ABSTRACT

Key words: Institutions, Practices, Field, Habitus

Kerala introduced a mass campaign for democratic decentralization in 1996, namely, People’s Planning Campaign (PPC), which was changed to Kerala Development Programme (KDP) in 2001. The PPC had introduced various participatory institutions for achieving its objectives, and most of those institutions continued during the KDP phase as well. Though institutions have greater objectives when they are started, the practices of the people are a decisive factor in their success or failure. The practices of the people are controlled by the field and habitus (Bourdieu’s conceptualization) they represent. This study attempts to understand the dynamics of participatory institutions in Kerala during the PPC and KDP phases. It also attempts to understand the approaches of various social fields of Kerala such as political field, religious field and field of voluntary action, towards participatory institutions. The dissertation followed an exploratory case study method, by selecting three Panchayats from three different regions of Kerala. A package of qualitative methods such as in depth interviews, focus group discussions, house visits, and document analysis have been used for collecting data.

The study indicates that the functioning of the participatory institutions became less participatory from the last years of PPC, and participation lessened even further during the KDP phase. The transition from a participatory project to a bureaucratic programme happened during this period. The changes were visible in the collective process of organizing participatory forums. The withdrawal of voluntary resource persons from the planning process, political changes in the state and the grampanchayats, and withdrawal of middle classes from the public forums are the major reasons for the weakening of participatory institutions since the later years of the PPC.

The political, religious and voluntary action fields of Kerala were reluctant to assimilate the concept of participatory democracy in its deeper sense. They largely failed in developing new practices according to the requirements of participatory institutions and democracy. Democratic decentralization could not locate specific and adequate space in the internal discussions of these fields. The findings of the study conclude that though Kerala has passed through one and a half decades of democratic decentralization, the public sphere of Kerala could not sustain the democratic practices according to the requirements of participatory democracy.