CHAPTER 6.

PARTICIPATION OF PEOPLE - AN EVALUATION WITH RESPECT TO VARIOUS PANCHAYATHS
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In people’s planning the basic unit of planning is the villages and the municipalities. The block plans have to be built up primarily by integrating the plans of the panchayaths falling under the block panchayath. The development studies-including discussions in the Grama Sabhas and findings from various studies- can provide the basis for preparing plan in Grama Sabha.

The idea behind the people’s planning programme is to bring every people in a panchayath to be a part of the democracy and to make them use the power they received through the constitution amendments. Their role starts from the very beginning, identifying problems, preparing projects, integrating them and implementing them. The people at panchayath level have to be trained to exercise the power they received. But in majority of cases they are more concerned with the benefits and returns.

The Average participation per year in the Grama Sabhas revealed that the participation was found to be decreasing with respect to the first and last (Fig.6.1). In the case of Alappuzha municipality in the first two years Grama Sabha has got almost equal participation. When coming to the middle years of planning the participation decreased and in the last year it reached about the half of the first year.

The participation in Grama Sabhas in Ramankary panchayath revealed a varying trend in all the years but generally showed a decreasing trend. The
Fig. 6.1. Percentage participation of people in Grama Sabha

Source: Primary data
Kanjikkuzhi and Maraikkulam panchayaths scored high value of participation in all the five years of the nineth plan. The distribution of plan fund and the physical achievements especially in the service sector as well as effective communication are the factors behind this. In both cases the proportion of decrease in participation is narrow.

In Neelamperoor panchayath the participation in the Grama Sabha was found to be linearly decreasing year by year. This led to poor participation in the last year, below half of the first year. This definitely reflects the lack of awareness among people of their role in Grama Sabha and planning. Similar trend was observed in Kavalam and Chambakkulam. Chambakkulam is found to be better in attracting people in the first year. After a sudden decrease in the second year the Velliyanadu panchayath was able to achieve almost equal participation in the last three years. In the case of Pulinkunnu panchayath the participation in Grama Sabha was found to be increased in the third year than in the second year and further decrease was noted. In Nedumudi panchayath after the first year the participation become steady for the next three years while the general trend of reduction was noticed in the last year. In the case of Muhamma panchayath also the reduction was evident and only half of the participants were present in the last year than the first year.

In the Kottayam sector the participation was found to be showing the similar decreasing trend as in the case of Alleppey. Any of the panchayath or even the Municipality was not able to hold the attendance of the first Grama Sabha in subsequent years (Fig.6.2). In Kottayam Municipality the participation in Grama Sabha was found to be linearly decreasing with equal proportion of reduction in
Fig. 6.2. People's participation in Grama Sabha in various panchayath studied.

Source: Primary data
every year.

In Menadom panchayath the participation in the last year was found to be reaching half of the attendance of the first year when compared with the first year of 9th five year plan period. Pampady panchayath also showed a similar trend, but in Kumarakom it was below the half of the first year.

Manarkadu, Puthupally, Ayarkunnam and Kooroppada showed similar gradual reduction in the average participation. In the case of Akalakunnam panchayath the reduction in the attendance of Grama Sabha was negligible from the second year onwards. The panchayath was able to account for steady participation in all the four years. In Kurichy panchayath the participation in the last year of the 9th plan was found to be very poor. Nattakom panchayath achieved much better participation in the first half of the 9th five year plan.

The data of participation in Grama Sabha in various panchayath revealed a decreasing trend. The participation is observed to be limited, especially from the second year onwards, this shows change in the attitude of individual or other beneficiaries. The physical achievements of the various panchayaths studied reflected a clear variation in the number of individual beneficiaries. Once they got a direct or indirect benefit they showed interest in participating in the next Grama Sabha. They always expected to get more benefits, but in due course when they realize that they will not, lost the interest in participation further.

All the respondents have heard about gram sabha an average of only 42 percent attended the first meetings (Fig.6.3). But most of the participants were aware of the preparation and formulation of projects or even who is responsible for that.
Fig. 6.3. Response of people about the participation in Grama Sabha

Source: Primary data
About 12 percent of the respondents believe that the local leaders of the present panchayath bharana samiti are responsible for the formulation of the projects. None of them are aware of the fact that they too can hold the power of formulation of the project and find out the needy sectors (Fig.6.4)

Majority (68 percent) of the respondents raised complaints about the procedures for the selection of beneficiaries and they are not satisfied. This response reflects that most of them are actually unaware of the selection procedure. While 26.6 percent was of opinion that the present selection is foolproof. The researcher found that they are actually the beneficiaries. 5.4 percent of people remain neutral because they fear that when they answer the question negatively they become eliminated from the next group of beneficiaries (Fig.6.5). About 14 percent of the respondents believe that the beneficiaries are selected on political basis.

The people’s response towards their role in 9th plan is that it is the duty of the government to give such benefits to the people. None of them knew that they are the key operators. This reflects that the officials as well as the political parties were not able to make them aware of the ethics behind this movement. The creamy layer of the society were not mobilized in Grama Sabha and showed their indifference to this experiment. The women participants were mainly from the low-income group.

Only 1.2 percent of the total respondents were aware of how the Grama Sabha is formulated. Majority (87.2) believes that it is a group of local bharana samithy. 11.6 percent believes that the Grama Sabha is meant for poor and backward community (Fig.6.6).
Fig. 6.4. People's opinion about the formulation of projects

- A committee of experts: 88%
- Present bharana smithi: 12%
- Participants: 0%

Source: Primary data
Fig. 6.5. Response of people about the selection of beneficiaries

- Neutral: 5%
- Satisfied: 27%
- Not satisfied: 68%

Source: Primary data
Fig. 6.6. People's awareness about the structure of Grama Sabha

Source: Primary data
The majority of the respondents (85%) believes that the distribution of the fund is on political basis because of the fact that the individual beneficiaries are supporters of the local leaders. The rest of the respondents (they are the actual beneficiaries) were satisfied with the present distribution system because they form the part of it (Fig.6.7). This clearly reflects the lack of proper training of the leaders about the concept of Grama Sabha. It may partly due to their reluctance in conveying the message to the common man.

In personal interview with the leaders majority of them blame that the creamy layer of the society showed no interest in the planning program and not willing to attend the sabha. This is because of the fact that they understood that they never form an individual beneficiary. The leaders are not able to make people aware about the ethics behind this programme.

Majority of the LDF leaders attended the Grama Sabha irrespective of the ruling party of the panchayath. While the UDF leaders showed less interest in attending the sabha where the ruling party is LDF. Similar policy is reflected among the participants of the Grama Sabha also. 34 percent of the leaders respond neutral to the procedure adopted for the selection of beneficiaries. 46 percent of them is of opinion that the selection is based on the criteria in the procedures of planning programme. 20 percent accept the political interest also play a role in the selection procedures.

12 percent of the respondents among the ‘Prerak’ and employees of panchayath are not aware of the rules and regulations clearly. This is one of the striking point that they cannot able to convey the message to the public doubtlessly.
Fig 6.7. People's awareness about the distribution of fund in Grama Sabha

Source: Primary data
They are working according to the interest of the ruling party. Many of the respondents (57%) in this category take a neutral stand to this question.

The 44% local leaders of the political parties were satisfied with the 9th plan while the rest is of opinion that the fund is not sufficient in completing or maintaining the physical achievements gathered during the 9th plan. The researcher found that the allocation of fund is improper in certain cases that the same head got many material benefits due to overlapping of fund from district, block and panchayath level. This distribution become unfair due to the lack of proper communication between different level of action and care should be taken to avoid such mistakes in future.

Other deficiency in the operation of planning programme is that the lack of proper link among the projects formulated. The committee members cannot interact among themselves thus fund allocated is not utilized properly.

The competitive mentality among the political parties does another harm to the planning system that they cannot able to gather their supporters under one roof overlooking their political attitude. Thus many of the Grama Sabhas become party meetings.

The MP or MLA cannot take interest in attending the sabha while they recommend their followers to the list of beneficiaries. In many of the study area the Grama Sabha postponed several times due to the absence of MLA. This created a negative interest among the participants to attend further.

A multi-year complex integrated system, which effectively overlooks the political, social, and economic bias only can able to make a fruitful participation,
which only can ensure stable development. This study reveal that such awareness about the plan is not yet currently established in any of the Panchayaths or Municipalities studied.

When evaluating the occupation of the beneficiaries it was observed that majority of them are agricultural labourers (57.5%) followed by unskilled workers (29.0%) and the rest being skilled working class (8.5%) (Fig.6.8). This reveals that the direct beneficiaries of the planning campaign were the economically low category people of the society.

The question regarding the measures of transparency in the selection procedures of beneficiaries received controversial answers from different groups. The panchayath officials responded that the list of beneficiaries was published in the notice board of the panchayath. The members of the local bodies are of opinion that the selection of beneficiaries are based on the instructions given by the authorities that the needy group definitely get the priority. They argue that the list of beneficiaries and their selection method are discussed many times in the Grama Sabhas and then only the final list is published. The local people are of opinion that the selection is influenced mainly by the political affiliation and recommendation of the local political leaders and form the basis of selection. This controversial opinion reveal that there exists certain malpractices regarding the selection procedure of individual beneficiaries.

The technical support for certain projects were found to be insufficient for its effective working. No effective mechanism of evaluation is there to evaluate the
Fig. 6.8. Occupation of the beneficiaries

- Skilled workers: 9%
- Unskilled workers: 31%
- Agricultural labourers: 60%

Source: Primary data
utilization of funds distributed for various construction, reconstruction works and maintenance work etc. and this leads to misuse of funds of many projects.

The recommendation of the planning board support and insists one full day long Grama Sabha. But in most cases examined it runs only for 3-3.5 hours. This limited time always affected the group discussions, which is an integral part of planning process.

CONCLUSIONS.

In the case of various panchayath and municipality studied except a few the ultimate aim of participatory democracy is not attained in planning process. The Grama Sabhas are not reflecting the status of village as well. Decentralized people's planning cannot mobilize certain group of people.

Participation of women was found to be low and can be effectively overcome by the meetings of ward level Grama Sabhas, ayalkoottam, mahila samajam etc. Conscious effort from the side of organizers are needed to make people aware of the importance of Grama Sabhas. Religious and caste level awareness is effective in inspiring women participants and there by increasing their participation.

Grama Sabhas should prove that they are institutions, which meant for empowering people. The authorities in most cases fail to achieve this goal. People are not at all aware that this is new system of governances. People's participation cooperation and understanding forms the basis of this political innovation, while in most cases studied it does not attain such vibrant level. Public support is not attained in most of the cases studied and the political interest dominates the social or
economic interest. There exists no understanding cooperation etc among people who attended the sabha. They are merely political representatives and are not found to attend the group discussion session because they thought that these are beyond their level of understanding. The much-celebrated literacy cannot found to play a role in this decentralization of power.