

BA Political Science Programme

State & Society in Kerala

MODULE – IV

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Grass root level Democracy:
Working of Panchayathi Raj Institutions
Peoples Planning Programme
Neighbourhood Groups.

PANCHAYATH RAJ INSTITUTIONS

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment was enacted in 1992. The constitutional amendment brought three tier (level) Panchayathi Raj system in India. Accordingly, the Government of Kerala enacted the Kerala Panchayati Raj and Municipality Act 1994. The government also brought 40% of financial outlay of the 9th five year plan under the Local Self Governments (LSG).

The three levels of Panchayaths came under the Panchayati Raj system accordingly. 10,732 Grama Sabhas, 991 Grama Panchayaths, 152 Block Panchayaths and 14 Zilla Panchayaths came under the Act. A Grama Sabha consists of all voters of a Ward. The Gram Sabha must convene its meeting at least two times an year. The Ward Member is the Convener. There shall be a Grama Panchayath for a Gramam or a group of Gramams. The Grama Panchayath must produce a plan for the development programme in the Ward area in the first meeting of the Grama Panchayath. The number of members is according to the population. There are reservations for SC/ST and women. The Block Panchayath is at the Block level. There also is a reservation of 1/3 seats for women as well as SC/ST. The Zilla Panchayath is at the District level. The State Government also has certain responsibilities. The government has the powers to remove a resolution passed by a Panchayath under certain circumstances. The Government also has the powers to dissolve a non performing Panchayath. There is a Finance Commission to look into the resource and disbursement matters of Panchayaths.

PEOPLE'S PLANNING PROGRAMME

After the enactment of **73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts**, Govt. of Kerala enacted the Kerala Panchayati Raj Act and Municipality Act 1994. These Acts have been amended during the years 1995, 1999, 2000 with a view to empower the local bodies to ensure peoples participation in the planning and development process and remove the restrictions and control upon the local bodies by the State Government.

The Kerala Acts provides powers, authorities and responsibilities wider in some respects than those envisaged under the above provisions of the Indian Constitution. A peculiar feature of the Act is the predominant role given to the '**grama sabha**' through which the common people get a direct participation in the development administration of local bodies. The important landmarks in Kerala's decentralisation, inter alia, include the transfer of powers, functions, institutions and staff to local self governments (LSGIs), adoption of separate budget documents for LSGIs, decision to devolve **35 to 40%** of the Annual Plan funds to LSGIs, launching of **People's Campaign in August 1996**, institution building at different tiers and levels, restructuring.

In 2002-03, the peoples Campaign Programme was renamed "**Kerala Development Plan**". The important features of Kerala development Plan are **1) Institutionalisation and building sustainable capacity in LSGIs 2) Catalyzing economic development through these institutions and 3) Improving the quality of Services.**

PROCESS OF DECENTRALISATION:

The decentralisation programme was implemented in a very systematic manner, phase by phase.

In the first phase, **Gram Sabhas**(village constituencies) were convened and people at the local level were organised to report on their immediate needs.

In the second phase, **development seminars** were convened at the village Panchayath level. Task Forces were formed for the preparation of the various development projects. 12,000 task forces were formed that worked out to around 12 task forces per village panchayat. Close to 120,000 people participated in these task forces.

In the third phase, **development projects** were prepared according to a format suggested by the Kerala State Planning Board. However, there were a number of problems faced by these Task Forces. Firstly, there were no enough number of experts at the service of the Task Forces. Secondly, the members already present in the task forces were not properly trained, especially in technical and financial aspects. Thirdly, the official participation was not up to the expectations.

At the fourth phase, phase, from March to May 1997, it was expected to prepare five year plans for the panchayats based on their development projects. But this was a tremendous task involving planning at the Panchayath level, and coordinating at the Block Level and district Panchayath level.

In the fifth and final phase, **preparation of annual plans** for block and district panchayats was planned. It had to be done in co ordination with the Block as well as Gram Panchayath levels.

The end results showed that the panchayats could not spend more than 10% by March 1998, the end of the first year of people's planning. The government extended the period for expenditure by three months and later up to 31 March 1999.

During the second year too, the panchayats could not spend more than 10% of the earmarked funds of around Rs750 crore. The period of expenditure was extended by another three months to the end of June 1998. In 1998-99, and 1999-2000, the funds allocated were Rs 970 crore and Rs1020 crore respectively.

The budgetary provision for grant in aid to the local bodies has three components; **Tribal Sub Plan (TSP), Special Component Plan (SCP) and General Sector Plan**. Between rural and urban local bodies, funds were distributed on the basis of the population share. As for the rural LSGIs, the total general sector allocation is apportioned among the Grama, Block and District Panchayats in the ratio of **70:15:15**. For the Special Component Plan the share of 20 per cent each was fixed for the higher tiers.

During the period, the Government also launched many programmes also in a festive mood. They may be summarised as follows:-

Modernising Government Programme – LSG Initiatives

The Government of Kerala began the Modernising Government Programme in 2002 in a Mission mode to bring about basic reforms in the administrative and governance machinery and to improve basic services to the citizens particularly to the poor and the marginalized. Government recognises that public services have to be delivered in a manner that is people centred, efficient, effective, equitable, affordable, sustainable and accessible to all.

Service Delivery Project

The Service Delivery Project is a fast tract project covering 22 categories of institutions in 8 Departments. The number of institutions targeted for improvements is 2587. The Service Delivery Project (SDP) seeks to improve the quality of services in 103 Grama Panchayats, 14 municipalities and 5 Municipal Corporations under LSGD. The objective is to make them models in terms of Service Delivery.

Asraya – The Destitute Plan

The destitutes are the poorest of the poor who constitute less than 2% of the total population in any local body. The Government of Kerala through State Poverty Eradication Mission has designed an innovative programme to address the varying problems of the destitute families in the state. The programme is known as 'Ashraya'. At present 391 local self governments 385 Grama Panchayats and 6 municipalities – have prepared projects that benefitting 30192 families at a total cost of Rs.159.27 Crore.

Akshaya

Akshaya is a programme for bridging the digital divide, promoting digital literacy, connecting communities, providing access points in an effort to establish a knowledge society in Kerala. The project intended to set up around 3000 multipurpose Community Technology Centres across the state. The project has implemented in eight districts in the state. Around 3.5

lakh people have completed the eliteracy programme and about 1300 Akshaya centres have been set up in Eight districts. Government have announced that Akshaya shall be implemented in the remaining 6 districts also.

Information Kerala Mission

The Information Kerala Mission (IKM), established in June 1999, for computerising the local bodies in the state had been pursuing one among the most ambitious e-governance programmes in the country. Visualised as a sequel to the decentralised plan campaign which has been acclaimed as one of the most deep rooted and extensive initiatives in strengthening grassroots level democratisation, the Mission during its initial phase, had put in considerable efforts in building up its perspectives and strategies. The new processes of participatory developmental planning increased the workload of local government personnel substantially. Additional workload of the local government personnel was sought to be balanced by automating various local government processes. Decentralisation had created a unique paradox in the matter of expertise. It was at the grass root level that the largest chunk of plan resources was made available for planning and resolution of citizen problems through decentralisation. However the staff in the civil service available at this level were the junior most, who lacked the experience of planning and developmental administration. Building up Expert Support Systems and Decision Support System was looked upon as a possible mechanism for tackling the lack of talent in the short run. The relevance of application of ICT in the context of decentralisation had emerged from these concrete necessities.

Capacity Building: Kerala Institute of Local Administration (KILA)

Kerala Institute of Local Administration (KILA), an autonomous institute under the Department of Local Self Governments, Govt. of Kerala is the nodal agency of training, research and consultancy in the area of local governance. Apart from training and policy oriented research activities, KILA organizes seminars, workshops and discussions on various issues of local governance and development. The Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India has initiated steps to declare KILA as a SAARC Centre for Local Governance and Development.

Decentralisation Support Programme

The Decentralisation Support Programme was a project of Local Self Government Department implemented on a mission mode. The project aimed to facilitate the process of institutionalisation of decentralisation initiatives in Kerala. The project was implemented in two phases. During the phase 1, the Decentralisation Support Programme documented and analysed the experience of decentralisation in Kerala through literature survey, stakeholder consultation and case studies. The phase II sought to address the needs, concerns and opportunities identified during phase I. The phase II was started in August 2004 and completed in November 2006. The activities taken up under phase II was confined in three main categories namely; (i) Gender and Development issues in Local Governments; (ii) Improving Planning Process in Local Governments for Sustainable and Equitable Management; and (iii) Institutional and Staffing Policy.

Kerala Grama Panchayat Arranges Loan for BPL Families

Mangattidom Grama Panchayat near Koothuparamba in Kannur district has accomplished a novel task by providing subsidised micro finance from a leading bank to people living below the poverty line for renovating their old houses or building new lowcost houses. The SBI Life Insurance Company has covered the beneficiaries under its home loan insurance policy.

Canara Bank adopts village Panchayat

As part of its centenary celebrations, Canara Bank has decided to adopt Vengappalli Grama Panchayat, one of the backward panchayats of Wayanad district.

Kole land development

The Karuvoduchira kole land extending over an area of more than 370 hectares is Water logged due to inadequate drainage facility. A study conducted by CWRDM, Kozhikode, recommended mainly to do the deepening and widening of the main drain and connected lateral drains for adequate drainage of water from ayacut area.

Special funds for panchayats in backward regions

The union government is going to set up a Backward Region Grant Fund (BRGF). A sum of Rs.50,000 crore would be sanctioned every year for this. The money would go to the states' consolidated funds, from where it would be directed to panchayats. The BRGF would cover 250 districts across the country, which have been identified as backward areas. The fund is aimed at removing regional disparities and inequalities among various income groups by catalyzing development in backward areas through providing infrastructure, promoting good governance and making agrarian reforms.

Initiative to make Panchayat – Karakulam and Nellanadu as 'litigation free'

Elected representatives, voluntary activists and women's representatives along with legal experts and judicial persons are sitting together as sworn members of the Grievance and Dispute Redressal body of the Karakulam – Nellanadu Panchayats. In addition to this there is a Vigilance Cell, with the support of official / non – official members such as sub – inspector of police, doctors, ICDS officers etc. so as to deal with status and dignity of women.

Identifying Scattered Tribal Families – Through Genealogy Method

An analysis of fund utilization under different projects during 2005-6 reveals that it is very difficult to spent plan outlay under TSP due to nontraceable tribal people. The Panchayat Committee felt that there exist disparity in the number of Scheduled Tribe families (scattered) in the Panchayat. Hence they decided to seek the support of experts in finding a solution to this. Identification of Scheduled Tribe families through a detailed survey in the area was initiated with the help of an Anthropological expert. The expert made use of '**Genealogy method**', generally used in Anthropological studies. In the beginning, the available list of tribal families at each GP was verified. Then, by using the genealogy method, location of other tribal families in the area was gathered. After identifying all tribal families in the area, their details were gathered using a detailed questionnaire.

A New Approach on Tax Collection Through Grameena Patana Kendram

The rapid urbanization and the increase in the building and professional taxes, which are the main sources of the own resource of the LSGs, has made the tax collection a hectic task for the limited number of functionaries of LSGs. Karakulam Grama Panchayath, a semi urban Panchayath in the outskirts of Thiruvananthapuram city, has come out with a remarkable example of people's participation in own resource mobilization. Financial Standing Committee of the Panchayath took the leading role for the efforts. The special efforts helped the Panchayath to collect 5 lakhs rupees, which is estimated to be the half of its arrears, within a short period

District Panchayat to take up milk distribution:

Thiruvananthapuram District Panchayat is to launch programmes to foster milk production in 50 panchayats with the support of Kudumbasree groups. It is a 45 crore project which would help 5000 families.

Conclusion:

The greatest advantage of People's Planning programme was that the village panchayaths were freed from the red tapism of the Public Works Department in matters relating to construction works. Moreover, the local planning could take place at the local level with popular participation. It was truly a felt need programme. The needs were determined at the local level.

KUDUMBASREE & NEIGHBOURHOOD GROUPS

Kudumbashree was conceived as a joint programme of the Government of Kerala and Nabard implemented through Community Development Societies (CDSs) of Poor Women, serving as the community wing of Local Governments.

Kudumbashree is formally registered as the "State Poverty Eradication Mission" (SPEM), a society registered under the Travancore Kochi Literary, Scientific and Charitable Societies Act 1955. It has a governing body chaired by the State Minister of LSG. There is a state mission with a field officer in each district. This official structure supports and facilitates the activities of the community network across the state.

Kudumbashree differs from conventional programmes in that it perceives poverty not just as the deprivation of money, but also as the deprivation of basic rights. The poor need to find a collective voice to help claim these rights.

The grassroots of Kudumbashree are Neighbourhood Groups (NHG in short) that send representatives to the ward level Area Development Societies (ADS). The ADS sends its representatives to the Community Development Society (CDS), which completes the unique three-tier structure of Kudumbashree. Today, there are 1.94 lakhs NHGs, over 17,000 ADSs and 1061 CDSs in Kudumbashree.

It is this network that brings women to the Grama Sabhas and helps them bring the needs of the poor to the attention of the local governments. The Community Development Societies are also very active in Government programmes and play significant roles in development activities ranging from socio-economic surveys and enterprise development to community management and social audit.

Though its efforts to engage women in civil society in development issues and opportunities, Kudumbashree in association with the local self government of Kerala is charting out new meaning and possibilities for local economic development and citizen centric governance.