In spite of many historical changes, in many parts of India rural society still keeps the tradition of local self governance and Village meetings are held to take decisions related to management of water bodies, temple functions and other common issues. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act has established official Village Panchayats and the Gram Sabha. This study is an attempt to compare the capacity of the Village Panchayats and traditional institutions to facilitate people’s participation. People’s participation in traditional village assemblies or Oorsabhai and the legally established Gram Sabha are compared. The ability of these two institutions to facilitate participation in development activities and management of common property resources are compared. The ability of the two institutions to facilitate people’s participation in designing development plans at village level is also compared. The study has been undertaken in two villages of Sivagangai District of Tamil Nadu. The findings of the study are discussed hereunder.
Findings

1. The majority of the respondents 311 (94%) belonged the age group of 21-60 years. Only a small minority of 20 (6%) respondents were above 60 years.

2. The majority of the respondents 279 (84%) are male and only 52 (16%) respondents are female.

3. The majority of the respondents 179 (54%) are from the most backward community. Only 15 (4.5%) respondents are from the forward community. 17.2% of the respondents are from Scheduled Caste.

4. Nearly 300 respondents (90%+) are Hindus and 13 respondents (4%) are Christians. In Nallukottai Village only Hindus live (mono religious village).

5. The majority 291 (88%) of the respondents are married. Only 18 (5%) respondents are unmarried.

6. The majority of the respondents 122 (36.9%) had studied upto primary level. Only 10 (3%) respondents are illiterate.

7. Nearly half 141 (42%) of the respondents are agriculturists.

8. The majority 185 (55.8%) respondents are poor and their annual income is below Rs.30,000/. Only 30 (9%) respondents had an annual income of above Rs.50,000/-
9. More than three fourths 265 (80%) respondents are from nuclear families.

10. Nearly 198 (60%) respondents have tiled houses. In both the study villages most of the respondents have utilized the government scheme benefits. Nallukottai village has been declared a hut-less village. It was the driving passion of the President, Ramanathan, which rendered this possible.

11. The majority 247 (75%) respondents are having lands and 84 (25%) respondents are not having lands.

12. In both the study villages the majority 292 (88%) respondents are fully aware of the functions of the Oorsabhai and only 92 (31%) respondents are fully aware of the functions of the Gram Sabha.

13. The Oorsabhai 331 (100%) respondents participate in the Oorsabhai meetings whereas in the Gram Sabha only 82 (25%) respondent participate.

14. More than 304 (90%) respondents said that they had the freedom to participate in framing the rules of implementation of the programmes of the traditional Panchayat, but only 40 (16%) respondents felt that they could participate in framing the rules of implementation of the programmes of the Village Panchayat.
15. The majority 286 (86%) respondents said that they participated in monitoring the implementation of the programmes of the traditional Panchayat, but, in the case of the Village Panchayat, only 60 (25%) respondents said that they took part in monitoring the implementation of the schemes of the Village Panchayat.

16. More than three fourths 259 (78%) respondents felt that they had scope for participation in the planning in the traditional Panchayat. Only 45 (18%) respondents felt that they had scope for participation in preparing the plan for the Village Panchayat.

17. The majority 323 (97%) respondents participated in the agriculture development activities carried out by the traditional Panchayat, while 173 (72%) respondents said that they participated in the agriculture development activities carried out by the Village Panchayat.

18. All the 331 respondents (100%) participated in tank maintenance activities carried out by the traditional Panchayat. Only 155 (65%) respondents participated in the tank maintenance work carried out by the Village Panchayat.

19. 100% (331) of the respondents participated in the regulation of tank water whereas, in the case of Village Panchayat, only 57% (135) of the respondents said that they participated in the regulation of tank water.
20. The majority 311 (94%) respondents said that they participated in the regulation of grazing by the traditional Panchayat, whereas only 113 (47%) respondents said that they participated in the regulation of grazing by the Village Panchayat.

21. The majority 321 (97%) respondents said that they participated in the fisheries development activities carried out by the traditional Panchayat, while only 137 (57%) respondents said that they participated in the fisheries development activities carried out by the Village Panchayat.

22. More than 300 (91%) respondents participated in the Kudimaramathu activities of the traditional Panchayat, but only 58 (24%) respondents participated in the Kudimaramathu work of the Village Panchayat.

23. More than 80% (270) of the respondents said that they participated in the traditional Panchayat’s regulating the use of poramboke lands in the village. Only 56% (134) of the respondents were involved in regulating the use of poramboke lands in the village.

24. The majority 239 (72%) respondents reported participating in planting trees in the village poramboke lands and patta lands in the village whereas only 95 (39%) respondents supported the planting of trees in the village poramboke and patta lands in the village.
25. 83% (273) of the respondents said that the local community had the freedom to initiate any new programme implemented by the traditional Panchayat, whereas 25% (60) of the respondents told that the local community had the freedom to Initiate any new programme in the Village Panchayat.

26. 81% (270) of the respondents said that the traditional Panchayat gave freedom to the community to design the programmes to be implemented by the traditional Panchayat. Only 19% (45) of the respondents said that the Village Panchayat gave freedom to the community to design the programmes to be implemented by the Village Panchayat.

27. 81% (269) of the respondents felt that they could influence the decisions taken in the Oorsabhai meetings. Only 42% (100) of the respondents believed that they could influence the decisions taken in the Gram Sabha meetings.

28. 97% (324) of the respondents said that they could bring up agenda items related to local issues in Oorsabhai meetings whereas only 28% (68) of the respondents believed that they could bring up agenda items related to local issues in the Gram Sabha.

29. 80% (269) of the respondents said that they were aware of the follow-up action taken by the traditional Panchayats. Only 25% (60) of the respondents said that they were aware of the follow up action taken by the Village Panchayat.
30. 98% (322) of the respondents said that the date and time of the Oorsabhai meetings could be decided upon by the community as per their convenience, but the Gram Sabha meetings are conducted on a date and at a time specified by the state government.

31. 88% (292) of the respondents said that they were bound by the decisions taken in the Oorsabhai meetings, but only 23% (55) of the respondents were of the opinion that they were bound by the decisions taken by the Gram Sabha.

32. 95% (318) of the respondents are known very well about the action taken on the decisions taken in the Oorsabhai. Only 16% (40) of the respondents had knowledge of the action taken on decisions taken in the Gram Sabha.

33. 84% (278) of the respondents said that they had knowledge of the various programmes implemented by the traditional Panchayat, whereas 22% (54) of the respondents said that they had knowledge of the various programmes implemented by the village Panchayat.

34. 96% (319) of the respondents were fully aware of different functions of the Oorsabhai whereas only 25% (60) of the respondents were aware of the functions of the Gram Sabha.

35. 83% (275) of the respondents were aware of the income and expenditure of the traditional Panchayat but only 22% (53)
respondents were aware of the income and expenditure of the Village Panchayat.

36. 92% (306) of the respondents said that the traditional Panchayat promoted cultural activities in the village but only 26% (67) of the respondents said that the Village Panchayat promoted cultural activities in the village.

37. 86% (285) of the respondents said that the Traditional Panchayat took effective steps to eradicate arrack in the village, while 19% (45) of the respondents felt that the Village Panchayat took steps to eradicate arrack in the village.

38. 87% (288) of the respondents said that the Traditional Panchayat played a vital role in settling disputes among the members of the local community, while 14% (33) of the respondents said that the Village Panchayats took efforts to settle disputes within the village.

39. 96% (317) of the respondents said that village security was provided by the Traditional Panchayat, only 54% (131) of the respondents said that Village Panchayat played a role in providing village security.

**Conclusion**

Based on the available data the hypotheses of the study have been tested and the study has come to the following conclusions.
The traditional Panchayats are still very active in the study area and people show more interest in participating in the activities of traditional Panchayats than in the activities of the legally established village Panchayats. People’s participation in the Oorsabhai meetings is greater than people’s participation in the Gram Sabha meetings.

People’s participation in the development activities relating to the management of the common property resources undertaken by the traditional Panchayat is greater than that in such activities undertaken by the village Panchayat.

Traditional Panchayats give better opportunities for people to participate in designing development programmes at the local level than the village Panchayats.

Olson and Ostrom argue the significance of the institutional arrangements for people’s participation for collective good. Olson argues that institutions must give assurance to the participants that their participation would result in the desired results.

Olson states that the participants must be given the ability to internally regulate the functioning of the organisation. Participants must feel that they are in control of the organisation. Ostrom’s design principles also indicate that the participants’ ability to locally design and control the institutions has considerable influence over people’s participation. Participants must have the power to frame the rules of institutions and the power to take decisions independently. External
government agencies should not have the power to control and regulate participatory institutions.

The frameworks of Olson and Ostrom have helped this researcher to understand the ability of the traditional Panchayats and Constitutional Panchayats in generating people’s participation. Participation in traditional Panchayats is greater than participation in Constitutional Panchayats. It is found that people feel that traditional Panchayats provide better opportunity for participation in development activities. Traditional Panchayats are evolved by the local community. Their rules and regulations are acceptable to people and known to everyone in the village. The Constitutional Panchayats are bound by the rules framed by the government. Most of the villagers are not aware of the rules governing the Village Panchayat. The Village Panchayats are regulated by government officials. Because of these reasons, people are not able to effectively participate in the activities of the Village Panchayats. The study has found the need for the convergence between Traditional Panchayats and Village Panchayats. Government in general ignore the role of traditional institutions in generating participation. In recent years it is found that traditional village institutions are able to change themselves to the needs of the present context and contribute to the development of the village. Enlightened leaders play significant roles in bringing about such changes in the traditional institutions. A deeper understanding of traditional institutions would be very much helpful in framing the policies and programmes for development at the grassroots. The
conclusion drawn from the study is that a synergy of the Traditional Panchayats and Village Panchayats will bring optimum benefits to the people.

It would be a worthwhile effort if some scholar were to identify some villages where the Traditional Panchayat and the Village Panchayat are functioning in perfect harmony and undertake case studies of these villages and therefrom evolve a module for synergizing the Traditional Panchayat and the Village Panchayat.

It would also be a worthwhile effort if some scholar were to undertake a thorough study of the features of the Traditional Panchayat that can be adopted to suit the framework of the Village Panchayat and induct them into a few Village Panchayats, thereby experimenting with hybridization.