

An Analysis Of The Participation Of Tribes In The Oorukoottam: A Study In The Kuttampuzha Grama Panchayat Of Ernakulam District

Shaimon Joseph^{1*}, Prof. Dr. Laisa Thomas², Dr. Meera R³

¹Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of Economics, Sree Sankara College, Kalady & Assistant Professor, Nirmala College, Muvattupuzha, Kerala, India. Email: shaimonjoseph@gmail.com

²Morningstar Home Science College, Angamaly, Ernakulam, Kerala, India, Email: laisathomasn@gmail.com

³Assistant Professor, Department of Economics, Nirmala College, Muvattupuzha, Kerala, India. Email: drmeerasreeraj@gmail.com

Citation: Shaimon Joseph, et.al (2024) An Analysis Of The Participation Of Tribes In The Oorukoottam: A Study In The Kuttampuzha Grama Panchayat Of Ernakulam District, *Educational Administration: Theory And Practice*, 30(1), 854-858

Doi: 10.53555/kuey.v30i1.5695

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Received: 03-05- 2024

Accepted: 05-06- 2024

With the 73rd Amendment to the Indian Constitution, the Panchayati Raj Institutions got autonomy in decision making in the areas of revenue mobilisation, plan formulation and its execution. Grama Sabha has become an institution of local democracy in which people can raise their concerns, lead discussions and finalise projects etc. Along with the general population, tribes in the country have a say in decision-making at the panchayat level. Kerala, the state which got international acclaim in its move towards decentralised decision making, offered the tribes a platform to participate in policy making spaces through Grama Sabha and *Oorukoottams*. However, it is doubtful whether tribes in the state are well aware of the process involved in decision making and whether they sincerely engage in the process of their own development. It is in this context that the present study takes into account the current status of tribal participation in these institutions and to what extent tribes could make a difference in preparing local development projects in the study area. The study is conducted at Kuttampuzha Grama Panchayat in the Ernakulam District of Kerala.

Keywords: Grama Sabha, Oorukoottam, Panchayati Raj Institutions, Malayaraya

1. Introduction

Tribes are indigenous people who live in deep forests, isolated from the rest of the population, and engage in agriculture, hunting, and foraging for forest resources. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, a tribe is "a collection of people, frequently related families, who live together and share a common language, culture, and history, particularly those who reside outside towns and cities." A tribe is a type of socio-political organisation comprised of a number of families, clans, or other groupings that share a common ancestry and culture but frequently lack formal or permanent leadership. In the Indian context, Majumdar's (1950) definition of "tribe" is the most acceptable, as he defines it as "a group of families or groups of families united by a common name, occupying the same territory, speaking the same language, adhering to certain taboos regarding marriage, profession, or occupation, and having developed a well-developed system of reciprocity and mutual obligations."

The country's tribes are marginalised and constitute one of the most vulnerable parts of Indian society. Special provisions in the Indian Constitution have been provided to address their welfare and development. Since independence, both the union and state governments have taken several policy steps to promote the growth of tribes throughout the country. The most notable was the establishment of the Tribal Sub Plan (TSP) during the Fifth Five-Year Plan. This represents a turning point in the development of a special tribal plan allocating funding exclusively for tribal development. The TSP was used to distribute benefits from the union government to tribal populations in the state, with the goal of closing the divide between tribal and non-tribal populations through increased access to education and health services, housing, income-generating opportunities, and protection from exploitation and oppression. Later, as a result of the 73rd

Amendment to the Indian Constitution, Panchayati Raj Institutions gained decision-making authority in the areas of revenue collection, plan creation, and execution. Grama Sabha has developed into a centre of local democracy, where citizens may voice their concerns, conduct discussions, and finalise initiatives. Like Grama Sabha, tribes in the Kerala state got a say in decision-making process through Oorukoottam. Oorukoottam provides a forum and crucial organisation for scheduled tribes to participate in local democracy. Oorukoottam is a development organisation that educates indigenous households about their own rights, privileges, and available government assistance. "The Oorukoottams were recognised as a democratic arena for tribal groupings under the local government system" (Baiju K.C., 2011). It is the primary organisation in charge of developing and implementing all tribal programmes, including not only TSP programmes, but also state, federal, and international government projects. Thus, Oorukoottams served as a focal point for the successful integration of programmes from numerous agencies. However, it is unclear that tribes in the state are fully aware of the decision-making process and are actively engaged in this process for their own development. In this context, it is relevant to examine the level of participation of tribes in Oorukoottam, which is considered as the decision making unit at the local level. Moreover, the study attempts to identify the problems and challenges in the conduct of Oorukoottam in the tribal hamlets.

2. The Significance of the Study

While Kerala's democratic decision-making process is well-managed, and the state has gained international recognition for its rural democracy work, some studies indicate that decision-making at the local level can fail in some circumstances, particularly in regions with an aboriginal population or adivasis. Adivasis, or tribes, in the state of Kerala are trailing behind in terms of quality of life compared to the general population. They are denied of essential services like healthy food, safe drinking water, housing, toilets, clothes, transit systems etc. Even while the government and its agencies have been creating community-specific projects for their upliftment, the benefits of those activities are not trickling down to the grass roots. The key difficulty found in this context is that the tribes don't have appropriate understanding about the numerous plans that are developed for them. They are fully or partially clueless about the local level decision-making process, which is being carried out through Oorukoottam. They are uninformed of the structure, purpose, and procedure involved in Oorukoottam for planning individual and local development programmes. Authorities may mislead people in some situations into channelling monies to defend their self-interest. Tribes who engage in Oorukoottam meetings are merely listeners and do not propose issues or arguments that are crucial for the design of programmes for their own development. Therefore, the genuine objective of this grass-roots level democratic organisation is not being accomplished in some instances without the active involvement of tribes. Thus, it is vital to analyse the attitudes of tribes regarding the institution of Oorukoottam and their level of engagement in this institution.

3. Objectives of the study

1. To study the awareness level of Malayaraya tribes about the institution of Oorukoottam
2. To study the level and extent of tribal participation in the Oorukoottam in the study area.

4. Methodology

The present study used primary data to examine tribal participation in Oorukoottam. Out of the twelve tribal hamlets in the Grama Panchayat, the present study selected Vellaramkuthu tribal hamlet. Among 220 Malayarayan tribal population, 54 sample respondents whose names are included in the voters' list were selected, and the relevant information was collected using a scheduled questionnaire. The direct interview of each respondent helped the researcher to understand the varied issues of the tribes along with their level of awareness and level of participation in Oorukoottam.

5. Findings of the Study

The study conducted at the Vellaramkuthu Tribal Settlement assessed tribes' awareness of Oorukoottam and their degree of involvement in Oorukoottam meetings in detail. The following are the principal findings of the study.

5.1 Level of awareness of the Malayaraya Tribes about Oorukoottam

The study examined the level of awareness by examining their understanding about the structure of Oorukoottam, the purpose of attending Oorukoottam, and the procedure involved in conducting Oorukoottam meetings.

5.1.1 Knowledge about the Structure of Oorukoottam

Table 1: Knowledge about the Structure of Oorukoottam

<i>Structure of Oorukoottam</i>	<i>Know</i>		<i>Don't Know</i>	
	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Specified quorum is required for the conduct of Oorukoottam meetings	48	88.9	6	11.1
Oorukoottam enjoys the power to select beneficiaries under various schemes of the govt.	52	96.3	2	3.7
Oorukoottam has a definite method of beneficiary selection	49	90.7	5	9.3
Oorukoottam has its role in the implementation of projects in the hamlets	49	90.7	5	9.3
Oorukoottam periodically monitor and evaluate the development projects	47	87	7	13

Source: Field Survey

The study reveals that 88.9 percent of them are aware of a definite quorum which is required to conduct the meeting; 96.3 percent of tribes are aware that Oorukoottam has the authority to select beneficiaries under various government schemes; 90.7 percent are aware of a specific method of beneficiary selection in Oorukoottam; 90.7 percent are aware that Oorukoottam plays a role in the implementation of projects in the hamlets; and 87 percent are aware that Oorukoottam holds periodic meetings. The aforementioned findings indicate that the Malayaraya tribes in the area are fully aware of the structure of Oorukoottam, in which they participate in decision-making.

5.1.2 Purpose of Attending Oorukoottam

Table 2: Purpose of Attending Oorukoottam

<i>Purpose of Participating Oorukoottam</i>	<i>Yes</i>		<i>No</i>	
	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Attending the meeting to know about various schemes	48	88.9	6	11.1
Attending the meeting for getting personal benefit from those schemes	52	96.3	2	3.7
Attend the meeting contribute towards formulation of development plan	38	70.4	16	29.6
Attending the meeting to raise questions and get clarifications various matters	45	83.3	9	16.7
Attending the meeting to engage in discussions on various matters	46	85.2	8	14.8

Source: Field Survey

88.9 percent of them stated that they attend the meeting to learn about various development initiatives presented in the meeting. 96.3 percent of them attend to get personal benefit from schemes. 70.4 percent of them attend the meeting to develop a tribal development plan. Additionally, 83.3 percent of them attend the meeting to raise concerns and get clarification on a various matters. 85.2 percent attend the meeting in order to engage in discussions on a variety of topics.

5.1.3 Knowledge about the Process Involved in the Conduct of Oorukoottam

Table 3: Process Involved in the Conduct of Oorukoottam

<i>Process of Oorukoottam</i>	<i>Know</i>		<i>Don't Know</i>	
	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Conduct meeting at regular intervals	54	100	0	0
Proper intimation about the meeting is being done by the authorities	48	88.9	6	11.1
Oorukoottam observe rules of procedure during its meeting	42	77.8	12	22.2
Attendance of Oorukoottam is noting down meticulously in every meeting	52	96.3	2	3.7
Members participating in the meeting always demand minutes	32	59.3	22	40.7
Authorities present various schemes of the panchayat in the meeting	54	100	0	0
During the meeting the members ask question on various matters	48	88.9	6	11.1

The meeting promotes the discussion on various issues	48	88.9	6	11.1
Periodic monitoring and evaluation is being done by the Oorukoottam to complete the projects on time	46	85.2	8	14.8
The decisions of the Oorukoottam is sometimes influenced by the interest of the political parties	12	22.2	42	77.8

Source: Field Survey

It is found from the study that the tribes in the study area have a proper awareness about the process involved in the conduct of Oorukoottam. 100 percent of the respondents replied that the Oorukoottam meetings are conducted at regular intervals; 88.9 percent responded that proper intimation is given to the participants about the time and venue; 96.3 percent of them responded that the attendance of Oorukoottam is noted down meticulously; and all the respondents replied that the authorities present various schemes of the panchayat in the meeting. 88.9 percent of the tribal respondents claim that the meeting promotes discussion on various issues and motivates the members to ask questions on various issues; 85.2 percent of them positively reply that periodic monitoring and evaluation are being done by the Oorukoottam to complete the projects on time, and only 77.8 percent of them don't know whether the decisions of the Oorukoottam are influenced by the interests of the political parties.

5.2 The Level of Participation of Tribes in the Oorukoottam

Table 4: Participation of Tribes in the Oorukoottam

<i>Participation</i>	<i>Yes</i>		<i>No</i>	
	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Attend the meeting before its commencement	42	77.8	12	22.2
Take part in discussions actively	38	70.4	16	29.6
Ask questions in the Oorukoottam	38	70.4	16	29.6
Authority responds satisfactorily to the questions	32	59.3	22	40.7
Give suggestions in the meetings of Oorukoottam	34	63.0	20	37.0
Active participation in the meeting helps me to get individual benefits from schemes	41	76	13	24
Participation in the meeting increases the decision making skills of the people	44	81.5	10	18.5
Effective organization of Oorukoottam empowers the tribal people	43	79.6	11	20.4
The advent of Oorukoottam has made the functioning of Panchayat more transparent	51	94.4	3	5.6

Source: Field Survey

The study shows that 77.8 percent of the tribes attended the meeting of Oorukoottam before its commencement; 70.4 percent of the respondents actively took part in discussions and asked questions; and 63 percent made suggestions during the meeting. However, the majority of the tribes replied that their participation in the meeting helps them to get personal benefits from different schemes, increases their decision-making skills, and also empowers the tribal people. 81.5 percent of the tribes believe that their participation in the meeting would increase the decision-making skills of the people; 79.6 percent think that the effective organisation of Oorukoottam empowers the tribal people; and 94.4 percent of the respondents think that the advent of Oorukoottam has made the functioning of the panchayat more transparent.

5.3 Participation of women in the Oorukoottam

Table 5: Participation of women in the Oorukoottam

<i>Women Participation</i>	<i>Yes</i>		<i>No</i>	
	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
a) Women in the settlement regularly participate in Oorukoottam meetings	52	96.3	2	3.7
b) More than Half of the participants are women	54	100	0	0
c) Women participate actively in the discussions of Oorukoottam meetings	51	94.4	3	5.6
d) Women ask questions regularly	46	85.2	8	14.8
e) Authorities fairly responds to the questions raised by women	41	76.0	13	24.0
f) Women make suggestions in the meeting	42	77.8	12	22.2
g) Participation in the meeting increases the decision making skills of the women	48	88.9	6	11.1

h)Effective working of Oorukoottam is essential for the empowerment of women in the settlement	48	88.9	6	11.1
--	----	------	---	------

Source: Filed Survey

It is found from the study that the women in the tribal hamlet actively participate in the meetings of Oorukoottam. 96.3 percent of the respondents claimed that women regularly participate in the meetings of Oorukoottam, and all the tribal respondents responded that more than half of the participants were women. 94.4 percent of the respondents stated that women actively participate in discussions on various topics during the meeting; 85.2 percent stated that the majority of women ask questions on a regular basis during the meeting; and 77.8 percent stated that women make suggestions during the meeting. The study also makes an attempt to examine how authorities respond to the questions raised by women. 76 percent responded that authorities in the meetings responded fairly to the questions and clarifications raised by the women. Regular and active participation in such democratic institutions will definitely improve the confidence in decision-making and lead to the empowerment of tribal women. 88.9 percent of the respondents accepted that the participation of women in the Oorukoottam meeting would increase the decision-making skills and further lead to the empowerment of tribal women in the hamlet.

6. Conclusion

The Oorukoottam is a democratic decision-making unit in the tribal settlements in Kerala. The institution got recognition from the tribal population since it gives them a platform to think about their own development. The present study found that the Malayaraya tribal community has a basic knowledge of this institution. They have perfect knowledge of the structure and process involved in the conduct of Oorukoottam meetings. Moreover, they are very much aware of why they should participate in these meetings. They participate actively in the meetings to discuss the development issues and schemes of the government. This made the authorities in the panchayat more responsible for taking the utmost care in the implementation of tribal development plans in the area. Another appreciable thing in the hamlet is the active participation of women in the Oorukoottam. Participation and involvement of women in the decision-making process would enhance their capabilities in public speaking and decision-making and lead to their overall development. Thus, the democratic decision-making unit at the local level is performing well in the Vellaramkuthu tribal hamlet and the Malayaraya tribal community in the study area has a thorough understanding of the local decision-making process.

References

1. BaijuK.C. (2011) Tribal Development under Decentralised Governance in Kerala: Issues and Challenges, Vol. 6. No. 1, Journal of Administration & Governance,11, 13-14
2. Niju.P.(2013) Primitive Tribals in Kerala: Struggle for Survival, Volume-3, Issue-6, Indian Streams Research Journal, 8, 12-13 July-
3. Majumdar,D.N (1950) The Affairs of a Tribe: A Study of Tribal Dynamics, The Universal Publishers Ltd., Lucknow
4. RathG.C.(2021) Tribal Development in India, The Contemporary Debate, GB Pant Social Science Institute, Allahabad, 16-18
5. Report on the Socio Economic Status (2013), Scheduled Tribes Development Department, Government of Kerala