Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Planning is a socio economic instrumentality to achieve the objective of short-circuiting and telescoping the time dimension of the development process and of reconciling various conflicting and disparate paths with a view to reaching the set of goals decided upon. The basic premise that led countries to adopt the process of planning is that development of the economy, if left to market forces will take a long time to develop, should be obtained in a much shorter time span (Sankaranarayanan, K.C. 1996).

The dawn of Indian independence launched an era of nation building through planning. India adopted centralised planning from 1951. Not withstanding wide differences of opinion among scholars regarding details, they agreed that centralised system of planning has not been successful in tackling many of the fundamental problems of development faced by the country such as mass poverty and unemployment. There is a growing consensus around the view that overcentralisation had been a major debilitating feature of Indian polity and development process. The centralised planning has failed to evoke popular participation in the plan formulation and implementation, thus seriously impeding the success of planning. In fact, the logic of centralised planning was antithetical to people’s participation (Chaturvedi, H.R. 1982).

A number of studies have conclusively proved that the spread of development has been so uneven among different regions that a general description
applicable to the whole country is not correct (Misra, G.P. 1985; Mathur, O.P. 1978; Cleaver, H. 1976). If development is to have any impact on the levels of living of the people, it must directly attack the problems of poverty and unemployment at their grass root levels. Planning, to be more meaningful, ought to be responsive to the local level problems and capable of resolving such problems by better uses of local resources and by carrying out planning exercise at local levels. Consequently, the emphasis has now been shifted to decentralised planning. In broader terms, it was referred to that decentralised planning with people’s participation is the only answer to the vexed problems faced by the teeming millions of the rural poor of Indian villages. The matter is that, such a vast country like India has a wide spectrum of problems unique in its own way of physicio-climatic, agro-economic, infrastructural and socio-economic milieu, which will have to be addressed not at the state or national level but at the grass root level.

Decentralised planning implies creating a development scenario at the local levels, consistent with specific needs of the people, the growth potential of the area and financial allocation available. In contrast to the national and state plans, the decentralised planning would represent a distinct multi-sectoral package of area specific investment proposals and institutional arrangements for the speedy, timely implementation of the proposals suited in this context. The concern of decentralised planning is with human social activity distributed over a given territory (Gadgil, D.R. 1966). In other words, the decentralised planning identifies the local needs, utilizes the available manpower and the local resources with the co-operation of the locals to satisfy the needs of the locality.
Case for Decentralised Planning

Decentralised planning is advocated for ensuring local participation, mobilising local resources, incorporating field level experience, facilitating integrated physical planning to establish close linkage between resource endowment and potentialities of an area, and accelerating the development of backward regions. These involve, identification of growth inhibiting factors and to overcome these barriers, specific facilities and incentives are to be provided to suit physcio-geographical and socio-economic situation of the concerned region (Subban Khan and Qureshi, M.A. 1987).

The rationale of decentralised planning is derived theoretically from the imperative of resolving the local socio-economic problems which, in the normal course of macro planning process, are likely to be overlooked by the planners. These local problems generally are associated with the unemployment of local manpower, under utilization of local natural resources and non-availability of certain social and economic infrastructure which will act as barriers to development of local regions and weaker sections of the community. The imperative of decentralised planning arose from the difficulty experienced with regard to: (a) matching the sectoral financial allocations with the location specific needs and potential and (b) ensuring proper distribution of gains of development to sub-regions and weaker sections (Abdul Aziz, 1990). In other words, the basic thrust of decentralised planning is to ensure equity in the general economic development through people’s participation in the process of planning and implementation.

The school of thought infavour of decentralised planning is based on the premise that information cost is an increasing function of the distance between the
action point at which the information is generated and the point at which the decision is made (Marschak, 1959). If the decision making is pushed down to lower levels, the smaller will be units better will be the situation, otherthings remaining the same (Chakravarthy, 1972). Under decentralised planning, the total planning problem is compartmentalised into sub-system problems based on certain norms to facilitate the decision making process at lower levels. This compartmentalisation is to have different strategies suited to individual regions of heterogeneous character in the spatial unit of lower level planning. In the Indian context, the often cited argument for decentralisation of planning is that, given the wide regional variations in natural endowment, levels of development and potentials, no single strategy of development for the whole country is appropriate (Gadgili, D.R. 1966; Raj, K.N. 1971; Mathur, O.P. 1973; Abdul Aziz, 1983; Jain et al., 1983; Gulati, I.S. 1994).

The advantage of decentralised planning lies with the possibility of tapping local resources by ensuring better participation of the people in the developmental process given the fact that bureaucratic planning and implementation machinery is alienated from the people. Decentralisation of planning has been seen as a method to overcome this alienation and to ensure a transparent and participatory development process. If the decision making is done at the lower levels, it is easier to ensure an effective system for people’s participation in the process of plan formulation (Raj, K.N. 1971). This is particularly true for the sectors such as agriculture, animal husbandry, inland fisheries, small and village industries, education, health, drinking water, housing, sanitation and rural transport, which would have to be planned according to the specificities of local resources and local needs of the people. The
standardised development schemes that are centrally drawn up cannot take into consideration these local variations. An integrated approach is vital for sustainable development and poverty alleviation. The centrally sponsored so-called integrated programmes of Indian planning, which were put forward to meet these needs, in fact, degenerated very soon into yet some other departmental programmes. The only viable alternative of integrated development lies in decentralisation of the planning process. It is only through decentralised planning that the 'departmentalism' that characterises plan formulation and implementation in India can be overcome (Abdul Aziz, 1993).

At the same time, it is unrealistic to think that planning at lower levels is a panacea for alleviation of all problems of an economy. The People's Planning Campaign of Kerala advocated a system of multi-level planning, where the lowest unit is allowed to plan and implement everything that can be preferred most effectively at that level and all the rest is left to the higher levels.

**Kerala Model of Decentralised Planning**

Kerala has remained as one of the most backward states in terms of decentralisation of governance till 1996, despite the long tradition of local initiatives for development and presence of an educated and vibrant civil society. The history of Panchayati Raj in Kerala till 1996 has been one of aborted attempts, unkept promises and half hearted efforts (Raj, K.N. 1992; Gulati, I.S. 1994). It is only from late 1980s that substantial efforts began to advance the process. The uniqueness of the decentralisation process of Kerala in the past two decades is that besides a feeble top-down decentralisation effort on behalf of the state, the current of bottom up initiatives for local level planning and development went from strength to strength. A
The process of development of ideas was in progress regarding decentralisation, among researchers and social and physical scientists, which culminated its initiative from research centres and mass conscientisation and mass mobilisation efforts on development issues which go together gave shape to the 'bottom-up' development initiative. The efforts made under the leadership of Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP), the people's science movement of Kerala, constituted the final but the most important component of the mass mobilisation in favour of the 'bottom up' approach.

The confrontation between the campaign, for introduction of a bottom-up decentralised development process led by the KSSP and the top-bottom approach insisted by the state brought Kerala, the unique experiment of decentralisation in history. These two counter veiling forces converged in formulating the People's Plan for Kerala. Preparation of the People's Plan was done in a campaign mode, which itself was a unique and innovative idea. The idea of campaign originated from the experience of bottom-up initiatives. The People's Plan Campaign for Ninth plan in Kerala has marked the emergence of qualitative approach quite different from that of decentralised planning, which has been in existence till now in India.

The People's Campaign is the people's movement for making the power of decentralisation a reality. Thus, the campaign tries to co-ordinate the activities of various mass organisations, experts, bureaucrats and politicians at the local level. This participatory planning is the people's movement from initiation to the completion of the plan. It is an invisible concept as it encompass the people's participation in decision making, implementation of decision, sharing of the benefits, evaluation and
monitoring of the plan. Thus, people's participation has to be threaded like wrap and woof in every stage of planning (Mahipal, 1997).

The People's Plan Campaign in Kerala is different from similar attempts at decentralisation elsewhere, as it is a people's movement. A movement by the people to establish their rightful role in decision making by empowering themselves and the local self government, as opposed to the usual propaganda to maintain popular consent for what states does from above. Thus, it is known as participatory planning. The whole concept of participatory planning depends on the extent of the autonomy of the people (Thomas Isaac and Richard Frankel, 2000).

The Campaign assumes importance from the point of view of the current crisis within Kerala's widely acclaimed development model. The 'Kerala Model of development' had been encountering a severe crisis of stagnation in agricultural and industrial production, widespread reduction in productivity levels, acute power shortage, outmigration of industries and skilled labour, unbelievably high unemployment rates, all round reduction in the quality of services and the debilitating fiscal crisis of the state. The crisis encountered by the state is widely noted and the focus of attention of debates and studies has rightly turned to the chronic lack of growth of productive sectors of the economy despite the respectable social indicators (Rath, R.K. 1997). The stagnation of the productive sector has worsened fiscal position of the state and made it incapable of making any effective intervention. The contemporary crisis has already started affecting the redistributive gains of the past and standard of living of the people. It has also been argued that Kerala's achievements
in the social sector may not be sustainable given the weak productive base (George, K.K. 1993). The focus of the social movement which made the ‘Kerala Model’ workable, has so far been mainly on the aim of equity in the distribution of wealth and income. But it is becoming increasingly evident that the pursuit of equity cannot be maintained in the absence of economic growth.

The People’s Campaign for Ninth Plan is an initiative to build creatively on the legacy of collective social intervention, in order to face the contemporary challenges of development. The Campaign is an attempt to conceptualise, operationalise and institutionalise a system of multi-level, people centered process suitable to the regional specificities of Kerala (State Planning Board, 1996).

Significance of the study

The study on People’s Planning Programme in Kerala is of special significance. This programme launched in 1996 is one of the most ambitious result oriented programmes ever since the reorganisation of Kerala State in 1956. Kerala, unlike many other states, have the necessary pre-requisites such as long tradition of democratic rule, legacy of strong democratisation movement, exceptionally high literacy rate, land reforms and balanced structure of power in rural areas, for launching a successful programme of local governance. The People’s Planning Programme with many unique and innovative features has attracted the attention of many policy makers and administrators throughout the country. But so far no material research is made in this novel programme. This study is directed to fill this gap in a small way. Hence the significance of this study.
Objectives of the study

The main objectives of the study are:

1. To study the evolution of decentralised planning in India.
2. To examine the process of ‘People’s Planning Programme’ in Kerala.
3. To evaluate the ‘People’s Planning Programme’ at the gram panchayat level.
4. To make suggestions to improve the process.

Methodology

The study is based on both primary and secondary data.

Ernakulam district, being a fast developing, centrally located district of the state with cent percent literacy is selected for the study.

Stratified sampling technique is adopted for the selection of panchayats. The panchayats are graded into special grade, first grade, second grade and third grade on the basis of revenue as mandated in the then Kerala Panchayati Raj Act, 1960. The panchayats are to be regrouped in every three years, but that has not taken place after 1983. Now, in practice, there are only two categories of panchayats, namely, special grade and first grade which is confirmed in the discussion with the concerned authorities.
There are eighty six gramapanchayats in Ernakulam district. Out of which, Rayamangalam special grade panchayat and Asamannoor first grade panchayat are selected for the study. While selecting the panchayats, it was kept in mind not to select both the panchayats under the same political front governance of either Left Democratic Front (LDF) or United Democratic Front (UDF). Rayamangalam panchayat is under the governance of UDF and Asamannoor panchayat under LDF. The geographical condition of the panchayats is also considered for getting homogeneity in the programmes for evaluating People’s Planning Programme.

Primary Data

The evaluation of the People’s Planning Programme is done mainly by using primary data. The primary data have been collected from the beneficiaries of the selected panchayats with the help of pre-tested schedules. General and scheme-wise evaluation are done. The general evaluation is done by considering different aspects such as extent of public participation, political discrimination, corruption and other related issues. For the scheme-wise evaluation, nine schemes from the selected panchayats were taken. They belonged three each to the productive sector, the service sector and the infrastructure sector. The schemes selected are, group farming, lift irrigation and well irrigation in the productive sector; housing, drinking water and sanitation in the service sector; and roads, electrification and public buildings in the infrastructure sector. For each scheme, 15 beneficiaries proportionate to total number of beneficiaries were selected. Thus, the total number of sample beneficiaries for each panchayat was 135 (9 x 15) making the total sample size 270. The beneficiaries in
the productive and service sector projects were selected by using lottery method from the beneficiary list maintained by the panchayat. In the infrastructure sector, beneficiary list is not maintained by the panchayat and the beneficiaries interviewed are selected at random.

Secondary data

The sources of secondary data are various publications of Government of Kerala, State Planning Board and Department of Economics and Statistics, Thiruvananthapuram and annual budgets, development reports, evaluation reports, list of beneficiaries, records and other documents of the respective grama panchayats.

The study is both analytical and descriptive. For analysing the data, statistical techniques such as averages, percentages, chi-square test of independence, t-test and cost-benefit analysis were applied.

Scope of the study

The study covers a period of 5 years starting from 1996-97 to 2001-02.

Limitation of the study

The People's Planning Programme as a means of decentralised planning is a novel idea introduced in Kerala as late as in 1996. It is at its infancy. The time is not fully ripe to reap the harvest. This idea is criticized in the political and social circles. Much literature is not forthcoming at this early stage of this programme. The voluminous work is a compelling factor to restrict the study to two panchayats.
Scheme of the study

The thesis is presented in seven chapters. The introductory chapter provides a brief description of the topic and presents objectives, significance, methodology, scope, limitations and the scheme of the study. A brief review of literature is presented in the second chapter. The evolution of decentralised planning in India is discussed in the third chapter. The fourth chapter examines the process of People's Planning Programme in Kerala. General evaluation of the People's Planning Programme is done in the fifth chapter. In the sixth chapter the schemes implemented under People's Planning Programme are evaluated. The last chapter presents the findings and the suggestions emerging from the study.
REFERENCE


