Chapter I
INTRODUCTION

Participatory development is gaining increasing attention from both scholars and policy makers as an idea as well as a strategy of development. Participation strengthens governance by making it more responsive to the preferences of the people. The proximity between the state and the people facilitates better understanding of the needs of the people. This requires regular involvement of the people not only in identifying development needs but also in seeking solutions. Participation really means close involvement of the people in economic, social, cultural and political processes that affect their lives (UNDP 1993). Thus, participation has different dimensions. Participation in the political process has an intrinsic benefit. Moreover, participation brings instrumental benefits such as better targeting of the resources. The most important aspect of participation is effective devolution of power to the people so that they have a decisive role in making decisions concerning them. It is a precondition of empowered participation. In this approach people are considered as an active agent of development rather than a passive recipient. This has got political implication since it facilitates deepening of democracy. The increased interest in participatory development is primarily due to the dissatisfaction with the model of development based on ‘trickle down’ approach, which has not transformed much the life of the poor (Kaufman and Alphonso 1997). In this top down approach the people have only a passive role in receiving what is provided to them, whereas participatory development is a bottom-up approach in which the capabilities of the people in controlling their resources and in the distribution of benefits are recognised.

Decentralisation and participation are complementary; participatory mode of governance requires decentralisation and successful decentralisation presupposes participation. Diana Conyers defines decentralisation as any change in the organisation of government, which involves the transfer of powers, or functions from
the national level to any sub-national level(s) or from one sub-national level to another, lower one. Decentralisation entails political decentralisation in which power is devolved to the lower tiers of government. Participation of the people is possible only in the context of decentralised administration. In a country like India with diverse regional preferences, decentralised administration is the preferable strategy of governance, because the central government is likely to be less sensitive to the diverse patterns of preferences.

Decentralisation of power has been an objective of India's National Movement. Gandhiji's ideal of Village Swaraj was based on the principles of democracy and decentralisation. But, it was an irony that panchayat raj was included only in the Directive Principles of State Policy of the Indian Constitution. Although, bottom-up planning from village upwards was visualised from the first plan onwards, planning remained centralised due to the absence of genuine local self-government institutions (LSGIs) at sub-state level. The organisational arrangements required for decentralised planning were not created. Although, the panchayati raj system acquired momentum in independent India with the recommendations of the Balwant Ray Mehta Committee Report in 1957, the local bodies could not deliver the desired results due to the absence of the devolution of power, functions, finance and functionaries. Many committees constituted since then to study the panchayati raj institutions recommended clear constitutional support to be given to the local governments. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments passed in 1992 were the culmination of the process of reform in this area, which gave a fillip to the decentralisation efforts in the country. These amendments enhanced the role of local bodies in developmental activities and planning. Every state government had to make conformity legislation. The Constitutional Amendments gave much discretionary power to the state governments as regards devolution of power, functions and finance.

The Kerala Panchayat Raj Act and Kerala Municipalities Act were passed in 1994 and the first elected local bodies with constitutional backing took charge on
October 2nd 1995. The new state government led by the left coalition, which assumed power in 1996, made a historic decision to allocate 35-40 per cent of the ninth plan outlay to the local bodies and to launch a People’s Campaign for Planning (GO.No.10/96/plg dated 30-7-96). This was a landmark decision since it enormously enhanced the resource base of the local bodies. Moreover, participation of the people in planning was emphasised. In terms of decentralisation efforts, Kerala stands first among the states of India (Nagaraj 1999; World Bank 2004; 2005). The United Democratic Front (UDF), which came to power in Kerala in 2001, did not attempt to alter the methodology of planning substantially; but changed the name of People’s Plan Campaign (PPC) to Kerala Development Plan (KDP).

The Constitutional Amendments, the state level acts, and government rules and orders put together shape the design of decentralisation in the state. The design of decentralisation as defined in the present study refers to the distribution of powers, functions, responsibilities, resources and staff across different tiers of government. As such, we have different designs of decentralisation in different states. The design of decentralisation should facilitate functioning of the local bodies as local self-governments institutions, with participatory structures as envisaged in the constitution. While the existing studies bring out many interesting dimensions of participatory decentralised planning in Kerala, none of them appear to have addressed the issue of design of decentralisation. It is our contention that the design of decentralisation has a crucial bearing on the success/failure of the decentralisation experiment in terms of its goals of deepening democracy and hastening development. This is the central proposition that we wish to pursue in the present study. It is hypothesised that the design of decentralisation impact up on almost all outcome parameters, especially on various desired dimensions of participation as well as on the horizontal and vertical integration of local plans.

The design/architecture of decentralisation in Kerala has four important dimensions: functional, financial, administrative and planning. The functional
autonomy is the essence of a federal set-up. There shall be devolution of power and functions from centre to the states and from states to the local bodies. Functional clarity of each layer of government so as to avoid overlapping of functions is important for effective functioning of a federation. The constitution has only listed the subjects of jurisdiction of the local bodies. In the state legislation, there should be precise definition of functions of each tier of the local bodies as well as specification of activities among the local bodies in each subject. Precise definition of functions would facilitate better discharge of functions.

Devolution of functions is a necessary condition, but it is not a sufficient condition for effective decentralisation. There should be devolution of finance. Fiscal autonomy should be the central theme of financial devolution. The local bodies should have the power to raise resources from different sources according to the requirements. The power to tax is important and raising own resource base of the local bodies is crucial. Moreover, there should be mechanisms to correct the vertical as well as horizontal imbalances. Grants-in-aid are an important tool to correct this imbalance, but these should be done on the basis of objective criteria. Unless sufficient funds are devolved in commensurate with the functions, the credibility of the decentralised system will be lost.

There should also be administrative decentralisation in which adequate staff is redeployed to the lower levels with necessary expertise and devolution of authority to take required decisions. The administrative system should be responsive to the demands of the people. The local bodies should have necessary control over the staff under it. The capability of the staff should be enhanced to take up the new responsibilities. Moreover, participatory development demands a different approach from the bureaucracy and attitudinal changes are required. Likewise, capacity building of the elected members is important, since they have to be equipped to take up new responsibilities.
It is important that the design of decentralisation, or the methodology of planning from below, should create structures suitable for participation of the people in every phase of the planning cycle. A challenging issue in decentralisation of planning, therefore, is to develop an appropriate methodology for participative planning from below. The People’s Plan Campaign developed such a methodology for participatory planning. It is, therefore, important to know the participative structures created, and to see how far the design of decentralisation facilitates participation. Many studies on grama sabha participation in different parts of India do not give us encouraging results. The trend in participation is important since it shows whether the faith of the people in the participatory experiment is increasing or decreasing. The participation of the marginalised sections such as women, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes gives indications of the nature of the democratisation process. Special care was supposed to be given in the campaign to address the issues of women, the scheduled castes and the scheduled tribes. In the grama sabha, there should be separate groups to discuss the issues of women and scheduled castes/tribes. It was insisted that 10 per cent of the grant-in-aid should be for the women component plan (WCP). The fund allocated for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes was given specifically for all the local bodies in the budget appendix. The outcome of participation depends also on the characteristics of the participants. The level of education, age structure and occupation are important in this context. It is equally important to understand the major determinants of participation. The participation level should be high if the decisions taken in the grama sabhas are to be democratic. Therefore, identification of determinants of participation is important.

Participation in higher stages of planning is equally important as at the grama sabha. The nature of participation changes at higher stages of planning. An important factor is to create appropriate structures for participation at higher stages and motivate the people to participate.
In a federal structure the various layers of government are independent. Each government can make independent decisions. But, the plans of all the governments should be integrated and there should be co-ordination in activities. Conflicting priorities followed by various governments will defeat the very purpose of planning itself. The integrating mechanism should be embedded in the design of decentralisation itself. The constitution mandates the District Planning Committee (DPC) to prepare an integrated plan for the district as a whole. There is a basic design problem, which is rooted in the constitution itself due to the separation of urban and rural local bodies into watertight compartments so that the district panchayat has no jurisdiction over the urban areas. Within the district there are many local bodies, which make independent plans. Integration of local plans requires information flow among various local bodies as well as different sectors in the same local body. Moreover, integration should not be limited at the district level; it must be extended to the state as a whole.

Objectives

Decentralisation by itself will not ensure people’s participation, but might facilitate it. Participative structures are essential for empowering and involving people. The design of decentralisation should ensure a framework facilitating participatory decision-making. In the planning process, the nature of participation required at different stages varies. The constitutional provision of grama sabha provides an opportunity for people’s participation in decision-making, not only in planning but also in governance. The local priorities are decided at the grama sabha where all the voters in a ward are eligible to participate. It is very important to know the trends in the rates of participation. How are the rates of participation changing over time? What is the participation rate of women and scheduled castes? What is the age structure of participants? What are the important determinants of participation?
Is participation happening at higher levels of planning? Are people participating in implementation?

The priorities fixed by each gram sabha need to be reconciled at the panchayat level; sometimes, there may be conflicting priorities among different wards. Each local body is autonomous, and making independent decisions disregarding the macro impact of micro decisions may lead to duplication and wastage of resources. Moreover, decisions at different levels of government need to be integrated. Integration and co-ordination are important in planning. What are the major problems of integration? How can integration be ensured? These are the important issues addressed in this study.

To sum up, the specific objectives are the following:

(i) to analyse the rationale of the design of democratic decentralisation in Kerala.

(ii) to examine the nature, trend and determinants of participation of people in the gram sabha.

(iii) to assess participation at higher stages of planning and to evaluate the issues of participatory implementation, and

(iv) to examine the various dimensions of integration in planning, as also to develop a methodological approach towards inter-tier integration.

Participation and integration are determined to a great extent by the design of decentralisation; as such, the present study on participation and integration would throw light on the design of decentralisation in Kerala and suggest measures to improve the present architecture of decentralisation. There is, however, no uniform design applicable for all societies. The ideal design depends on the objectives and environment in which it functions.
Chapter Scheme

The study is organised in seven chapters. The first chapter is a brief introduction to the study in which the objectives and the chapter scheme are presented.

The second chapter describes the context and framework of the study in which a brief history of the evolution of the local bodies and decentralisation of planning in India as well as Kerala is presented, besides a review of literature on decentralised planning in Kerala. The chapter also discusses leading approaches to decentralisation, besides presenting the sources of data and the methodology.

Chapter III critically examines the design of decentralisation in Kerala in the context of the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments and the follow-up legislation in the state, focussing on the functional, financial, administrative and planning dimensions.

In Chapter IV, an analysis of gram sabha participation is attempted dividing the period into two sub-periods, taking elections in 1995 and 2000 as milestones. The rate of participation and its trend are examined, broadly dividing the participants into general, scheduled castes and women. The characteristics of the participants such as their age, education and occupation are analysed along with other determinants of participation. The reasons for low and declining participation are also examined in this chapter.

Chapter V is devoted to the examination of participation of different categories of people at higher stages of planning such as in development seminars, task forces, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

In Chapter VI, a discussion of the integration of plans at different levels is attempted. The various dimensions of integration as well as the major problems in integration are analysed. A detailed examination of the projects of different tiers of local governments is made along with a specific analysis of the animal husbandry
projects in the panchayats in one block panchayat- Puzhakkal. An alternative approach towards integration of plans is presented in this chapter.

Chapter VII brings together important findings of the study. On the whole, the study emphasises the critical role of the design of decentralisation in deciding the outcomes, especially in participation and integration. In the Kerala context, the design of decentralisation leaves much scope for improvement.

Notes


2 '..... Real Swaraj will come not by the acquisition of authority by a few but by the acquisition of capacity by all to resist authority when it is abused....Swaraj is to be obtained by education of the masses to a sense of their capacity to regulate and control authority' Gandhi MK (2002) 'Village Swaraj' Navajeevan Trust, Ahmedabad. p.3.