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**Reproduction of  
Institutions through  
People's Practices:  
Evidences from a Gram  
Panchayat in Kerala**

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# REPRODUCTION OF INSTITUTIONS THROUGH PEOPLE'S PRACTICES: EVIDENCES FROM A GRAM PANCHAYAT IN KERALA

**Rajesh K\***

## **Abstract**

*This paper analyses the dynamics of participatory institutions in Kodayathur Gram Panchayat in Kerala. It also explores how the different fields of society in panchayat internalised and reproduced these institutions through their actual practices. The study has adopted a relational methodology, linking the subjective stand point of individuals or groups, affiliated to institutions, with their objective position in the society. It has applied methods like in-depth dialogues with informants along with group discussions and document analysis. The study reached the conclusion that institutions in GP largely failed in achieving their objectives. Apathetic approach of the political parties, aversion of the middle and upper middle class groups towards public institutions, and inability of the marginalised groups in involving such institutions were the major hurdles in achieving their ideal objectives.*

## **Introduction**

Institutions provide orientation to a large number of actors. They enable the actors to coordinate their activities by means of orientation to a common sign post (Lachman1970). Institutions have a crucial role in society, which orients the actions of different set of actors towards a common goal. Institutions, introduced in Kerala as the part of decentralisation process especially through the People's Planning Campaign (PPC), had the objective of leading people towards a common goal and, overcome the development crisis of the state. The micro-level institutions established in Kerala aimed to nurture a new democratic culture in favour of participatory democracy and development (Isaac and Franke 2000). It has already been established that in real practice<sup>1</sup>, an institutional system is neither fully accepted nor accepted to a same degree by all those participating in it (Eisenstadt 1968). It is argued that the reproduction<sup>2</sup> of the social order and institutions happens through the practices of the people. The institutions, which have ideal dreams in their origin, will be reproduced through the practices of individuals and groups through their living process.

French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu has talked about the theoretical underpinnings of the practices of individual and groups. Bourdieu argues that the practices of the individuals are closely related to the habitus and field in which they represent (Bourdieu 1977, 1989). Field consists of a set of objective historical relations between positions anchored in certain forms of power or capital. Habitus is a historically constructed product deposited within the individual which defines the nature of their practices in the living world. Bourdieu identifies social structure as a combination of different fields like political field, religious field, artistic field, field of class differences and field of power, each of them having their unique logic, (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). He reiterated that every individual is closely

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related to one field which can professionally influence their habitus, and has a critical role in defining their practices. At the same time, as part of total social field, other fields also can make a minor influence upon individuals in their own ways, according to the nature and volume of capital he/she holds. Individual practices towards the institution would be prominently decided by the field and habitus he/she represents. It will lead to the reproduction of institution through the practices of the people.

People's Planning Campaign has introduced several participatory institutions to evolve a new methodology for participatory planning, and to ensure mass participation in the democratic process. It was expected that people will widely participate in the functioning of these institutions and it will subsequently lead to the strengthening of the democratic process at the grass roots. For this purpose, general Neighborhood Groups of 25 – 50 households (NHGs), Women Neighborhood Groups (NHGs), Task Force for Planning, Technical Experts Groups for plan appraisal etc, were introduced. The Constitutional entity of Gram Sabha (GS) has been innovatively redesigned (Isaac & Franke 2000). The period of PPC was 1996 -2001, which was the phase of Left Democratic Front rule in the state. PPC had some theoretical expectations while launching the campaign. It was expected that Kerala's good network of class and mass organisations and civil society organisations will participate extensively in this movement to make it a success and to overcome Kerala's development crisis (Isaac & Franke 2000). It was also expected that the deprived status of marginalised groups can be addressed by providing special emphasis to them. With this broad objective, PPC has provided special emphasis to hitherto marginalised groups like Scheduled Castes (SC) , Scheduled Tribes (ST) and women, and more attention has been given to the agrarian sector (Kerala State Planning Board 1999). Most of the intentions of the PPC were expected to attain through the better functioning of participatory institutions.

The decentralisation initiative in the state has been renamed as Kerala Development Programme (KDP) during the United Democratic Front (UDF) rule from 2001 to 2006. The campaign approach of the programme, adopted by the PPC, was replaced by the KDP and more thrust was given to bureaucratic-based institutionalisation. Notwithstanding these changes, most of the institutions and funding to the Local Self Governments have continued in KDP phase as well. With this back drop, this paper narrates the experience of Kodayathur Gram Panchayat (GP) in Idukki district of Kerala, with special focus on selected institutions during the PPC and KDP phases. It is part of a larger study focusing on three panchayats in the state. The paper attempts to address three major questions: What were the dynamics of participatory institutions in Kodayathur? Were there any differences felt in the functioning of institutions during PPC and KDP phases?, What were the influence of various fields upon the functioning of institutions, through the practices of the people affiliated to them?

## **Methodology of the study**

Pierre Bourdieu observed that in order to understand the subjectivist position of an individual or groups, we should be able to understand and connect their objectivist position in the society. He believed that every individual practices are controlled by the fields and habitus they primarily represent (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992). While adapting this concept to the Kerala situation, it is observed that Kerala is a society with a higher density of political, class and mass, civil society, religious and economic organisations (Tharamangalam 2003, Tharakan 2004). Every individual in Kerala seems to be a part of

one or more of these organisations. Thus, in order to understand an individual or a particular group's practices towards institutions, it is relevant to understand the approach of various fields towards participatory democracy and institution. This study has taken such a framework for analysis. It has collected information from various stake holders of institutions, to get the dynamics of the institutions and also collected information from the people representing various fields about their concept and approach towards participatory institutions.

This study has taken two important institutions for analysis. They are Gram Sabhas (GS) and Task Forces (TF). While collecting the information of the TF, more emphasis was given to TF for agricultural planning, women development and SC & ST development. In order to understand the influence of various fields upon institutions, the stakeholders from various fields have been interviewed. The focus was given to the political field, field of voluntary organisation and major mass organisations. To serve the purpose of the study, in-depth dialogues have been conducted using discussion points with elected representatives, Task Force members, political party leaders, mass organisation representatives and representatives of major voluntary organisations in the panchayat. The field study has been conducted during the time span of October to November, 2009. The focus of the inquiry has been limited to the time period of 1997-1998 to 2005-2006, which was the duration of the PPC and KDP.

#### List of the Key informants

Category of the informants	Number
Elected representatives	11
Task Force/ Working Group members	15
Political party leaders	12
Mass organisation representatives	10
Voluntary organisation representatives	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>55</b>
Women among total informants	11

### Back ground of the Panchayat

Kodayathur Gram Panchayat (KGP) is situated in Idukki district, administratively included in the former Travancore region of non-unified Kerala. It is a small panchayat with an area of 28.04 sq.km. It had only 8 wards during 1995-2000 and was further extended to 10 in 2000 and again expanded to 12 in 2005 panchayat election. It has a population of 11,181, which includes 1,246 (11.14%) Scheduled Tribes (ST) and 743 (6.64%) Scheduled Castes (SC) (Kodayathur GP 2009). The tribal population in Kodayathur is Malayarayas who are in a comparatively better off economic position than other tribal groups in nearby panchayats and district as a whole (Peter 2003). Most of the tribal families in Kodayathur have an average 1-3 acres of land and several households have government servants, which are not normally visible in other tribal communities in Kerala. The Christian Missionary Society (CMS) established two churches in Koovappilly and Adoormala, which are the prominent ST settlements in Kodayathur, in the later half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The documents of Kodayathur GP state that Koovappilly church was established in 1872 (KGP 1996). The church at Adoormala also celebrated 125 years of its existence last year. CMS started two schools in Adoormala and Koovappilly, at the latter half

of 19<sup>th</sup> century, which had a prominent role in educating the tribes. The economic capital formation of tribal through the ownership of land was supplemented by cultural capital formation through good access to educational opportunities. Together, these two factors provided a different type of mobility to the tribal groups in GP compared to other tribal groups. Most of the tribal families in Kodayathur GP have been converted to CMS, which later merged with the Church of South India (CSI). Though some of the Malayaraya families have not been converted to Christianity, they also reaped the benefits of educational opportunities provided in that area (KGP 1996).

There are 743 Scheduled Caste population in Kodayathur, and most of them belong to the Pulaya community. In contrast to the situation of the tribals, SC families has an average of 2 -5 cents, which is also not fertile in nature (KGP 1996). Their educational attainments are also very low compared to that of the tribal's, which might have contributed to their deprived status. The educational institutions started by CMS, both in Adoormala and Koovappilly were ST concentrated hilly areas which was very distant from SC settlements. The low access to educational institutions in their settlement areas made hurdles in their educational opportunities.

### **Functioning of Gram Sabhas**

According to the Kerala Panchayat Raj Act (KPR Act), Gram Sabha (GS) is the general assembly of all persons included in the voters list of a constituency (KPR 1994). The KPR Act declares that the GP should give due consideration to the directions of GS as the basic unit of federal democratic system and sole institution of direct democracy under the Constitution. The KPR act suggest eighteen duties of the GS that includes, giving shape to the developmental programmes that the panchayat takes up, preparing beneficiary lists, helping to implement the development programmes, auditing the accounts of GP, cooperating with Gram Panchayat in rendering voluntary services, helping public health activities etc. PPC has adopted a more innovative strategy to make GS effective. Organisational committees were formed at the ward-level and various mass information systems applied to bring people in to the Gram Sabha. It has also adopted the method of subject-wise group discussion and reporting in GS for effective democratic process (Isaac and Franke 2000).

Kodayathur has started it enthusiastically in the initial phase of PPC. A former Key Resource Person (KRP) of GP recalls: "We have formed organisational committees in every ward. Representatives of all political parties have been included in such committees. It was really like a festival. We organised processions for announcing the advent of Gram Sabhas". It is clear from the statement that GS in Kodayathur started with a lot of preparatory work and organisational activities. Most of the respondents stated that there was a collective movement in the initial stages of PPC.

It also brought out the fact that a collective effort was visible in organising the Gram Sabhas. Another voluntary activist explained the process of calling people to Gram Sabhas "We visited every household as a team for inviting people to the GS. The team included ward members and volunteers from various fields. Apart from that, we established 24 Notice Boards in the major corners of the panchayat". Most of the respondents said that direct invitation by a team in each area was the method adopted by them initially. These responses corroborate the fact that invitation process was also collective in nature. However, this picture has changed subsequently. It is explained that the group

efforts to organise GS and inviting public eventually gave way to the individualistic efforts of ward members. Inviting people became a mechanical process. Talks with a former respondent shed light into such a dimension. He continued: "Eventually, the Gram Sabha invitation became the responsibility of women neighbourhood groups (NHG), further transferred to Kudumbashree<sup>3n</sup>". There was a consensus among the respondents that eventually, the invitation process of GS has shifted to women NHG workers and ward members. This has started at the end of the PPC itself and continued during the KDP phase.

The researcher has examined the minutes of the GS during the PPC and the KDP phases. The minutes of GS and the responses of key informants provide a similar picture about the participation in the GS. It is shown that the participation in the GS at the launching phase of the PPC was around 175–225, which eventually reduced to 150-175 at the end of the PPC phase. This was further reduced to 125-150 at the initial phase of KDP and later declined to 80-100. The recent participation of GS is ranging in between 50 to 70, except in some cases. Since the average number of voters in a ward of the panchayat ranges from 1100 – 1400, at least 110-140 voters should participate to fulfill the required quorum, i.e. ten per cent of total voters. The Kerala Panchayati Raj act declares that the quorum of the GS should be at least 10% of the total voters in a ward (KPR Act, 1994). The former convener of the panchayat development committee recollects: "For first two to three years, everything went on systematically but later the scene changed. The middle class and educated people's participation in the GS reduced considerably". It is pertinent to mention that the participation of the women in GS has been comparatively high in Kodayathur from the PPC phase itself. This was because of the attempt to form women NHGs all over the panchayat, which later shifted into the banner of Kudumbasrees, the women's NHGs initiative by the state. At the end stage of KDP, the GS participation was reduced considerably. This trend has continued in the later stages too. The present participation in GS seems to be lower than the required minimum. One panchayat member commented: "Except some GS, we are not able to ensure the quorum". Most of the ward members are unable to fulfill the required quorum in their wards. One Elected member of the present GP openly commented that: "Normally, we don't close the minutes in the Gram Sabha itself. We will do it later by adding the necessary signatures for quorum and required decisions in the minutes". This comment brings out the reality that even the exhibited signatures in the minute's book may be fraud, which has been entered by the ward members themselves. It really challenges the right of a GS that the minutes should be closed in the Gram Sabha premises itself by putting the signature of the chairperson under the decisions (KPR Act, 1994). This practice also provides space to members to include their own agendas as GS decision and to supersede the real decisions of the Gram Sabhas. Except 2-3 people, out of the 55 key informants the researcher met responded that from the second stage of KDP it self, they were not able to fulfill the required quorum in majority of GS.

There are different factors that can be attributed to the declining participation in Gram Sabhas. One of the major factors, according to many, was the withdrawal of voluntary activists who were the backbone of the PPC process. One voluntary activist reflected that: "We were working as a team in the Panchayat, but after the panchayat committee changed, most of us were removed from the key posts in the task forces and the other committees. Some of us have withdrawn because of the political change that has occurred in the state. The official space of the resources person has been avoided in KDP phase, and we were confused about our own role in panchayat". A Congress leader explained the

withdrawal like this: "All the Left activists have withdrawn from the process because of political reasons. If they want to work along with us, we would have given space to them". Different versions of reality are coming out of these comments. Both the changes happened and their party-centred approach has contributed to their withdrawal.

The group discussions in Gram Sabhas in the initial period of PPC were active because educated people and middle class group were attending the meeting and were raising the common developmental issues in the GS, rather than their individual requirements. Regarding the discussions in GS, some groups whose work was directly beneficial to the people, were active from the initial phase itself. One panchayat member of the PPC phase still remembers that: "The participation in agricultural group, infrastructural group and group discussing housing issues have been high compared with the other groups such as culture and education". The evidences from GS minutes also support this observation. It is also worth mentioning that the feed back regarding the quality of discussion in Gram Sabhas were vivid in nature. Most of the respondents commented that the majority of the discussions in GS are centered on either individual benefits or related to infrastructural issues like roads and water supplies. Discussions, considering the panchayat as a development unit and raising public development issues or analysing the quality of functioning of transferred institutions, were found to be weak. From the second half of the KDP itself, the subject-wise group discussions became a formality. It is found that the number of groups has either been reduced or the group discussions have been avoided. This has seriously affected the quality of GS deliberations. Lack of participants was the major reason highlighted by most of the respondents for this default. It is also found from the GS minutes that the merging of groups, due to lack of participation, became a practice from the initial phase of the KDP itself. While answering a question about the reasons for the deterioration of the quality of GS discussions, one key activist of PPC reflected that: "In the earlier phase, all sorts of people were coming in GS and actively participating in discussions. Eventually, because of the flow of individual beneficiary schemes and also due to the populist approach of the political parties, more emphasis was given to individualistic scheme discussions. Discussions on general issues have become a mere formality. This has led to the withdrawal of persons who have been coming out of common interests rather than targeting individual benefits". The responses on quality of discussions in GS have shown that multiple factors have contributed to the deterioration of quality.

One pertinent factor the study has noted is that higher presence of women in number has not been translated to their participation in the discussions in GS. The Kudumbashree activists, who are collectively attending the GS, were not able to raise women's issues in GS or make collective deliberations on women component plans. Responding to a question regarding women's participation in the GS, a former Community Development Society<sup>4</sup> (CDS) president responded that: "Except the matter of providing revolving fund to Kudumbashree NHGs, discussions on Women Component Plan (Special plan for development of women) were rarely happening in the GS". The present GP president, who is also a woman, agreed to this.

The elite groups, who are otherwise active in caste and religious organisations, are not participating in the GS. This clearly brings out the fact that, staying away from the GS is a class strategy of elites thereby denoting it is as a forum for the poor. This strategy supplements to establish their

status as elites, who do not need charity from the government. Interviews with two major caste organisation leaders in the GP area, Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (SNDP) and Nair Service Society (NSS), corroborates this fact. They replied that middle and upper middle class groups within them have a notion that poor people are attending GS only for getting some benefits, which is not needed to them. This shows that they are not considering the attendance of GS as citizen's responsibility.

One factor that is relevant in the panchayat is the good participation of tribal's in their Oorukuttoms<sup>5</sup> and GS. One GP member commented that "participation in tribal groups and Oorukuttam was good". Another member, representing SC community, highlighted the fact that the discussions in the SC group were nominal in comparison with other groups. She pointed out that: "Our people are illiterate and less educated; they are actually ignorant about the procedures". We can summarise that though they are incapable of participating in general discussions, they fare better while requesting for their individual needs. Most of the other respondents who talked about SC participation in deliberative discussions highlighted their incapability in engaging such discussions. Deliberative discussions take place among the tribal groups, whether it is in the GS or in their own groups called 'Oorukuttoms'. The key informants whom the researcher met unanimously responded that tribals are regularly attending 'Oorukuttam' and the GS, and are participating in deliberative discussions. However, the SCs are not even aware of their own funds and their discussions are mainly focused on individual requirements. Deliberations based on right consciousness are not emerging out of the SC groups. This observation corroborates the argument of Bourdieu about the relation between the nature and volume of capital owned by individuals and groups, and their influence upon social order and institutions. Bourdieu argue that an individual or group influence upon social institution or order will be changing according to the forms and volume of capital they hold (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992). In the case of tribal's in Kodayathur, the accumulated effect of economic capital acquired through better ownership of land and cultural capital, gained through better access to education facilities in their lives, is evident, while both are lacking among Scheduled Caste groups. Here the deliberative element of democracy is working among the tribal's through their better capital accumulations, while it is lacking among the SC groups, who do not have fertile land and are not able to reap the advantages of educational opportunities. Here, we can articulate that the concept of deliberative democracy and the deliberation process required as the part of that, would be working in different groups in different ways according to the nature and the volume of power or capital they hold. The collective participation of women in the GS as passive members also corroborates the fact that PPC's dream to bring the discursive and democratic process to the grassroots-level, by providing a special emphasis to marginalised groups, faced hurdles in practice. This evidence challenges the PPC proponent's rhetoric about universal deliberative democratic process through participatory institutions. This further reiterates the fact that though equal opportunities were provided to various groups to participate in the direct democratic process, their involvement will be controlled largely by their habit us, which is also a historical construct.

## **Task forces/Working groups**

Task forces are groups required to be formed in every GP, Block Panchayat and District Panchayat to prepare the sector-wise plans in each sector, according to the budget allotment of the state government (KSPB 1999). Separate task forces were formed for different subjects by including officials, elected representatives, non-official experts and voluntary activists. Task forces were setup in areas like agricultural and allied sectors, women and child development, education and culture, health, sanitation and drinking water supply, industry and energy, co-operation and resource mobilisation, infrastructure development and housing, Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe development during the PPC period. Some changes have been made in the number of task forces in the KDP phase. Some groups have been merged together and the task for poverty alleviation and local economic development has also been added. The name of the task force was also changed to Working Groups. Number of members in the working groups have also been reduced (Government of Kerala 2002). Irrespective of these changes, the functions of the task force remained the same. It was suggested that the functions of the task forces include evaluation of the resources in each sector, preparing a plan by understanding the needs of the people, evaluating the ongoing and finished projects, preparing a long-term vision in each sectors and updating the development report periodically (KSPB 1999, KGO 2002). In order to meet these objectives, they were advised to include experts from various streams.

In the case of task forces, it was seen that initially there was collective work of volunteers and the elected representatives at the panchayat level. Volunteers were the conveners of the various task forces at the initial stage and later this role was shifted to officials from respective fields. The initial process of the PPC to collect the secondary data from offices, to conduct transit walks all over the panchayat to understand the resources, to conduct group discussions in Gram Sabhas for identifying people's needs, to prepare panchayat development report all were very new to the people, which in turn made them active. There was a collective effort in preparing projects. Participation of all party representatives was visible in the task forces, irrespective of party affiliations. The President of the GP during PPC phase recollected that: "We have been including all party representatives in committees". The training of the task force members was arranged by the panchayat itself at different phases. It is also pertinent to mention here that official training from the planning board was also frequent in the PPC phase. A former Key Resource Person (KRP) in charge of the GP recollected that: "We had been organising several camps for teaching task force members". Notwithstanding this, not much effort was taken by the panchayat to find out and include expert members in the task forces, which became a hurdle in planning innovative projects. The monitoring aspects of the project were also found to be weak. Though it was suggested to form separate monitoring committees for each sector, none of them were active. One task force convener, who is also an officer, opined that: "Committees will be formed just for namesake. It is our duty to visit field and monitor the project". She continued: "It is ironical that the same person who designed and implemented the projects would have to monitor and evaluate them and to release the money". She pointed out that there should be a separate system, apart from the implementing officer, to monitor the project. There was a consensus among majority of the respondents about the weakness of the monitoring system.

In case of the agricultural task force, it was instructed that there should be comprehensive water shed plans in the GPs to implement year-wise agricultural projects. Evidences show that this instruction has not been followed by the GP. Rubber is the major crop in Kodayathur. Apart from this, tapioca, plantain, ginger and coconut are the major agriculture products of the panchayat. Scientific projects to increase the production and productivity of the crops were not visible in panchayat agricultural plan. One agricultural task force member commented: "Subsidies for fertilisers to coconut farmers, subsidies for removing deceased coconut trees, assistance for making contour bunds were the major projects related to coconut cultivations". The plan document of GP shows that this was a major item for spending in agricultural sector (KGP, 2009). They also have provided assistance to plantain, tapioca and ginger cultivation as mixed crops. But most of them were individual-based schemes and the outputs have not been monitored. The GP also gave assistance to vegetable cultivation on individual household basis, but later evaluated it as a failed attempt. It is noteworthy that group vegetable production schemes that were implemented in the later plans have succeeded. However, though rubber is the major product in the panchayat, they could not succeed in making even a small scale industrial plan based on this resource. The lack of expertise is found as a major lacuna in this regard. The panchayat have not been able to make an integrated comprehensive agricultural plan which would have made a long term impact. Instead of that, they have been following a kind of ad hoc practice by making year- by-year plan, without any long-term vision. The panchayat committee has been focusing on populist individual projects rather than following a more scientific long-term approach. The lack of expertise may have restricted them to design more innovative alternatives in terms of sustainable development, which was visualised by the concept of PPC.

The women task force was very active in the panchayat in earlier stages. The panchayat had organised a women's development committee for coordinating women's development activities. The secretary of the committee has become the president of GP following the 2005 election. They had initiated some employment units, but none of them have been sustained. The former president of the panchayat reflected that: "We have done a lot of experiments, but the enterprises which actually needed technical support did not succeed". It is remarkable that Kodayathur Development Society (KDS), a voluntary organisation (VO) in the Panchayat, has given technical support to a vermy compost project, which was a success, and was then expanded to a number of units. It reveals a fact that technical support is an important factor in running units, which is lacking in the women enterprises in the GP. In the initial stage, the Women Development Committee (WDC) organised a lot of training programmes but the trainees who attended the programmes did not choose to use them. Though the GP conducted several training programmes using women component plan throughout the period of PPC and KDP, they were not reflected in the number of self employment units. One resource person of the KDP phase mention that: "We have done a lot of training including bamboo basket making, mat weaving, soap making etc... But none of them has selected it as a self employment programme". The effect of the training programmes has never been evaluated by women task force. Most of the women task forces members have supported this observation. Though in the initial stages, the WDC had organised some gender empowerment trainings, they largely failed to make plans to address the strategic gender needs of the women. Except auto driving training, most of the projects were focusing

on practical gender needs of women which are also not systematically planned. This fact corroborates the observation that the plans coming out of PPC were directly or indirectly contributing to sustain and strengthen the male hierarchy that has sustained in Kerala society (Devika, 2005). There was no serious attempt on the part of the panchayat to conduct women status study which was suggested at the PPC phase. They did not attempt to organise 'Jagratha Samithis', which was expected to deal with cases related to atrocities against women during the KDP phase. Even in women development forums, the decisions were largely coming from the male members, representing the panchayat, or indirectly from the controlling forces like political parties, and they were compelled to go ahead with those decisions. This indicates that though there are several women's forums, they have not been able to make rights-based deliberations in the forums by breaking the male hierarchy and the decisions imposed by such system.

In the case of the SC/ST task force, it was observed that ST representatives were actively attending task force meetings, while their SC counter parts were not able to engage actively in such a process. They were not able to include experts from various walks in their task forces. Most of the tribal sub-plan centered on the projects related to housing, latrine, water supply and road constructions. Some employment generation efforts for the STs were made by the panchayats such as group-based tailoring units, which did not continue for more than two years. The projects to provide more educational and health support have not been visible in Panchayat programmes (KGP 2009).

Regarding SCs, projects for providing houses, latrines, drinking water facilities and roads have been implemented by the local body. One Panchayat member representing SC community reiterated the fact that "almost all SCs who have proper documents of their lands have been given assistance for housing. The roads leading to the SC colonies were also renovated by using SC fund". The panchayat has also given assistance to landless SC families for purchasing house plots (KGP, 2009). Decentralisation has made tremendous changes in the infrastructure facilities of SC concentrated areas. Guidelines issued by the government to prepare SC projects also suggested that the panchayat has to undertake projects to address the educational and health issues of SC communities (GOK, 2002). Meanwhile, such efforts have not been undertaken by the GP. The project to provide special coaching to SC students in schools has been initiated by the GP only in the recent past. Though SC members are participating in Task forces, they themselves admit that they have not been able to make much impact through deliberations in SC Task force groups and in the GS.

While evaluating the changes in the task force functioning during the KDP phase, it could be noted that most of the volunteers who are also the supporters of LDF have withdrawn themselves or avoided from the key positions after the PPC. UDF was not able to mobilise enough volunteers to go ahead with the activities. One key activist of the UDF who is also a member of GP admits that: "Since we are not a cadre-based party, we would not be able to mobilise that many volunteers as the LDF can". The other UDF leaders also agreed to the fact that they were not able to mobilise enough volunteers to the process. The activity of task forces, which has been turned into working groups during KDP phase, has become centered on a few activists and officials. One member of the agricultural task force reflected that: "During the second phase, most of the projects have been written by the officials who have been the conveners of working groups. We are involved in discussing ideas as members of

the group and they were writing the projects". This tendency has led to the routinisation of the process rather than becoming a creative effort. Most of the responses corroborated the fact that group efforts declined significantly during the KDP phase.

The withdrawal and apathetic approach of the LDF activists, who had previous work experience, also affected the process adversely. The number of training focused on task force members reduced considerably during the KDP phase. While the general trainings have been continued, the subject and sector-wise training were not enough according to the needs. This situation has created a lethargy in the task force functioning. The evidence show that the people's attendances in first task force meeting during KDP phase was more than 60 per cent. This may be because of the combination of group members who belonged to political parties. Notwithstanding this, contribution of the Working Group members were not fruitful as it was in earlier stages. The concept of planning board to make panchayat -level task force as an informal planning board at the local-level (Isaac and Franke, 2000) was not realised in the expected sense with the experience of Kodayathur.

### **Influence of various fields upon institutions**

Pierre Bourdieu observes that the institutional dynamics will depend upon the practice of people and in turn depends upon the field and habitus of the individual and groups affiliated with them. In the initial phase of PPC, there was an argument from the proponents of the campaign, especially from famous Marxist ideologue E.M.S. Namboodiripad that: "It will be an attempt for Kerala's development by overcoming the political differences" (E.M.S. in Isaac & Sreedharan 2001). He pointed out that *ruling parties and Opposition shall co operate in making the development plan of a panchayat/municipal jurisdiction. It will help to form a new development culture, were the losers of election shall co-operate with winners and vice versa.* Though E.M.S. had a broad vision while supporting the concept of PPC, Kerala's political sphere was not equipped to adopt that ideology in practice.

The experience of GP reveals that apart from the initial cooperation, a long lasting consistent effort was not found in the political field on a common agenda of development of the panchayat. In order to introduce a new development culture, political parties have to under go an enabling process in favor of grassroots democracy. The prominent parties in Kodayathur including CPI (M) and Congress were not consistently allotting time in their committees for discussing the panchayat development plan and panchayat administrative processes. A key activist of Congress responded that: "We discuss such matters in our committees if something abnormal happens". The other three Congress leaders, the researcher met, agreed with this statement. It shows that discussions about panchayats did not figure in their routine agenda. It was said that the parliamentary party<sup>6</sup> committee of the Congress met very rarely, whether they were in power or in the opposition.

In the case of CPI (M), this committee was functioning whether they were in power or in opposition. They were calling it as sub-committees. One prominent leader reflected that: "Such discussions will happen only in our sub-committee. We were not able to discuss the issues in detail in our local committee". While responding to a question about the time allotted to the discussions related to GP administration and development programmes at the party's regional committee (Local committee) meeting, he said that: "Our primary concern in the committee will be the reporting of the higher

committee's decisions and programme planning for implementing it. We report on the parliamentary party's discussion at the local committee but deep discussions are not possible there". Here, it is evident that a party like CPI (M) which initiated the PPC in Kerala is not able to give enough concern to the agenda of decentralisation in their decision-making bodies. Evidently, political parties discuss panchayat programmes in their committees only in rare occasions. The long-term development of the panchayat has not become the agenda of the political parties.

In the initial stages of the PPC, it was suggested that there should be a long-term five-year-plan in every panchayat, and year-wise programmes have to be generated out of this long-term plan (KSPB1999). Such an instruction has not been followed by the Kodayathur GP, and the political leadership which ruled the panchayat in the two phases. It can be observed that long-term planning has been replaced by a populist-based adhocism in the GP. It is also relevant that none of the organisations in the GP area conducted any programme for educating their allies about the philosophy of democratic decentralisation and participatory institutions. Congress and CPI(M) have taken limited initiatives, which were confined to leaders and not reached to grass roots-level, which also lacked continuity.

In the initial stage of PPC, there were several ideal dreams in its formulator's vision. Famous Marxist ideologue E.M.S. Namboodiripad, who took a prominent role in framing the idea of PPC once explained: *"It as an opportunity to use organised network of agrarian, labour and mass movements as a social force for grassroots planning and development"*. (E.M.S. in Isaac & Sreedharan 2002, p 41.). He also found it as an opportunity to make the bourgeois capitalist state more friendly to the proletariat classes. Once he explained: *"I have the confidence in democratic decentralisation because of the reason that it will help the working class people in their fight against oppressions and exploitations they suffer in their day- to-day life"* (E.M.S. in Isaac & Sreedharan 2002, p21.). In order to achieve such a vision, increased involvement of Kerala's class and mass organisations were expected. The evidences show that such phenomena did not occur in Kodayathur. Most of the class and mass organisation representative in the panchayat replied that they were not considering panchayat development programmes and administration as their agenda. One Left youth organisation leader responded that: *"We have been discussing it, if some special situation emerges. Otherwise it was not there in our routine agenda"*. The Congress leaders themselves admitted that their own mass organisations were inactive during the period of enquiry because of factionist tendencies within the party. Women's development plan was not a major concern in the meetings of either Mahila Congress (Women's organization of Congress) or within All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA) (Women's organization of CPI (M)). It is also noted that very few voluntary efforts have been undertaken by mass organizations within the period of enquiry.

In the voluntary organisation field, panchayat has a good relation with arts and sports clubs in organising cultural and sports event called 'Keralotsavam'. Some clubs have, through their own efforts, organised medical camps, some times associating with the panchayat and some times independently. The volunteer efforts, except some help to beneficiary committees in the PPC phase, is lacking from VOs. The political decision during the KDP phase to withdraw beneficiary committees from the project implementation has also affected the possibilities for voluntary action. In the initial phase, a few Kerala

Sasthra Sahithya Parishad (KSSP) (a renowned People's Science Movement in Kerala), activists gave some voluntary initiation to the PPC, but their organisational capacity in the panchayat was very weak. They have provided support to form women SHGs and women development committees. Another group that could have contributed expert voluntary support was Kerala State Service Pensioners Union (KSSPU). Their office bearers responded that : "Though some of our members are involved in panchayat activities, we have not taken an official decision to support the panchayat in plan formulation". Their participation in GP activities was nominal in nature.

During the PPC and the KDP phases the panchayat committee, whether led by LDF or UDF, have not been able to conduct open discussions with political parties, mass organisations or voluntary organisations who represent their respective fields. Rigid political approach of the ruling parties and the lacunae happened in comprehending the idea of cooperation proposed by the PPC and democratic decentralisation might have restricted them in leading such an initiative.

### **Concluding observations**

The experiences of Kodayathur have revealed a broader reality that whatever may be the intentions behind the origin of institutions, it will be reproduced in a manner through the actual practices of the people. This reproduction happens in different ways according to the political and social environment of the societies in which institutions function. This reproduction occurs prominently in two ways. Sometimes the society will adapt the given ideas and multiply its possibilities through their own creative efforts. The initial attempts in Kodayathur to form women development committees and SHGs all over the panchayat were such a creative attempt. This has happened in Kodayathur without official instruction and was generated out of creative thinking or the adoption of some innovative methods from other panchayats. Collective action, which was visible in the panchayat in the initial stages, helped them to reproduce the concept of women NHGs within their GP area in a different mode. The result of this innovative attempt can be found in the higher participation of women in the GS and other forums till recently. Another way of reproducing institutions is accepting them as formal systems without creative adaptations and follow it mechanically. Here they will simply follow the instructions from above rather than conceptualising and adapting it in their own ways. Eventually, the practices will give way to their convenient rituals, rather than practices following ideal instructions. This kind of reproduction was visible in most of the institutions in the Kodayathur GP.

We have analysed the reasons for such a sea change between idea and practice. The political change occurred in the panchayat and the state after the PPC was prominent among them. The changes happened in the campaign mode after the PPC and the reduced emphasis given to voluntary workers during the KDP phase is relevant in this context. Along with this, the party-centered attitude of Left, which forced them to withdraw from the process in the second phase, and the Congress approach to avoid Leftist people from key positions are also the contributing factors to such a transition. It is pertinent to observe here that the panchayat or local politics in Kerala mirrors the antagonistic political culture that exists in the state, irrespective of the PPC proponents' call for mutual cooperation based on local development.

Regarding the functioning of institutions in the PPC and the KDP phases, changes are visible. The ideas about the institutions provided by the PPC were new to the stake holders who were practicing it. In its initial stage, there was a collective effort in the panchayat to follow innovative ideas and to adopt them in their own ways. One prominent factor in this context will be the interim and continuous evaluation and interventions of Kerala State Planning Board (KSPB), which was directly leading the campaign. KSPB's frequent instructions helped the GPs to follow a guided path, which made their efforts less hard, though it was mechanical in nature. This kind of intervention from above was lacking during KDP phase.

The planned intervention from above may be required up to a level where the panchayats are equipped to follow practices in a planned order. In this respect, the changes during KDP may have affected their actual practices. Notwithstanding this, one lacuna has been found from the PPC phase itself. In order to disseminate the value of new institutions in society, various mass education efforts were needed. This was needed officially from the panchayat to educate various stake holders, and also required from the side of political, class and mass and voluntary organisations as representatives of respective fields. The evidence show that such an effort was lacking either from the panchayat or from the organisations. The attempts by such organisations to equip their allies towards democratic decentralisation and participatory institutions seem to have lacked. Volunteers during the PPC phase were the remaining possibility for public education. Their withdrawal also made unfavorable impact upon the public education process, which may have made things more mechanical in nature.

The experience of Kodayathur raises the lacunae in the PPCs conception about universalisation of deliberative democratic process through participatory institutions. It was argued that in the PPC, special emphasis was given to hitherto marginalised groups to increase their democratic participation and development, equal to mainstream groups. Notwithstanding their number-wise participation in democratic forums like GS and TFs, it is found that their deliberations were very poor even after one decade of experience. Though these kinds of opportunities were given to those groups, their habitus, which is a historical construct, might have restricted them from exploring such possibilities. It is relevant here that in order to overcome such a historical marginality, concerted efforts were needed to educate and equip them to explore the fruits of statutory assistance such as reservations and special component plans. The efforts in such direction were missing throughout the PPC and the KDP phase in Kodayathur.

One of the major assumptions of the PPC was the cooperation between political parties, and organisations over the common agenda of regional development. It is legible from the study that such a phenomena has not happened in the GP. Though there was a formal cooperation between political parties at the initial stage of the PPC, it later became a mutual blame game between them. It is also pertinent here that a strong movement from the VOs was not visible in the GP for the period of enquiry. This could be connected to the lack of internal processes within political parties and organisations to internalise the philosophy of democratic decentralisation and participatory democracy. Evidence shows that peripheral cooperation of groups without such an in-depth internalisation would not be long lasting. The experience of kodayathur reiterates the fact that, until and unless the mental schemata and the processes of various fields are conducive to participatory democracy, its ideal practice in a society would continued to be a distant dream.

## End notes

- <sup>1</sup> Practices are the different patterns and approaches people follow in their day to day life ( see Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992)
- <sup>2</sup> Reproduction here means the alterations and modifications that happen to the institutions through the practices of the people in their day to day life. Modern sociologist Anthony Giddens explained that the day-to-day activity (practices) of social actors draws upon and reproduce structural features (rules/institutions) of wider social system. (see Giddens, Anthony(1984): *The Constitution Of Society: Outline Of Theory Of Structuration*, Polity press, Cambridge, USA).
- <sup>3</sup> KUDUMBASHREE is a poverty eradication mission launched by the Government of Kerala in 1998. It is intended to address the issue of poverty through the functioning of women Neighbourhood Group
- <sup>4</sup> Community Development society (CDS) is a panchayat-level apex body of women NHG's elected through a democratic process.
- <sup>5</sup> OOrukootoms are the general body of the tribal's based on their Hamlets
- <sup>6</sup> Parliamentary party committees are the forums formed by the political parties by including their elected panchayat members and party leaders. This will act as a link between the party and elected panchayat members representing the concerned parties.

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