	Marketing Cooperative Societies	5	12	12	3	6	10	15	18	23	15	9	8	15	7	158
12	Miscellaneous Non-Credit Cooperative Societies	210	439	208	340	149	112	105	423	72	51	45	187	210	2	2553
13	Multipurpose Cooperatives	1	0	1	8	2	1	1	14	2	0	1	0	7	1	39
14	Social Welfare And Cultural Cooperatives	11	8	13	20	33	10	7	108	9	11	11	52	17	0	310
15	Tourism Cooperatives	2	5	4	8	5	2	3	10	3	3	5	4	4	2	60
16	Transport Cooperatives	1	1	1	1	2	0	0	3	6	0	0	2	1	1	19
17	Tribal-Sc/St Cooperatives	1	1	17	8	10	2	7	19	17	10	20	10	15	3	140
18	Women Welfare Cooperative Societies	1	7	21	169	38	8	3	131	56	12	7	18	25	0	496

Total	605	896	516	1033	557	732	704	1219	804	621	479	907	858	187	10118
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Source: Compiled by the authors from National Cooperative Database, 2023

Table 5 presents data on the distribution of various non-credit cooperative societies across the 14 districts of Kerala, categorised by sector. The total number of such cooperatives across the state is 10,118. The largest category is dairy cooperatives, with a total of 3,355 societies. These are spread throughout the state, with the highest numbers in Thiruvananthapuram (356), Palakkad (328), and Kollam (325). Even districts with fewer cooperatives like Wayanad, have a notable presence with 55 dairy societies. Miscellaneous non-credit cooperative societies form the second-largest group totalling 2,553. Ernakulam has the highest number in this category with 439 societies, followed by Kozhikode with 423 and Alappuzha with 210. Educational and training cooperatives are also well represented totalling 1,001. Kottayam leads with 215 societies followed by Malappuram with 169 and Thrissur with 159. Wayanad has 71 of these cooperatives, while Idukki has only 3. Consumer cooperatives make up a significant portion with 926 societies. Malappuram and Palakkad lead with 161 and 145 respectively. Kasaragod, Kollam and Kannur also show strong presence in this category. Fishery cooperatives are concentrated mainly in coastal districts such as Kozhikode (107), Alappuzha (74) and Ernakulam (74) contributing to a state total of 528. Social welfare and cultural cooperatives number 310 with high

concentrations in Malappuram (108), Thiruvananthapuram (52) and Ernakulam (8). Labour cooperatives account for 317 societies with Kozhikode again having the highest number at 103. Women welfare cooperative societies total 496 with the largest number in Kannur (169), followed by Kozhikode (131) and Malappuram (56). Some districts like Wayanad report no cooperatives in this category. Other smaller sectors include agricultural and allied cooperatives (85), agro-processing and industrial cooperatives (22), marketing cooperatives (158), housing cooperatives (60) and tribal/SC-ST cooperatives (140). Tourism cooperatives and transport cooperatives are fewer in number, totalling 60 and 19 respectively. The overall distribution reflects a strong and diverse cooperative movement in Kerala, with each district contributing to various sectors based on local economic, social and geographic conditions.

Conclusion

Cooperatives in India play a vital role in supporting the country's socio-economic development, especially in rural and semi-urban areas. Built on principles of mutual aid, democratic control and collective benefit, cooperatives serve as a strong alternative to profit-driven enterprises. They operate across a wide range of sectors including, agriculture, credit, housing, dairy,

fisheries, marketing and more, helping millions of people, particularly small farmers, workers, women, and marginalized communities and gain access to resources, finance and markets. Over the years, India has developed a vast and diverse cooperative network with institutions functioning at the primary, district, state and national levels. The presence of multi-state

cooperative societies and national federations further strengthens coordination and representation across regions. Though cooperatives face challenges such as governance issues and financial sustainability in some cases, their role in empowering local communities, promoting inclusive growth and fostering social capital remains significant.

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