

OORUKOOTTAM AS A DECENTRALISED AND PARTICIPATORY MODEL OF GOVERNANCE AT TRIBAL HAMLETS IN WAYANAD DISTRICT

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Abstract: Tribal community in India is considered as the most vulnerable community facing isolation and social discrimination from the mainstream society. The Panchayats Extension to the Scheduled Areas Act in 1996 and the role of PESA act has the provisions to strengthen and promote the social development in these areas of tribal habitats. The institution of local self government has initiated a process of democratic decentralization in India and Indian democratic government with its constitutional provisions has provided many privileges to this particular disadvantaged group. Even if all these positive back up are there for the tribes, they could not seize this opportunities due to lack of awareness about the human rights and because of the ineffective implementation of the schemes and projects for the tribal empowerment. The concern of the study is to recognise the importance of the Oorukoottam, the part of local self government insituation at the tribal hamlets and to reaffirms the decentralized system of governance and participatory involvement of the tribal beneficiaries in the policy making and in the implementation process of tribal empowerment in Wayanad.

Keywords: Oorukoottam-tribal beneficiary group, Decentralisation. Participatory approach.

1. INTRODUCTION

India is rich with its diversity in religion, culture, castes, believes and different communities with various social - economical standards. In this situational complexities, it is found very difficult to formulate uniform policies to provide social justice to all. For which many provisions for all the sections of the people in the state particularly for the scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the constitution of India has incorporated, in terms of special representation and reservation in local governance, public services and in other opportunities. The founding father of our constitution has provided specific safeguards in the constitution for the scheduled castes and Scheduled Tribes who were the most weaker and vulnerable sections of society. All these protective measures and safeguards are meant for the all round development of these deprived ones in order to bring them to the mainstream society. (III Report of the National commission for SC/ST 1994-1996) But unfortunately 50 % of these special sections are unaware of their rights and privileges and many are ignorant to obtain the benefits provided to them. (Guruswamy S., 2009) Even though these constitutional benefits have been provided to the most deprived sections of the population, the socio-economic conditions of these sections remains poor. The study would highlight the importance of *Oorukoottam* in the tribal scenario as a platform for tribal empowerment by realizing the fruits of decentralization and of participatory approach in local self government in Wayanad district of Kerala, where the tribal population is in a large scale found socially deprived. An evaluation of the levels of socio economic development achieved by the scheduled tribes of India found that there has been not much improvements in the living conditions of these tribes. (Joy George, 2017)

2. OORUKOOTTAM AND ITS FORMULATION FOR THE TRIBAL EMPOWERMENT

'*Oorukoottam*' is a neighborhood beneficiary group in the local self government's decetralised planning system in India. It is a colloquial term used among the tribal groups. "*Ooru*" in their slang means habitat. (Baiju, K. C., 2011). The specific objectives for the formulation of *Oorukoottam* is to identify the beneficiaries from the scheduled tribes and to design the

developmental projects and policies for the tribal hamlets. *Oorukoottam* have to be established in all the panchayat municipal wards of the tribal areas and the presence of all scheduled tribes in the meeting have to be confirmed. The tribal extension officer has to convene the *Oorukoottam* meeting at least once in 3 months and it is the responsibility's of the tribal promoters from the government to control the *Oorukoottam*, to lead the discussions and to keep a record of the proceedings. An agenda should be prepared with the specific objectives of the meeting and its developmental needs are to be submitted in the plenary sessions. All the tribal developmental projects in the tribal areas have to be undergone social audit by the members of the *Oorukoottam* and the community based monitoring is essential for all the individual beneficiary programs. The selected members of the *Oorukoottam* are given special training to equip them with other knowledge about their rights, ways of its executions for their integral development, how to implement the tribal sub plan and projects in the tribal hamlets in all the *Oorukoottam* meetings. The contemporary challenges faced by the tribes and its solutions are to be the major points to the discussions scheduled in the group discussions which is facilitated by the tribal promoters. These discussion points are preferentially codified for action in priority and the representatives from each *Oorukoottam* with the officials, prepare the tribal sub plans of the local self government institutions (Kaippusthakam 2017-18, 2017).

3. DECENTRALIZED GOVERNANCE AND TRIBES

The decentralization in governance in India is an instrument of tragic transition for the socio-economic development in the rural village of the country; especially it promoted development in the tribal habitats. The enactment of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act in 1996 and the role of PESA act has strengthened and promoted the social development in these areas of tribal habitats.

Actually the process of decentralization in the local level influenced the development of the tribal population in Kerala. It is strongly affirmed that in this modern period of development, the local self government of decentralization have been playing a vital role towards the socio-economic empowerment of the downtrodden sections of the society (Mohapatra B.P.). It is explicitly given that the need and importance of decentralized self government is an essential tool for the promotion of local level institution for the integral development of the most disadvantageous sections of the society. The system of decentralisation is a prominent approach in all over the world and has made a social change in the transfer of planning, decision making or governing power from the central government to the local institution. The proponents of the decentralization state that it is the way to bring government near to the ordinary people to formulate policies and planning and also give its outputs to the poor people (Crook and Sverrisson, 2001). The decentralized system thus promoted the participatory approach of political movement and which is more beneficial to the weaker sections, particularly to the scheduled castes and Scheduled Tribes. It brings division of power in society and representation to the disadvantageous section with the power sharing among the three tiers of the local self governing institution (Hadenius A., 2003). The democratic decentralized institution enhances the active participation in all the realms of human development by its beneficiaries. Decentralization is considered as that way of reducing the role of the state in general by fragmenting central power and initiates more intergovernmental competitions followed by the checks and balances. And it makes these governments more responsive and efficient (Bardhan P. 2002). Thus the decentralized self governing Institutions on tribal development have received a supreme importance in the evolution of the local self government.

4. TRIBAL RIGHTS TO THE TRIBAL PARTICIPATION

The Panchayat Raj Act clearly affirms the need of inclusion through the provision of Scheduled Tribes and other vulnerable groups. It ensures the reservation with proportional representation in all levels of panchayati Raj system, particularly in the three tier local government. The Forest Right Act of 2006 has given particular provisions for the particular vulnerable tribal groups in the section (PVTGs). The section 2(h) of the forest rights act recognizes the habitat rights of the scheduled tribes. The Forest Rights Act (rules 5(c) and 7 (c) defines the representation of PVTGS in the sub divisional or district level committees and in rule 7 (c), it is said that in the district level committee and the district Panchayat together can nominate three members to district Panchayat of whom two shall be from Scheduled Tribes or from the primitive tribal groups (SCSTRTI, 2015). The FRA also provides legal provisions to the woman to ensure women participation and the representation in the decision making process. Section 3 of FRA ensures the women's active participation in the process of determination of forest rights, which includes claim making and verification, governance, management and convergent. It is practiced in Odisha where the women sit together in the meeting and finalize beneficiaries and their claims (SCSTRTI, 2015).

The tribes of India invariably struggle for safeguarding their rights, not only against non-tribes but also against the governments (Nazeer Z. &Chimurkar R., 2016).After independence, there are attempts of legislations in order to empower the tribes such as Forest Rights Act,2006,Panchayats(Extension to Scheduled Areas)Act 1996 etc..However, these rights are misused inappropriately by various governments neglecting the tribal rights (Nazeer Z. &Chimurkar R., 2016).PESAAct is an important legislation for tribal empowerment by which it is mandatory to get consent from Gramasabha, if there is any developmental activities at tribal hamlets, because Gramasabha is the most important representative Institution of any tribal village and it is the responsibility of Gramasabha to adopt all safety measures against the alienation of the tribal land (section 2(c))(PESA,1996).

5. TRIBAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

The concept 'people' participation' is formulated in the year 1970 in response to various approaches for rural development. The World Conference on Agrarian Returns Under Rural Development (WCARRD) held at Rome in 1979 was the milestone in people's participation in rural development, where it asserts that if the rural development was to realize its potential, disadvantaged rural people had to be well organized and actively involved in the policy making and in controls of social and economic institutions. Participatory local planning has got a central importance in the present developmental scenario. It is assured that the decentralized and participatory government is an essential structure for the sustainable rural development. The participatory local planning is an important precondition for successful execution of plans and developmental model for tribal development(Chinsinga, B., 2003). The African charter in 1990 realized that a nation cannot be built without the full support and participation of the local people(Wunsch, j. &Olowu, D. 2000) It concludes that no development program however can succeed unless the local people are willing to accept it and make an effort to participate(Makumbe, 1996).The tribal empowerment and their promotion strengthens only when the participation of the beneficiaries' intervention is in the proposed development.

The word 'participation' has got a great scope in the various discussions about the human development and the need of human input in the developmental process (Richardson 1983).In the opinion of Bastian & Bastian(1997), participation creates a sense of belongingness among the local people and promotes self-reliance.The participatory approach has made a result in the past i.e., an ideal harmonious village where everybody lived together and solved problems peacefully.A readymade developmental strategies brought from outside to the tribal hamlets partially neglects tribal initiative in their development.And unless when the tribes realize their need of development, itwon't transform their life.A sense of belongingness develops only through the total involvement in the planning strategy and that would change the life of the tribes.It results a self-reliance growth among them.With regards to the tribal development the participation includes their involvement in the planning session process, implementing those projects and their sharing in the benefits from development.Participation is an active process by which the beneficiaries influence the decision making and implementing the developmental projects with a view to enhance their better life in terms of income, personal enrichments, self reliance and other cultural transformation (Paul, 1993)

6. NEED AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

In order to cater many complex problems of the scheduled tribes and against their developments, the constitution of India has provided many privileges.The central and state governments have been formulated and introduced various developmental programmes through Scheduled Tribes Development Department, Local Self Government Institutions, *Oorukoottam* sub plans and the enactment of Panchayats Extension Scheduled Areas (PESA) Act. But in spite of all these welfare programs and constitutional protection for the scheduled tribes, still they are remain to be the weaker sections of the society. The present study is an attempt to identify the drawbacks of *Oorukoottam* and to indicate some significant proposals for the future developments.

7. OBJECTIVES

- To study the effectiveness of *Oorukoottam* in wayanaddistrict
- To identify the participatory role of *Oorukoottam* in Wayanad District.
- To study the effects of decentralized governance among Scheduled tribes.
- To study the tribal rights in terms of participation at local self governance.

Methodology in brief

- Secondary sources
- Discussion and conversations are conducted with subject experts.

8. OORUKOOTTAM IS A MODIFIED ALTERNATIVE FOR TRIBAL GRAMASABHA

The post independent India molded and began five year plans for integral development. Till fourth five year plan the tribal development plans were not considered in the priority list of the action plan. It was thought that as a result of the five year plans, there would be a simultaneous growth of scheduled tribes along with the general growth of the country. It is the reason that since fifth five year plan onwards a Special Component Plan and Tribal Sub Plans are included for the total empowerment of the tribal community and to bring them to the mainstream of the society. Since sixth five year plan, the sub plans are decentralized to district level and as a result, the planning and implementation power has completely given to governing board of the district.

In Kerala the decentralized planning was launched primarily for the tribal development but it was in the ninth five year plan the decentralized governance realised its power to the three tier local self government with regards to the 73rd and 74th amendment of the Indian Constitution. As a result all the government institutions and officials are brought under local self governance in the districts. The governing system of decentralization and people's participation could make tremendous changes in Kerala, as a remarkable movement. In the beginning the financial projects from the government was given to local government institutions with the policies and guidelines for the mode of utilization of funds for the tribal development. The beneficiaries are recognised and action plans are taken in the special Gramasabha and the implementations are in accordance with the decision of the Gramasabha. But they did not have a proper awareness about the tribal sub plans and the way of its implementation. They became passive viewers in the Gramasabha without any initiation. In order to get an ultimate solution for the passive involvement of the tribal people the government developed and introduced a new paradigm as a democratic and participatory model of governance at the tribal hamlets, i.e., the new alternative for tribal Gramasabha named *Oorukoottam*. (Joseph, E. G.)

Oorukoottam provides an open forum to the tribal people to discuss their actual situation and draw an effective solution for the problems. It would expediate the productive mobilisation of local resources needed for tribal development programmes. Tribal participation initiates faster action. People involvement in planning for rural development helps to raise the levels of the conscience towards their rights and responsibilities which lead to social change (Prasad, 1990). *Oorukoottam* in a participatory level creates consciousness of their rights and their achievement level. In the democratic state, the participatory role of people is highlighted and it influenced the formulation of *Oorukoottam*. There are three major objectives for the people's participation as stated by the Dhillon; (i) Promote better planning and execution of rural developmental programmes (ii) it can mobilize the local resources required for rural development programmes (iii) empowering the poor people to play an effective role in the rural development through the decentralized governance in the *Oorukoottam* (Dhillon and Hansara, 1995). But the study reflects that it is failed to realize its goal. The state had a well expectations over the decentralized form of tribal Gramasabha and its modified alternative e.i., *Oorukoottam* at tribal habitats. But still they continue to be passive viewers in the *Oorukoottam* meetings because of the lack of motivation and conscientisation. Unless and until, one identifies the reason behind their passivity and deprivation, no further development strategy can transform their life. So it is an urgent need to reach out a positive conclusion to ensure the effectiveness of *Oorukoottam*. The tribal society can be empowered within short period, if they fully enjoy the benefits of the democratic participatory approach. The study concludes with future proposals that can be a supportive for the tribal empowerment at the tribal villages.

9. PROPOSALS

- The tribal sub plans should be prepared with more innovative projects for the total upliftment of the scheduled tribes and ensure tribal participation in all the phases of the projects, e.i., planning to implementation.
- Redefine and redesign *Oorukoottam* and incorporate it in the constitution of India as a full fledged decentralised form of governance at the tribal hamlets with a provision of specified rights and powers.
- Government should monitor periodically whether the objectives of development strategies are in the right path to realise its final goal.

- Ensure an adequate number of tribal participation in the Apex body of the tribal development department for the reliable future planning.
- Members of the target group of Oorukoottam should be equipped with an ample training for an efficient leadership for the tribal community.
- Oorumooppen, the chief of the tribal village can be properly oriented and provide him an accessibility to utilise the power vested on him.
- The list of the beneficiaries in the *Oorukoottam* can be selected on the basis data, show all the details including the socio economic status of the person, applied for the claim.
- Recruit Committed Social Workers as the caretakers of the tribes in order to find out the reason behind their perpetual backwardness and its ultimate solution.
- The *Oorukoottam* decisions and resolutions must be democratic in accordance with the bylaw and minutes of the *Oorukoottam* with due representation of its members.
- Conscientise the members of the *Oorukoottam* with motivation and education in order to enhance the effective participation of the tribes.

10. CONCLUSION

There is a considerable scope for the active involvement and participation of the tribals in the *Oorukoottam*. The beneficiary's involvement at the district and local levels particularly in the *Oorukoottam*, results a tremendous improvement in the implementation of developmental plans. *Oorukoottam* is a tribal governing body that provides direct and free participation of tribal people in the formulation and implementation of tribal sub plans in accordance with the needs and necessities of the tribal people. As it is said, the success of any developmental programmes is depended on active participation of the people (Bava, 1997), tribal participation in policy evaluation, decision making and its implementations process through *Oorukoottam*. And the local self government institution is very essential for the overall and sustainable development. An effective participation implies equalization of opportunities and equitable distribution of resources. The beneficiaries of tribal sub plan should not be mere receivers but should actively associate themselves in all developmental activities. Actually the passivity from the part of tribal beneficiaries is a barrier even if implemented many developmental projects for their empowerment. It is sometimes found that the developmental interventions initiated by the government without ample thoughtfulness results negative effects in the tribal development. So the government authorities should have an eagle eye towards all developmental schemes and projects to tackle the present issues and challenges against the tribal development.

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