

## A Study On Local Self Government “Sevanam” With Asha Workers In Kerala

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### Abstract

Local Self Government (LSG) institutions in Kerala have played a pivotal role in strengthening decentralised governance and citizen-centric service delivery. Among the various initiatives implemented, Vaathilpadi Sevanam has emerged as a significant reform aimed at ensuring timely, transparent, and doorstep delivery of essential government services. ASHA workers, as frontline community health volunteers, often serve as key intermediaries between citizens and local governments, particularly in rural and marginalised communities.

This study examines the functioning, effectiveness, and challenges of LSG Sevanam services with a specific focus on the role of ASHA workers in selected districts of Kerala. Using a mixed-method research approach, data were collected through structured questionnaires, interviews, and field observations. The findings reveal that ASHA workers significantly contribute to enhancing accessibility to LSG services by facilitating communication, supporting documentation, and guiding citizens through service procedures.

The analysis underscores the need for strengthened institutional support, capacity-building programmes, and streamlined digital service platforms to improve the efficiency of Vaathilpadi Sevanam. The study concludes that empowering ASHA workers within the framework of LSG service delivery can substantially enhance community outreach, ensure inclusive governance, and promote effective decentralisation in Kerala.

### INTRODUCTION

Kerala has a robust three-tier Local self-government system comprising Grama Panchayats, Block Panchayats, District Panchayats, Municipalities, and Municipal Corporations. In Kerala, the Local Self-Government Department (LSGD) and its three-tier system (Gram Panchayats, Block Panchayats, and District Panchayats) directly support ASHA workers, and playing a central role in their payment, recognition, and coordination with health and volunteer networks like Kudumbasree and palliative care teams.

In Kerala, Local Self-Government Institutions have been meaningfully empowered through massive transfer of resources as well as administrative powers. Local self-government Institutions have emerged as effective agencies for the implementation of developmental programmes. Developmental programmes are identified and implemented through Grama Sabhas. Currently, the State of Kerala has 1200 local self-governments including 941 Grama Panchayats, 152 Block Panchayats, 14 District Panchayats, 87 Municipalities and 6 Municipal Corporations. Local Self-Governments in this context would mean Gram Panchayat defined under Kerala Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 and Municipalities and Municipal Corporations defined under Kerala Municipality Act, 1994.

“Sevanam” under Local Self Government in kerala refers to two things:

1. Vaathilppadi sevanam (a door step service scheme)
2. e-Sevanam portal (an online service platform)

### **Objective of the study**

1. To study about Vaathilppadi Sevanam a Local Self-Government Service with 'ASHA' (Accredited Social Health Activist) Workers in kerala
2. To study the role of 'ASHA' Workers in identifying, monitoring and supporting patients under Vaathilpadi Sevanam

### **Vaathilppadi Sevanam**

It is a government service which is provided by Local Self Government for supporting the elderly, people with disabilities those who require palliative care or have been identified through Extreme poverty identification process. And this Sevanam project in Kerala is under through with the help of ASHA workers along with other volunteers and local government committees deliver service to vulnerable citizens at the doorsteps. The department of Local Self Government (LSGD) will be the implementing agency / nodal department of this scheme. A committee will be formed by the LSGD for implementing this scheme. These committees with the help of ASHA workers, Sannadhasena volunteers and the social justice department, will prepare the list of beneficiaries through house visits. ASHA workers will be the primary point of contact. Any beneficiary will contact the respective ASHA worker and Sannadhasena volunteers will assist in the delivery of services.

#### **Beneficiaries of this scheme are**

- **Elderly, who are 60+ of age**
- **Differently abled persons**
- **People under medical and palliative assistance**
- **Anyone with mobility restrictions**

What are the various services provided by them

- **Social Security Pensions:** Assistance with receiving welfare pensions.
- **Application Assistance:** Help with filling out forms to apply for financial aid, including assistance from the Chief Minister's Distress Relief Fund (CMDRF).
- **Essentials Delivery:** Providing food and emergency medicines to those in need.
- **Certificate-related help:** In the pilot phase, this included help with services like obtaining life certificates.

### **'ASHA' (Accredited Social Health Activist) workers**

Asha workers are community health workers selected from within the community primarily women, who serve as crucial link between the public health system and community. In 2005 the Indian government launched the NRHM to address the health needs of under served communities in India. As part of the mission, ASHA were to be women community health workers employed by MOHFW.

ASHA will be a health activist in the community who will create awareness on health and its social determinants and mobilize the community towards local health planning and increased utilization and accountability of the existing health services. She would be a promoter of good health practices

ASHA must be primarily a woman resident of the village and preferably in the age group of 25 to 45 yrs. ASHA should have effective communication skills, leadership qualities and be able to reach out to the community. She should be a literate woman with formal education up to Eighth Class. This may be relaxed only if no suitable person with this qualification is available. Adequate representation from disadvantaged population groups should be ensured to serve such groups better.

### **Role of 'ASHA' Workers in supporting patients under Vaathilpadi Sevanam**

In the context of Kerala's "Vathilpadi Sevanam" (doorstep service) scheme, ASHA workers play a crucial role in **identifying beneficiaries, coordinating with local**

**committees and volunteers, and facilitating the delivery of essential government services directly to vulnerable populations.**

The primary roles of ASHA workers in supporting Vathilpadi Sevanam include:

- **Beneficiary Identification:** ASHA workers, being frontline health activists with deep community ties, help identify eligible beneficiaries for the scheme. This includes the elderly (above 60-65 years), differently-abled persons, people requiring medical/palliative assistance, and those identified through extreme poverty surveys who have mobility restrictions.

- **Facilitating Access to Services:** They act as an interface between the community and the public health and local government systems. They ensure the target population can access services without the need to travel to government offices, which is particularly important for those with limited mobility or digital literacy.

- **Doorstep Delivery Coordination:** ASHA workers collaborate with ward-level committees, "Sannadhasena" (volunteer corps) members, and the Social Justice Department to ensure the actual delivery of services at the beneficiaries' homes.

- **Providing Information and Guidance:** They raise awareness about the available services under the scheme and guide beneficiaries on the application process.

- **Direct Support:** Specific services they help facilitate or deliver include assistance with applying for social security pensions, life certificates, and assistance from the Chief Minister's Distress Relief Fund (CMDRF), as well as delivering essential items like food and emergency medicines.

- **Palliative and Health Care Linkage:** ASHA workers, who are already involved in community-level primary healthcare and palliative care activities (e.g., under the Vayomithram project for the elderly), integrate Vathilpadi Sevanam into their existing home visit schedules to ensure continuity of care and support.

In essence, ASHA workers leverage their existing community outreach and healthcare framework to ensure that the Vathilpadi Sevanam scheme successfully reaches the most vulnerable individuals in the community, thereby enhancing social inclusion and welfare delivery.

**The list of various local self-governments in the state of Kerala are given below:**

| District           | Urban                  |                | Rural              |                 |                 |
|--------------------|------------------------|----------------|--------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
|                    | Municipal Corporations | Municipalities | District Panchayat | Block Panchayat | Grama Panchayat |
| Thiruvananthapuram | 1                      | 4              | 1                  | 12              | 78              |
| Kollam             | 1                      | 4              | 1                  | 11              | 68              |
| Pathanamthitta     | -                      | 4              | 1                  | 8               | 53              |
| Alappuzha          | -                      | 6              | 1                  | 12              | 72              |
| Kottayam           | -                      | 6              | 1                  | 11              | 71              |

|              |          |           |           |            |            |
|--------------|----------|-----------|-----------|------------|------------|
| Idukki       | -        | 2         | 1         | 8          | 52         |
| Ernakulam    | 1        | 13        | 1         | 14         | 82         |
| Thrissur     | 1        | 7         | 1         | 16         | 86         |
| Palakkad     | -        | 7         | 1         | 13         | 88         |
| Malappuram   | -        | 12        | 1         | 15         | 94         |
| Kozhikode    | 1        | 7         | 1         | 12         | 70         |
| Wayanad      | -        | 3         | 1         | 4          | 23         |
| Kannur       | 1        | 9         | 1         | 11         | 71         |
| Kasargod     | -        | 3         | 1         | 6          | 38         |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>6</b> | <b>87</b> | <b>14</b> | <b>152</b> | <b>941</b> |

## LOCAL SELF-GOVERNANCE IN INDIA

### Concept and Development of Local Self Government

The history of local self-governments in India could be traced right from the Vedic ages, in the form of Gramini, who was a prestigious village leader advised and assisted by Gram Vridhas (a council of elders), through whom the King vindicated his power over the village. Associated with the agricultural activities, a form of village administration composed of the headman (Adhyaksha), the veterinary doctor (Anikastha), village officials of different grades (Sthanikas), the accountant (Samkhayaka) and the village couriers (Jamgha karika), also finds in its place in the pages of history books as against the Maurayan Age (324 BC- 236 BC). The sabha, which met under a tree, framed rules on matters concerning the village and dealt with offenders.<sup>vii</sup> The system continued from 200 BC to 00AD.<sup>viii</sup> In the Gupta administration, Janapadas, headed by Grameyaka, was responsible for public works, revenue collection, settlement of communal disputes and defence. Administrative units like Kurama, presided by a headman and assisted by Mahasabha, were also found in the southern-most region of India. During the Mughal period, the administrative units of Maurtya and Gupta ages were given way to hereditary native officials called Patel (in charge of collecting revenue), Patwin (accountant), and chowkidar (watchman). However, the system remained in particular pockets, devoid of any local administration established by law for the development and welfare activities. Improvements of Town Act, 1850, were introduced to authorise the government to establish municipal administration to manage public works and general welfare but was not implemented in Madras Province. Town Improvement Act, 1871, gave municipalities the power to maintain hospitals, dispensaries, schools and so on. District collector acted as the ex-officio president, and councillors were elected from taxpayers for a term of three years. Madras District Municipalities Act, 1884, gave much more power to the municipalities in terms of public works. The implementation of Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms in 1919, liberated the local bodies from being headed by district-level officers.

During British Rule, the lowest administrative units in villages could be identified in many places as village council panchayats, which consisted of five members, headed by a headman, and basically constituted an intermediary between proprietary and the

government. In the British regime, mostly characterised by centralisation, the autonomy at the lowest level of administration could hardly be demonstrated. Even the responsibility for revenue collection was lapsed to the centralised system and the officials entrusted with the same were gradually converted to salaried employees at various places. The formalistic approach of justice dispensation, gave way to the justice delivery nature of village panchayat. In general, the centralised colonial governance, caused the erosion of the traditional village panchayats characterised by autonomy and self-sufficiency. From 1887 to 1900, all across British India, district boards and taluk boards were setup following the proposal by Lord Rippon. However, later realising the efficiency of village panchayats, certain efforts were made in the later phase. In the 1907-08 period, a Royal Commission on Decentralisation was appointed by the Secretary of State to render the Local Self-Governments really self-governing. The 24th Session of Indian National Congress, lauded the measure and called upon the British Government to make it elective and participatory. However, the recommendations of the Commission were never implemented and the Karachi session of the Congress in 1913, regretted the non-implementation of the recommendations. Though rural self-government was entrusted to Indian ministries by the Government of India Act, 1919, however lack of political will and resources hindered its effective devolution.

The history of local self-governments in the Travancore region starts from the Travancore Municipality Regulation, 1920. The president was the Chief Executive Authority and except at Trivandrum, every Municipality had elected President, whereas at Trivandrum, it was nominated by the Government. Prior to the same, Town Improvement and Conservancy Regulation, 1894 was passed and created Town Improvement Committees in Nagercoil, Quilon, Alleppey and Kottayam, each with five to nine members, however, invested with limited power. Regulation II of 1901 conferred such committees the power of taxation and Regulations passed in 1910, 1912 and 1914 extended the sub-committees to some other places as well and conferred them with the power of appeal and punishment. Besides, Travancore Village Panchayat Act 1925 was enacted to constitute village panchayats. The duties of the panchayats were classified into obligatory and discretionary. The state of Cochin was divided into districts subdivided into desams, headed by deshavazhi. The deshavazhi exercised control over the officials of the village. Later, Cochin Municipalities Act II was passed in 1921 and got replaced by 1938 Act. In Travancore Cochin, by 1940, Village Union Act was passed and the judicial powers of the panchayats were taken off. In the Malabar area, by virtue of Madras Village Panchayat Act, 1950, village panchayats could be constituted in villages having a population of more than 500. Areas not covered by the village panchayats were brought under the Malabar District Board Administration

### **Local Self-Government- Origin and Evolution**

#### **Balwant Rai Mehta Committee**

Balwant Rai Mehta Committee, its historical report in 1957, proposed a system of Panchayati raj institutions with a three-tier system, viz., village panchayat at the basic level, panchayat samiti at the block (intermediary) level and zila panchayat at the district level. Panchayat samiti was envisaged as the body for the execution of plans, wherein zila panchayat had a supervisory role. All three bodies were recommended to be interlinked through their membership and to have a crucial role in the planning and development of their respective area of governance. The village panchayat would be constituted through direct elections and panchayat samiti through indirect elections from the village panchayats, and political parties should be allowed to participate effectively at all levels. District Collector was proposed as the chairman of the Zila Parishad. Mandatory and discretionary

powers were sought to be assigned to the Panchayati raj institutions, though the government exercised a certain amount of control.

#### **Ashok Mehta Committee**

In order to attain the maximum degree of decentralisation in terms of planning and implementation, the Government of India, Batting in favour of the participation of political parties at the decentralised form of governance, according to the Committee, the establishment of democratic institutions below the State level will contribute towards competition as well as mutual cooperation in terms of developmental activities among the political parties. A newer approach to the Panchayati raj system was suggested by the Committee with a two- tier system, viz., zila parishad at the district level and Mandal panchayat, constituted as a cluster of villages at the most basic level. At the local level, the people's participation in Mandal Panchayats will be ensured through village panchayats. Committee opined that the contours of the Panchayati raj system are in conformity with the developmental pace and the system has to be equipped further to keep in tandem with the rapid developments in the future. The committee suggested the decentralisation of certain functions and recommended periodic adjustments. Zilla panchayats would be in charge of handling and planning decentralised functions for the district and the Mandal panchayats would be implementing the plans so made. Recognising the fact that an omnibus list of Mandal Panchayat functions has no relevance unless there is genuine decentralisation accompanied by corresponding resources', the Committee recommended the allocation of sufficient funds and higherlevel technical expertise to the Mandal Panchayats along with the work allocation made. In order to ensure the efficiency of the delivery systems, the Committee called for regular analysis of the projectlevel functionaries.

#### **Lakshimal Singhvi Committee**

With an objective to review the functioning of Panchayati Raj institutions, LM Singhvi Committee was constituted in 1987. The Committee was of the opinion that the local self-governments, rather than being viewed as a basic administrative unit, should be conceived as a facilitator of people's participation in the planning process. Reorganisation of Panchayati raj institutions, availability of adequate resources to meet compulsory duties, dissolution of Panchayats, the establishment of a judicial Tribunal for holding elections, assess the progress of work and settle all kinds of disputes were suggested by the Committee. The Singhvi Committee also called upon the Parliament to afford constitutional protection to the local self-government.

#### **GVK Rao Committee**

In order to look into the administrative setup for rural development and poverty alleviation programme, the GVK Rao Committee consisting of 12 members, was appointed by the Government of India. The Committee also insisted on regular elections to the Panchayati Raj institutions. The committee, for the first time, proposed a planning institution at the lower level and recommended the district as the basic unit of planning and institutions at the district and below would plan, implement and monitor rural development programmes. The Committee further suggested the introduction of a budget at the district level. Besides, Rao Committee suggested strengthening and training the official and political functionaries in the local self-governments. It also suggested improving the number of extension officers and involvement of professionals from outside to meet the technical requirements at the lower level and called for strengthening the data base.

#### **Kerala Panchayati Raj Act, 1994**

The Kerala Panchayat Raj Act, 1994, is a comprehensive legislation that governs the functioning and powers of the Panchayati Raj institutions in the State of Kerala. The Act establishes a decentralized system of local self-government, empowering the rural

communities to actively participate in decision making processes and take charge of their own development.

#### **Definition and Composition of Panchayat:**

The Act begins by defining various terms, including "Panchayat," which refers to an institution of self-government at the village, intermediate, and district levels. Section 2(10) states that a Panchayat includes a Village Panchayat, Block Panchayat, and District Panchayat, each representing different territorial units within the state. This hierarchical structure ensures effective governance and devolution of powers at various levels.

#### **Constitution and Election of Panchayats:**

Section 3 of the Act lays down the procedure for the constitution of Panchayats, which includes the conduct of regular elections. The Act mandates the State Election Commission to conduct free and fair elections for Panchayats at all levels, ensuring the democratic selection of representatives. The provision of regular elections ensures the continuity of local governance and promotes the accountability of elected representatives to the people.

#### **Powers and Functions of Panchayats:**

The Act grants Panchayats extensive powers and functions to enable them to fulfil their role as effective local self-governing institutions. Section 43 empowers Panchayats with the authority to prepare and implement plans for economic development and social justice within their jurisdiction. They have the responsibility to undertake various developmental activities, including infrastructure development, healthcare, education, and poverty alleviation programs.

#### **Financial Powers and Resources:**

To ensure the effective functioning of Panchayats, the Act provides for financial autonomy and resources. Section 81 stipulates that Panchayats have the power to levy and collect taxes, fees, and other charges. They can also receive grants and loans from the State Government, Central Government, and other funding agencies. This financial independence enables Panchayats to generate revenue and allocate resources as per the local needs and priorities.

#### **Devolution of Functions and Powers:**

The Act emphasizes the principle of devolution, transferring functions and powers from higher levels of government to Panchayats. The Act establishes the Block and District Panchayats as the intermediate and district-level authorities, respectively, entrusted with specific functions and powers. This devolution ensures effective decentralization of governance, empowering Panchayats to address local issues and provide responsive and accountable governance.

#### **Participation of Women and Marginalized Sections:**

The Kerala Panchayat Raj Act, 1994 recognizes the importance of inclusive and participatory governance. Section 7 mandates that at least one-third of the total seats in Panchayats shall be reserved for women, ensuring gender representation and empowerment. Furthermore, the Act encourages the participation of Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and other marginalized sections of society, promoting social inclusion and equity in decision-making processes.

#### **Ward Committees and People's Participation:**

To enhance citizen participation at the grassroots level, the Act provides for the establishment of Ward Committees. Section 164 stipulates that each ward within a Panchayat shall have a Ward Committee comprising elected representatives and residents of the ward. These committees serve as platforms for local residents to voice their concerns, suggest developmental initiatives, and actively participate in the decision-making process.

#### **Accountability and Monitoring:**

The Act emphasizes the need for transparency and accountability in local governance. Section 94 mandates the Panchayats to maintain proper accounts and publish an annual financial statement. The State Government and the State Election Commission have the authority to conduct audits and inquiries to ensure compliance with the Act's provisions. This accountability mechanism enhances public trust and promotes efficient utilization of resources.

#### **Dispute Resolution Mechanism:**

The Act provides for a robust mechanism to resolve disputes and grievances arising within the Panchayats. Section 234 establishes the Panchayat Raj Ombudsman, an independent authority responsible for investigating complaints against Panchayat officials and ensuring remedial actions. This mechanism ensures that citizens have a platform to address their grievances and seek redressal. The Kerala Panchayat Raj Act, 1994, stands as a landmark legislation in promoting grassroots democracy and decentralized governance in the state of Kerala. By empowering Panchayats with extensive powers and functions, ensuring financial autonomy, and promoting the participation of women and marginalized sections, the Act strengthens local self-governance and promotes inclusive development. The Act's provisions promote transparency, accountability, and citizen participation, laying the foundation for a robust and responsive local governance system. Through its comprehensive framework, the Kerala Panchayat Raj Act, 1994, serves as a model for effective local governance and serves as an inspiration for decentralized governance systems across the country.

#### **Functions of Gram Panchayat**

##### **Planning and Development:**

Under Section 166 of the Kerala Panchayat Raj Act, 1994, Panchayats are entrusted with the responsibility of formulating and implementing plans for economic development, social justice, and poverty alleviation in their respective areas. Panchayats have the power to prepare development plans, mobilize resources, and execute development projects in consultation with the District Planning Committee.

##### **Infrastructure Development:**

Section 166(2) of the Act empowers Panchayats to provide and maintain public amenities such as roads, culverts, bridges, street lighting, and sanitation facilities. Panchayats are responsible for the construction, repair, and maintenance of public assets within their jurisdiction. Health and Sanitation: Panchayats play a crucial role in ensuring public health and sanitation in rural areas. Section 166(5) of the Act outlines the functions of Panchayats in providing healthcare facilities, sanitation measures, waste management systems, and the prevention and control of diseases. Panchayats are also responsible for promoting public awareness of health and hygiene.

##### **Education and Cultural Activities:**

Section 166(6) of the Act mandates Panchayats to promote primary education, adult education, and cultural activities in their respective areas. Panchayats have the authority to establish and manage schools, libraries, community centres, and other educational and cultural institutions. Social Welfare: Panchayats are entrusted with the responsibility of implementing social welfare schemes and programs for the welfare of backward classes, scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, and other marginalized sections of society. Section 166(7) of the Act empowers Panchayats to undertake measures for the welfare and upliftment of these communities.

##### **Government Delegation of Work:**

The Kerala Panchayat Raj Act, 1994, recognizes the power of the government to delegate certain functions to Panchayats. Section 13(1) of the Act states that the government may

transfer any function or power entrusted to it under any law to the Panchayats, subject to certain conditions. This provision ensures the effective delegation of work from the government to Panchayats, enhancing local self-governance.

### **Kerala Municipality Act, 1994**

The Kerala Municipalities Act, 1994, is a comprehensive legislation that provides a legal framework for the establishment, administration, and functioning of municipalities and municipal corporations in the state of Kerala. This landmark Act has played a pivotal role in promoting local self-governance, enhancing citizen participation, and ensuring the efficient delivery of public services. This article aims to provide an in-depth analysis of the Kerala Municipalities Act, 1994, highlighting its key provisions and their significance in shaping local governance in Kerala.

#### **Definition and Composition of Municipalities:**

The Act begins by defining a "municipality" under Section 2(15), which includes institutions of self-government at the urban level, such as municipal corporations, municipalities, and town panchayats. It recognizes the diverse nature of urban areas and provides appropriate governance structures for different categories of municipalities based on their population and characteristics.

#### **Constitution and Election of Municipal Bodies:**

Section 4 of the Act lays down the procedure for the constitution and reconstitution of municipalities and municipal corporations. It emphasizes the importance of democratic principles by providing for regular elections conducted by the State Election Commission. This ensures that the process is fair, transparent, and free from undue influence, thereby promoting representative governance in urban local bodies.

#### **Powers and Functions of Municipal Bodies:**

The Kerala Municipalities Act, 1994, confers significant powers and functions upon municipalities and municipal corporations to enable them to fulfil their responsibilities effectively. Section 52 enumerates these powers, which include urban planning, public health, sanitation, solid waste management, water supply, drainage, and maintenance of public spaces. These powers empower local bodies to address the specific needs and challenges of urban areas and promote the overall well-being of residents.

#### **Financial Powers and Resources:**

To ensure financial autonomy, Section 96 of the Act grants municipalities and municipal corporations the power to levy and collect taxes, fees, and other charges within their respective jurisdictions. It also allows them to receive grants and loans from the State Government, Central Government, and other funding agencies. This financial independence enables local bodies to generate revenue and allocate resources according to local priorities, fostering sustainable development and efficient service delivery. Devolution of Powers and Functions:

The Kerala Municipalities Act, 1994, is based on the principle of devolution, emphasizing the transfer of powers and functions from higher levels of government to municipalities and municipal corporations. Section 15 of the Act establishes the role of local bodies as the primary local authority responsible for governing urban areas. It ensures the devolution of administrative, financial, and planning functions, empowering local bodies to make decisions on local issues and implement development plans effectively.

#### **Administrative Structure and Committees:**

The Act provides for the establishment of a comprehensive administrative structure within municipalities and municipal corporations. Section 19 outlines the composition and functions of various committees, including the General Purpose Standing Committee, Finance Standing Committee, and Town Planning Committee. These committees consist

of elected representatives and experts, promoting transparency, accountability, and citizen participation in decision-making processes.

#### **Public Participation and Grievance Redressal:**

Recognizing the importance of citizen engagement, Section 22 of the Act mandates the establishment of ward committees within municipalities and municipal corporations. These committees serve as platforms for residents to voice their concerns, provide suggestions, and actively participate in local governance. The Act also provides mechanisms for grievance redressal, ensuring that residents have access to a fair and efficient system for addressing their grievances and seeking remedies.

#### **Accountability and Monitoring:**

Transparency and accountability are crucial elements of effective local governance. The Kerala Municipalities Act, 1994, emphasizes the need for accountability by requiring municipalities and municipal corporations to maintain proper accounts and publish an annual financial statement. It also grants the State Government and the State Election Commission the authority to conduct audits and inquiries to ensure compliance with the Act's provisions. These mechanisms foster transparency, enhance public trust, and promote good governance at the local level.

The Kerala Municipalities Act, 1994, has played a vital role in empowering local self-governance in urban areas of the state. By defining the powers, functions, and responsibilities of municipalities and municipal corporations, the Act has established a robust legal framework for effective local governance. The provisions of the Act ensure democratic processes, financial autonomy, public participation, and accountability in the functioning of local bodies. As a result, the Act has contributed to the overall development and well-being of urban areas in Kerala, making it a progressive model for local governance in India.

#### **Functions of Municipalities:**

##### **Urban Planning and Development:**

Section 30 of the Kerala Municipalities Act, 1994, empowers Municipalities to prepare and implement master plans for urban development, including land use planning, infrastructure development, and environmental conservation. Municipalities have the authority to regulate building construction, town planning, and zoning regulations within their jurisdiction.

##### **Public Health and Sanitation:**

Municipalities are responsible for ensuring public health and sanitation in urban areas. Section 30(1) of the Act specifies the functions of Municipalities in providing and maintaining public health services, including water supply, drainage systems, waste management, and control of diseases.

##### **Infrastructure Provision:**

Under Section 30(1)(v) of the Act, Municipalities are entrusted with the responsibility of providing public amenities such as roads, bridges, street lighting, and transportation facilities. Municipalities have the power to plan, construct, and maintain public infrastructure to cater to the needs of the urban population.

##### **Revenue Generation and Financial Management:**

Municipalities have the authority to generate revenue through various sources and manage their finances effectively. Section 30(3) of the Act enables Municipalities to levy and collect taxes, fees, and charges on properties, trades, professions, and services within their jurisdiction. They also have the power to borrow funds for development projects and administer financial resources.

### **Urban Governance and Administration:**

Municipalities play a pivotal role in urban governance and administration. Section 30(5) of the Act mandates the conduct of Council Meetings to deliberate on matters of urban importance, formulate policies, and make decisions for the overall development and welfare of the municipality.

### **Government Delegation of Work:**

Similar to Panchayats, the Kerala Municipalities Act, 1994, allows the government to delegate functions to Municipalities. Section 23 of the Act empowers the government to transfer any function or power vested in it by any law to the Municipalities, subject to certain conditions. This provision ensures the effective decentralization of power and promotes local selfgovernance.

## **CONCLUSION**

The present study reveals the significant role of *Vaathilpadi sevanam* in strengthening local self-government service delivery through the active involvement of ASHA Workers in Kerala. As frontline health volunteers, ASHA Workers act as a vital bridge between the community and local institutions, ensuring that essential health and welfare services reach households efficiently. The findings indicate that their participation in *Vaathilpadi Sevanam* not only enhances accessibility and responsiveness of public services but also fosters greater community trust in the local governance system.

Moreover, the initiative has helped streamline service delivery by reducing administrative bottlenecks and improving coordination between local bodies and health functionaries. Despite facing challenges such as workload pressure, limited resources, and occasional gaps in training, ASHA workers continue to demonstrate commitment and adaptability in fulfilling their responsibilities. Strengthening institutional support, capacity-building measures, and better recognition of their contributions can further enhance the effectiveness of this model.

Overall, the integration of ASHA workers into *Vaathilpadi Sevanam* reflects Kerala's progressive approach towards community-centric governance. The study underscores the need for sustained policy attention to reinforce such participatory mechanisms, ensuring that local self-government remains inclusive, accessible, and people-oriented.

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