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Sociology of Governance: A Study in Sonitpur District of Assam

**A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PART FULLFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

AMIYA KUMAR DAS

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**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY
SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES**

TEZPUR UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

Title of the Thesis: Sociology of Governance: A Study in Sonitpur District of Assam

Governance has become a much contentious issue in recent times. Although conventionally this issue mainly comes under the domain of the political scientists, the contemporary sociologists and the social anthropologists have also developed keen interest in studying the issue of governance from their disciplinary perspectives. The main thrust of this new interest lies in exploring the sociological dynamics of the process of governance.

The system of governance is hierarchically organized at different levels. The objective of this thesis is to understand the complex processes associated with governance in the context of the experiences at the local level. With this in view, the thesis attempts to comprehend the idea of the state, the government and the governance as perceived by the communities at the grassroots. For the purpose of this study, data was collected through both ethnographic study and survey across a number of communities based in rural areas in the Sonitpur district under the state of Assam which constitutes one of the most diverse demographic landscapes within the state. In order to grapple with the nuances of governance and politics in a multi-ethnic setting, the thesis examines the sociological dynamics involved with the processes of various elections, the most dominant and dramatic site of democratic participation and performance in India. Besides, the thesis also studies the day to day engagement of the rural communities with the agencies of the state and the way it informs their relationship.

It is well recognized that while all the rules and the policies of governance are framed by the state, their implementation at the local grassroots level is conditioned by a multiplicity of factors. This thesis examines how these factors condition the implementation of the state policies and programmes at the local level by using the idea of 'embeddedness' emphasizing the inter-linkages among the state, the society and the community.

Further, the thesis examines the contemporary discourse on 'good governance' by locating it in the agenda of neo-liberalism. It also explicates the changing nature of the

state under the impact of the neo-liberal policies and the manifestation of this change in the implementation and withdrawal of various welfare measures of the state along with its implication on the everyday politics at the local level. The thesis also delves into the role of political parties, pressure and interest groups, and the middle men (*dalal*) in the implementation of various schemes at different levels.

The thesis finds that notwithstanding the overarching nature of the state and its programmes and policies, the system of governance is considerably mediated and conditioned by a host of local specificities. It argues that a system of governance has two facets, formal and informal, and that both are important in the day to day functioning of the state. While the formal governance is employed by the state as a legitimate means of reaching out to the people, the informal governance facilitates the people's negotiation with the state for access to different limited resources. The thesis explicates this with the example of the class of middlemen who play a very critical role in the state-community transaction. It shows how the functioning of the state leaves space for the emergence of these informal agents. While the middlemen, on the one hand, bridges the gap between the state and the community thereby apparently adding to the legitimacy of the former, on the other, it also erodes the formal legal authority of the state by underscoring its indispensability for the community.

Finally, the thesis argues that the political and the ethnic affiliations of a community in a multi-ethnic society play a significant role with respect to its access to the state machinery as well as to its various welfare schemes. While this may be true even at a broader level, it argues that the ways in which such affiliations play out among the poor, marginal rural communities at the local level has its own distinctiveness. The manner in which the state negotiates and renegotiates with the multiple interests of these local communities and yet sustains its paramountcy makes the functioning of the state in a multi-ethnic context very interesting study.

DECLARATION

I do here by declare that the thesis titled “Sociology of Governance: A study in Sonitpur District of Assam” submitted by me to the Tezpur University in part fulfilment of the requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology under the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, is my own and that it has not been submitted to any other institution, including this University in any other form or published at any time before.



(AMIYA KUMAR DAS)

Date:

Registration No.: 024 of 2012



TEZPUR UNIVERSITY

Certificate of the Supervisor

This is to certify that the thesis entitled “Sociology of Governance: A study in Sontipur District of Assam” submitted to the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Tezpur University in part fulfilment for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology is record of research work carried out by Amiya Kumar Das under my supervision and guidance.

All help received by him from various sources have been duly acknowledged.

No part of this thesis has been submitted elsewhere for award of any other degree.

Signature of Supervisor

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chandan Kumar Sharma", written over a horizontal line.

(Chandan Kumar Sharma)

Designation: Professor
School: Humanities and Social Sciences
Department: Sociology

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

AIUDF	All India United Democratic Front
AGP	Assam Gana Parishad
ANM	Auxiliary Nurse Midwife
ASHA	Accredited Social Health Activist
BDO	Block Development Officer
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
CDP	Community Development Programme
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
CPI-M	Communist Party of India, Marxist
CPI-ML	Communist Party of India, Marxist-Leninist
DC	Deputy Commissioner or Collector
DPEP	District Primary Education Project
DPC	District Planning Committee
EAS	Employment Assurance Scheme
EGS	Employment Guarantee Scheme
EU	European Union
EVM	Electronic Voting Machine
GP	Gram Panchayat
ICDS	Integrated Child Development Scheme
IMDT	Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunal) Act
INC	Indian National Congress
IRDP	Integrated Rural Development Programme
JSSK	Janani-Shishu Suraksha Karyakram
JSY	Janani Suraksha Yojana

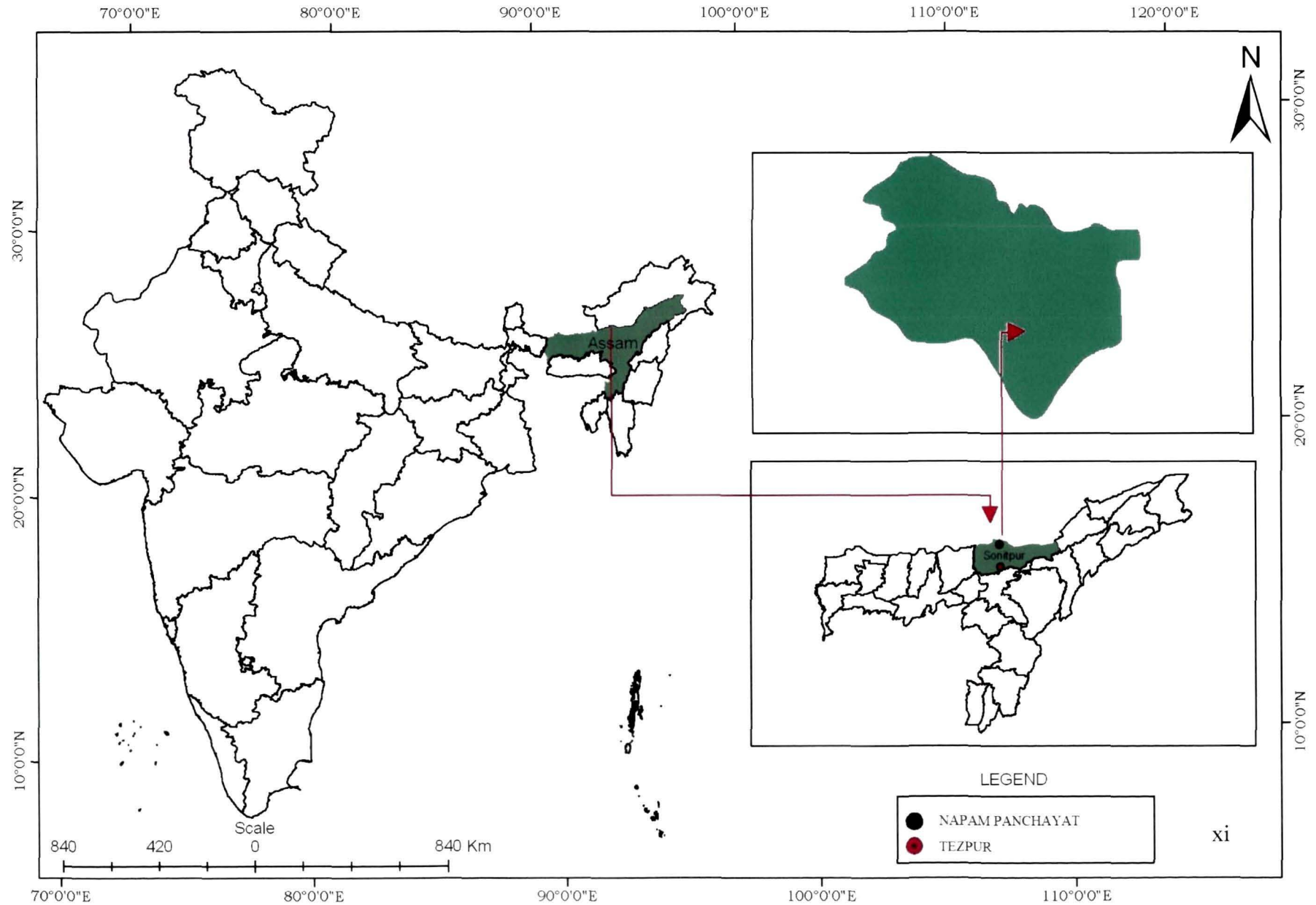
JRY	Jawahar Rozgar Yojana
KMSS	Krisak Mukti Sangram Samiti
MLA	Member of the Legislative Assembly
MLG	Multi-Level Governance
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MNC	Multinational Corporation
MP	Member of Parliament
NCPRI	National Campaign for the People's Right to Information
NDA	National Democratic Alliance
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OBCs	Other Backward Classes
PDS	Public Distribution System
PPP	Public Private Partnership
PRI	Panchayati Raj institutions
RSBY	Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana
SCs	Scheduled Castes
SGSY	Swarajayanti Gram Swaroznar
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programme
STs	Scheduled Tribes
TMC	Trinamool Congress
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UPA	United Progressive Alliance
VDC	Village Development Committee
VEC	Village Education Committee
VHC	Village Health Committee
VHSND	Village Health and Nutrition Day

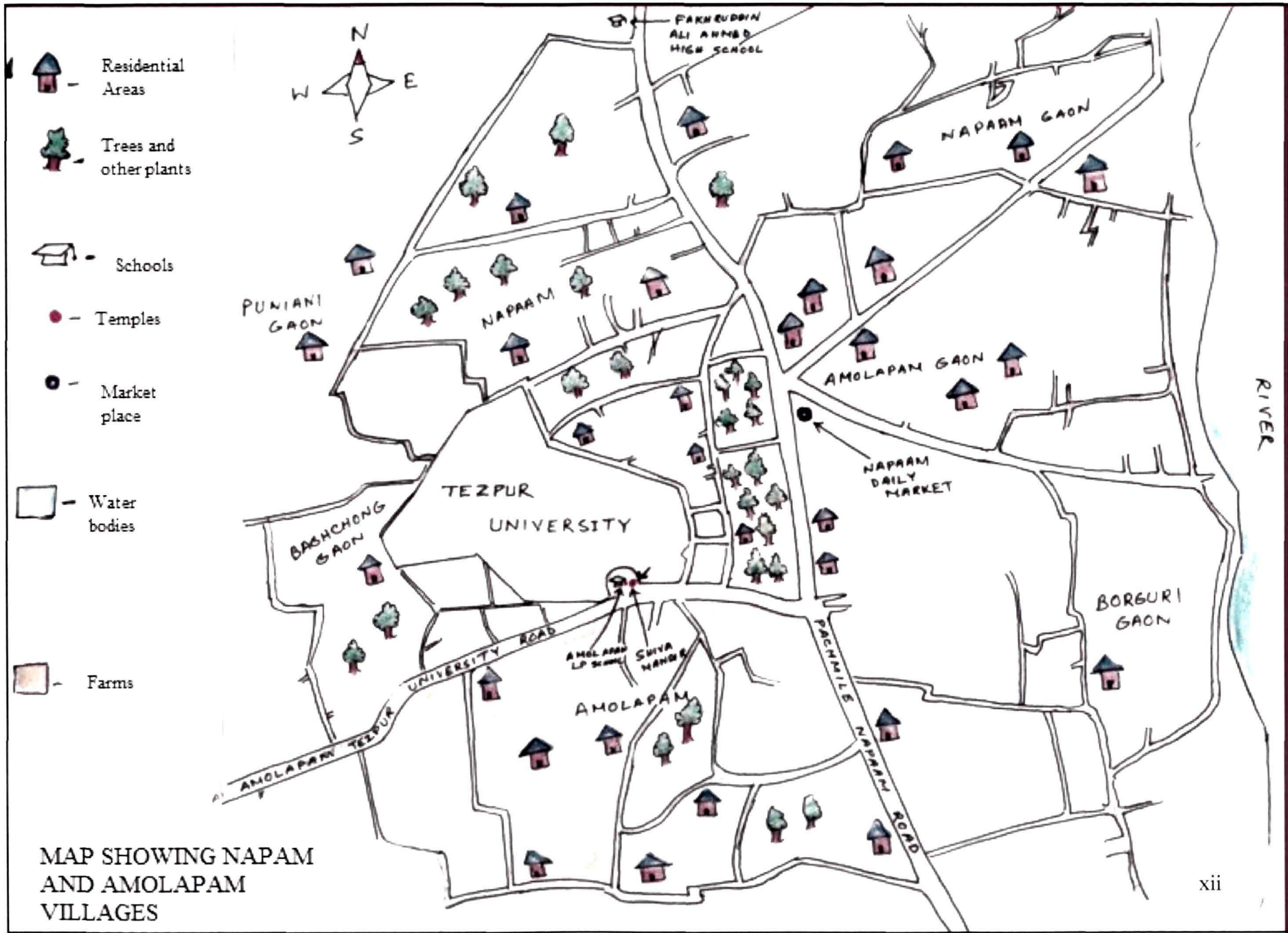
WHO	World Health Organisation
WWII	World War Second
ZP	Zila Parishad

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MAP OF INDIA SHOWING NAPAM PANCHAYAT OF SONITPUR DISTRICT IN ASSAM

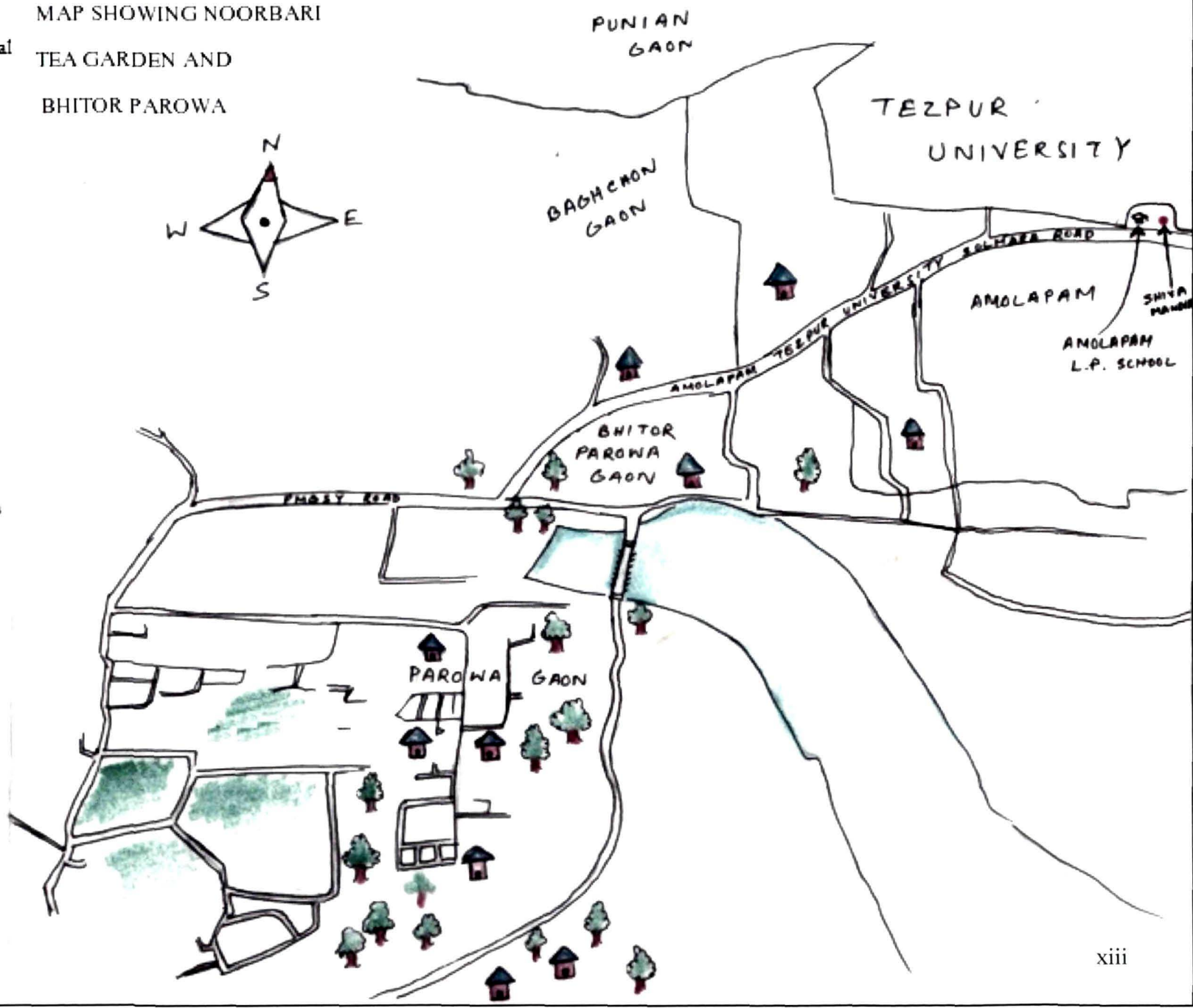
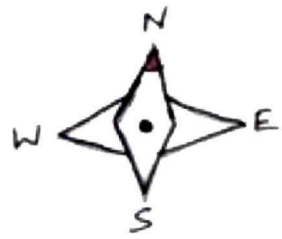




MAP SHOWING NAPAM AND AMOLAPAM VILLAGES

MAP SHOWING NOORBARI
TEA GARDEN AND
BHITOR PAROWA

-  Residential Areas
-  Trees and other plants
-  School
-  Temple
-  Bridges
-  Water bodies
-  Farms
-  Noorbari Tea gardens



Chapter 1

Introduction

In the happiness of his subjects lies the king's happiness; in their welfare his welfare. He shall not consider as good only that which pleases him but treat as beneficial to him whatever pleases his subjects (Kautilya 1992, 149).

In the history of human civilization, the concept of governance, which originated with Plato, has always been complex, ambiguous, and contentious; drawn much attention; and undergone change. Although conventionally the issue of governance is in the domain of political science, contemporary sociologists and social anthropologists are also keenly interested in exploring the sociological dynamics of governance. Contemporary discourse on 'good governance' is critically analysed in some recent works corresponding with neoliberalism. If one looks at the everyday life of the majority of people, the changing nature of the state is felt. Under the impact of neoliberal policies, the state tends to withdraw from various welfare measures, which affects the everyday life of poor people at various levels. Political parties play a significant role in the lives of people, where intermediaries or brokers (*dalal*) also have an important role to play in facilitating access of people to different welfare schemes and entitlements.

The overarching nature of the state and its programmes and policies, or the system of governance, is considerably mediated and conditioned by a host of local specificities. Often, people use the system of informal governance in the day-to-day functioning of the state. While the state employs structures of formal governance as a legitimate means of reaching out to the people, informal governance structures facilitate people's negotiation with the state for access to different, limited resources. In a multi-ethnic society, a community's political and ethnic affiliations play a significant role in its access to the state machinery and its various welfare schemes. Communities operate at the local level in their own distinctive ways.

Discipline

The object of knowledge, in the way it is constructed and approached, is dependent on one's training in a particular discipline. It trains us to think in a disciplinary language. Therefore, it is important to know the language of the discipline. It will be problematic to talk about a discipline and its boundary in a period when there is a call to break the disciplinary border, but understanding one's own discipline—where one is located—helps one transcend disciplinary boundaries without much uncertainty. Unlike disciplines like political science and public administration—which focus mainly on the formal institutions and functions of the modern state and in knowing who gets what and where—sociology and social anthropology are concerned with not only the formal institutions of the modern state but also with the various forms of engagement of the common people with the state in everyday life. Anthropology tries to find how certain phenomena works and through what mechanisms, and sociology, especially in India, tries to understand through fieldwork why certain social processes occur.

Ideas and Interest

The issues of governance have been dealt with mainly by scholars of political science, international relations, public administration, system analysts, and so on. The sociological study of governance has not yet—like other sub-disciplines of sociology—fully developed as a sub-discipline in India and elsewhere. Sociologists and social anthropologists, who have always been fascinated by phenomena in their immediate surroundings, have only recently started analysing the sociology of governance, and consider this sub-discipline a part of both political sociology and economic sociology.

Classical sociology developed in response to the modernist intervention in society in the 19th century, which believed that society can be changed with necessary interventions. Since then, sociologists have been engaged in understanding and explaining the nature of state and society relationship from various perspectives. Classical sociologists developed sociology in response to the modernist intervention in the 19th century, though its origin can be traced to an earlier period. Sociology itself as a discipline emerged out of the process of modernization. The crucial idea embedded in modernism was that society can be changed with interventions. After the initial development of sociology, many sociologists tried to understand modern society using their own perspectives. The more recent social theorists have also been engaged in trying to

understand the issue. Foucault analysed European society and tried to show how the modernist agenda penetrated people's lives, and how various technologies and tactics of modern government constitute a strategy, which he defines as governmentality—and that it prepares citizens to be ruled in the manner that the state desires (Foucault 1991).

Keeping the above issues in mind, it can be assumed that sociology, as a disciplinary practice, is appropriate to understand governance in modern society. Modern governance, an outcome of modernism, gained prominence in the 1960s after the World Bank started emphasizing good governance. Following this, scholars of social science, in general, and political science and sociology, in particular, started studying the issues of governance both theoretically and empirically. All this work led to various understandings and interpretations of governance. In this study, I will dwell upon the idea of governance in contemporary society and try to evolve some sociological understanding of the social processes that shapes the nature and forms of governance.

As a discipline, sociology by now has made a significant intellectual journey. However, and interestingly, it is difficult even now to define 'sociology' precisely, its meaning, or its objective, although many sociologists have defined it according to their theoretical and methodological position, and have contributed significantly to its growth and development. While sociology is generally defined as the systematic study of different social processes occurring in society, the difficulty of defining 'society' precisely makes it difficult for sociologists to define sociology convincingly.

Theodor Adorno, one of the influential thinkers of the Frankfurt School, tries to interrogate the concept and idea of society in terms of individuals and various forces that connect individuals to one another. Adorno suggests that sociology must provide an insight into society and explore its essential nature. Sociology should offer a critical insight into the society to discern the real meaning of it. Adorno quotes Wittgenstein's well-known formulation "the world is all that is the case" and emphasizes that sociology's objective can be drawn from Wittgenstein's idea. Adorno also proposes the idea of dialectical characteristics of society. He contends that though the concepts of integration and differentiation are essential to society, it sustains itself through contradictions and changes (Adorno 2000: 15). Following Adorno's argument, it can be further argued that the whole idea of modern rule and technology applied in governance mechanism is fallacious, and that it is bound to fail. Therefore, we need to accept the

idea of failure in governance, and that contradiction and failure are inherent in governance. This idea of failure is discussed in Chapters 2 and 4.

Sociology aims to define ‘society’, understand its structure and social processes within it, and also to understand governance in its various forms—the different ways in which human beings govern themselves to cope with and exist in the larger process and structure of governance. Apart from being governed by the state, people also govern themselves in everyday life, without necessarily involving the state whether in the realm of culture, politics, economy or any other social process.

Among contemporary sociologists, Pierre Bourdieu has extensively written on the relationship between politics and sociology. Writing on Pierre Bourdieu, sociologist David Swartz argues that for Bourdieu all sociology is sociology of politics (Swartz 2010, 143). Drawing from it, I propose that all sociology can be seen as sociology of governance. In direct or indirect ways, people are governed by somebody else and, in a more micro way, people govern themselves.

If one searches for the word ‘governance’ online, one can see many entries on either good governance or corporate governance. Governance is widely recognized as governance of corporations, and has different dimensions when it comes to issues related to the state. Various disciplines in the social sciences have used this concept according to their own purpose. Recently, scholars have urged for developing a multidisciplinary approach that has no methodological constraint, as it should help us understand various issues and problems of governance.

As the title of the thesis suggests, the issue of governance will be discussed frequently in this work. But I am not going to offer or propose a sociological theory to understand governance, as it is an eclectic concept and used very differently by various social scientists. Rather, my intention is to evolve a kind of understanding of governance from a sociological point of view.

Social structure is a very important concept in sociology. Sociologists and anthropologists have conceptualized the idea of social structure from various theoretical and methodological viewpoints. This study does not claim any universality in application of its findings or formulations. Each research field is unique in its feature, but could resemble others in function and pattern. Therefore, in this case, learning from

new experience will help us understand other phenomena. The framework of the sociology of governance will deal with production of governance objects by state and with people's perception, reception, negation and negotiation in everyday life. Other theoretical concepts will be discussed briefly, in passing, or not at all.

This thesis discusses the sociology of governance in the Sonitpur District of Assam. Social structure and therefore, governance differs from society to society. I argue that the concept of embeddedness is important in the process of governance. Governance could be seen as an outcome of modernity. One of the major forces and claims of modernity is freedom. Similarly, the liberal and neoliberal ideology emphasize upon freedom.

Similarly, Das and Poole in their book *The Margin of the State* (2004) suggest that sociology and anthropology should explore social processes at the margins of society. Therefore, the sociology of governance should study and analyse the margins of society in the structure of governance. Societal processes are dynamic, not static; therefore, it will be erroneous to define 'state' simplistically by assigning to it some concrete feature of tax collection centre, police, judiciary, army, administrator, and so on. In this case, sociology should strive to explain certain phenomena that influence society but are not directly visible. Das and Poole (Ibid) powerfully demonstrate the argument of the functioning of the state at the margins of society, where different peoples and communities perceive the state's presence differently. Until recently, mainly political scientists dealt with the subject matter of governance, and that too in terms of institutional framework analysis. On the other hand, political sociologists and political anthropologists did not consider the state holistically in studying local communities. However, in contemporary academic practices, there has been a shift in the approach—social scientists have been applying the ethnographic method in looking at the power relations between the state and the people and the sociality involved in it. The state governs people's lives, which depend on the kind of relationship between the state and society, which is negotiated in various ways in everyday life. Interestingly, this relationship changes according to its environment. It is also important to look at the global politics in creating different concepts, categories and rhetoric. Words like governance, participatory development, cultural capital and social capital have dominated the contemporary governance discourse in the global level.

In sociology, the idea of hierarchy has a prominent place, as few societies have systems without a hierarchy. Hierarchy is a widespread feature of human society, reflected in many aspects and in varying degrees. The governance process may entail a system of super-ordination in terms of keeping everybody equal, but people will always try to manipulate the system to gain advantage over others, as will people at the margins to access scarce resources and services.

The Porous State and the Society

Mitchell (1991) suggests that the edges of the state are uncertain, but the societal elements have penetrated the state from all sides, and thus differentiating between the boundary of state and society is very difficult. Similarly, the state has also penetrated into various social spaces (Das and Poole 2004).

It is important to understand the deceptive character of the state. Nandy (1989) interprets the Constitution of India and argues that modernization will prevail, more Indian-ness will emerge, and the diversity of India will diminish so that people of the country will be governable. Bardhan (1984) argues that the state is controlled by rich farmers, industrial capitalists and bureaucrats. Some say the state is an idea while others argue it is a system. But Philip Abrams (1988) suggests that the relation between state system and state ideas should be more carefully examined. For Mitchell (1991), the state is important because of its political structure as a mythic or ideological construct. For him, the state should not be read as a structure but as a structural effect. Practices make the structure exist. Kaviraj and Chatterjee argue that the Indian bourgeoisie could not dominate the masses because it could not control the community through culture. Chatterjee argues that the postcolonial nation-state, embedded as it is within the universal narrative of capital, refuses to recognize any form of community except the nation itself. Culturally distinctive expressions of community identity are therefore antithetical to the modern Indian state, which generally seeks to subjugate them (Chatterjee 1986; Kaviraj 1984).

That the boundary between the state and the society is porous and permeable could be inferred from ethnographic experiences. However, and largely, people practise certain

rituals in everyday life where they feel that state (*Sarkar*)¹ is different from them. Symbols and signs separate ‘state’ from ‘society’, and it is often difficult to define what a state is and what it is not. There are debates in the social sciences, particularly in sociology and social anthropology, over how to study the state. The book *The Margin of the State* (2004), mentioned above, specifically looks at different practices of state and society interaction that sociologists and anthropologists take for granted and ignore. Various essays in this book show how state practices are produced and reproduced in most social spheres—from family to check gates and borderlines.

It is also an important task of sociology and anthropology to understand people’s perception, practices, and stratagems in negotiating with the state. I will discuss how people view and understand the state’s agenda. The state has mechanisms to keep the people in order and legitimize its presence through various social welfare schemes, but they receive and respond to these schemes in their own ways. We will also try to understand the mechanisms through which people settle scores and bargains. At the time of elections, for example, even vulnerable poor people can get to prove their importance by their voting power. Similarly, local intermediaries who are mostly affiliated to different political parties also try to mediate with the agencies of the state for various socioeconomic benefits for local communities.

Further, different communities perceive and use the agenda of the state differently. They have various meanings for the same thing. One of the main causes of the failure of governance is miscommunication between the state and the people. Often, members of political parties mediate between these two, and try to interpret various aspects of governance to the people. It can be argued that, often, people do not understand the language of governance, and that is when they find the role of intermediaries useful and crucial. At these times, intermediaries work as Hermes².

¹ Sarkar is a rough translation of government or state.

² Hermes is a god in Greek mythology. He is considered an intermediary between gods and humans who interprets the message of gods to the people and vice versa.

Research Problem

The study seeks to understand how people respond to various forms of governance, and how these forms mutate as they interact with the target populations. It is well recognized that while the state frames all the rules and policies of governance, many factors influence grassroots implementation of these rules and policies. Inter-linkages among the state, the society, the community and the market unfold its own permutations and combinations on the ground. This study attempts to understand how this happens, and how this shapes and facilitates interaction between the state and society.

Theoretical Framework and Research Approach

Generally, international agencies and global players produce and reproduce concepts of governance. It is interesting to analyse how the nation-state co-opts or operationalizes these concepts. Governance entails policy planning and evaluation. Generally, it is done in a centralised manner, where local considerations are hardly incorporated. Despite bitter experiences, severe lessons of failed programmes and implementations and unplanned consequences, why does the state follow governance patterns designed by so-called experts? What is the politics? Who benefits from these games of governance? This thesis attempts to understand these complex questions through experiences in local governance.

As James Scott (1998) casts doubt over state planned programmes in his work *Seeing Like A State*, this thesis seeks to understand these programmes as the citizens see it, i.e people's perceptions and ideas of the state, government and governance. This thesis draws on ethnographic studies of various elections, which are considered a pathway to better democracy, and analyses these in terms of performance and magic. Using the concept of neoliberal governmental politics developed by various scholars like David Harvey (2005) and Wendy Brown (2005, 2006), this study explores the politics of good governance in relation to the agenda of neoliberalism. This thesis analyses the interest of the World Bank and other multilateral organizations in the politics of developing countries and governance at the macro-level and tries to link this interest to everyday, local politics, thereby situating the Indian state in people's life. The core argument of this thesis is that the state may lay down governance rules and policies, but these assume various forms and characters at the grassroots, as mentioned above, and do not

translate exactly. The idea of ‘embeddedness’³ is used to explain the dynamics at the local level.

Objectives

The study aims to study people’s experience and engagement with governance in everyday life; understand the processes associated with governance in the local context; comprehend the idea of the state, the government, and governance as perceived by grassroots communities; analyse how the local social structures influence governance at the local level; and understand the relationship between the state and community during the time of elections.

Methodology

The theoretical perspective of this study is located in the debates and works of the scholars like Pierre Bourdieu, David Swartz, Gary Wickham, Newman, Kooiman, R J Pierre, Partha Chatterjee, James Scott and David Harvey on state, government, community, NGOs, CSOs and their inter-relationship.

The work is a field-based empirical study. The field study has combined ethnographic approach with the survey method to study the state–society relationship and how it impacts everyday life. The study has also used interview method for the purpose of primary data collection. For the collection of secondary data, the study depends on relevant books, newspaper reports, official documents, etc.

Period and Field Area of Research

This study was conducted in the Sonitpur District of Assam, which has three sub-divisions. Tezpur is one among them, and is divided into several developmental blocks, each of which is divided into many panchayats. Under Tezpur sub-division, there is Balipara development block, under which is Napam Panchayat, which is divided into 10 administrative wards. Fieldwork has been conducted in the villages of Napam, Bhitor Parowa, Noorbari tea garden and Amolapam under Napam Panchayat.

³ Here the use of embeddedness is borrowed from Karl Polanyi and Mark Granovetter. It is explained in Chapters 2 and 4. It shows how individual actions are constrained by various social considerations.

There are a number of factors for choosing the field sites. One is the diversity in ethnic composition and community. Another is accessibility to the field where the researcher is located. Every field worker, whether an insider to the society under study or outsider, is faced with the challenge of maintaining objectivity in the accounts of the field with which she/he establishes close relations. Srinivas talks about a situation where a researcher finishes the field study and starts writing the analysis, which forces him to emerge from the field and transform oneself into an impersonal analyst from being a participant observer. He starts “the process of writing about his experience for an impersonal and professional audience, which gradually produces for him a measure of distance from the field he has left behind” (Srinivas 2009, 165).

The fieldwork for the present study was conducted in different phases from 2009 to 2013. The reason for this long period of field study is that it sought to collect ethnographic data from various elections and study the state-society relationship, as it were, in the months prior to the different elections when this relationship between state, community and political parties becomes different than usual. While the common people become more important for political parties, including those in the government, the former also becomes more assertive in bargaining for their demands and rights. Activities conducted during the pre-election period thus offer significant insight into the engagement between society and the state. Since elections are held only periodically, the study had to wait for a comparative, comprehensive view of the state-society relationship as manifested during election times.

For the purpose of this study, data was collected across a number of communities based in the rural areas under the Napam Panchayat of Sonitpur District of Assam, which constitutes one of the most diverse demographic landscapes within the state. To grapple with the nuances of governance and politics in a multi-ethnic setting, the thesis examines the sociological dynamics involved in the processes of various elections, the most dominant and dramatic site of democratic participation and performance in India. Besides, the thesis also studies the day-to-day engagement of rural communities with state agencies, and the way it informs their relationship.

Many different communities inhabit this region. Samples of these communities have been drawn from the voters' list. To begin with, a cluster of different communities was

prepared from the list. Then, according to the population size of each community, a representative sample of each of them was drawn based on random sampling.

The field study on the election part was done in Tezpur and Behali, two Legislative Assembly Constituencies (LAC) under the Tezpur Parliamentary Constituency. Some field study was also conducted in the Dhekiajuli LAC under the Tezpur Parliamentary Constituency. The issues pertaining to governance were mostly studied in the Napam Gaon Panchayat, which comes under the Balipara Development Block of Sonitpur District.

The study on elections aims to prepare ethnographic details of the voting practices of people in a limited area. To achieve this goal, three select polling booth areas (Behali, Panchmile and Thelamara-Naharbari) of the Tezpur Parliamentary Constituency in the Sonitpur District of Assam were covered. These three polling stations were chosen to represent three different ethnic, cultural and geographically distinct areas, and utmost care was taken to select them so that these areas could be representative of the universe. Behali is dominated by tea garden workers (popularly called tea tribe in Assam), Panchmile area is inhabited predominantly by Muslims of immigrant origin and Nepalis, and the Thelamara-Naharbari area has the Bodo tribal groups as the majority community. These polling stations were selected based on purposive sampling and utmost care was taken to have representation of three different communities, which are numerically preponderant in these areas. It was expected to provide an opportunity for making comparative analysis based on social and political behaviour. This procedure allowed this study to gather opinions from different sections of the electorate. This study tried to find out the nature of voting decisions and gather views and opinions in the context of broader social and economic issues, because this study was designed to analyse social background of voters, their social and political values and perceptions. It also intended to evaluate the levels of groups and candidates and ascertain opinions on questions of public policy besides studying the nature of participation in political activities.

Data were collected primarily through interview schedules. This process was also supplemented by detailed observations of various activities in the polling booth area on the day of election. I participated in the election rallies and followed the campaign trails of various political parties and examined the response of the voters of various

communities. This provided the opportunity to meet and interview some of the voters and political campaigners, leaders and contesting candidates. The polling booth- based profiles of the voting activities have been prepared with the help of intensive fieldwork. This study thus tried to explore the relationships between workers of a political party and between the leaders and workers of the party and so the connection between the workers and voters. I attended public meetings and public rallies that were addressed by the candidates themselves and some other meetings organized at the village level. It was also observed that how workers campaigned and canvassed door to door and how voters were mobilized on voting day. The flyers, pamphlets, cassettes, CDs and banners of different candidates and parties were collected and analysed.

Riles (2006) takes ethnographic methodology to a new dimension. She suggests ethnography excites, provokes, and intrigues. In the academy in particular, in disciplines from law, sociology, and economics to literary criticism, scholars are turning to ethnographic work as a way out of over determined paradigms, as a theoretically sophisticated antidote to the excesses of theory. A number of contributors to the volume *Documents: Artifacts of Modern Knowledge* (2006) argue that documentation and documents are among the prime elements in modern bureaucratic governance. Documents are an inevitable part of the modern governance system. Therefore, it is necessary to analyse documents to have a meaningful understanding of the social transactions involved in governance. Riles writes: "Documents provide a useful point of entry into contemporary problems of ethnographic method for a number of reasons. Documents are paradigmatic artifacts of modern knowledge practices. Documents thus provide a ready-made ground for experimentation with how to apprehend modernity ethnographically" (2006, 2). The issue of D voters⁴ and access to the state's welfare mechanisms depend largely on necessary documents. This is discussed in some detail in Chapter 4.

I approached different party offices, spoke with party members, candidates in general and the common people in particular and reporters of different Assamese and English dailies especially of local correspondent of Dhekiajuli as well. The respondents were randomly taken from different areas of the universe. I visited some other selected areas of Tezpur town, Thelamara, Kawaimari, Naharbari, etc. Intensive fieldwork was

⁴ Doubtful or dubious category of voters in the electoral list. For details, please refer to Chapter 4.

conducted for one month before the polling. A cross-section of people at different levels, which included party workers at the grassroots and administration, authority, different civil society like Mahila Samity⁵, Dokani Sangha,⁶ were interviewed. The candidates in the fray were interviewed along with the voters to have an understanding of the general environment of the elections. The voters were observed minutely as to how they came to the polling booth, who accompanied them, how long they waited outside before and after voting, with whom different voters talked and how the different party workers tried to mobilize them at the last moment of voting.

Chapterization

The thesis has seven chapters, including the introduction and the conclusion. Chapter 1, that is, the introduction, discusses the theoretical framework and methodology of the study. This chapter briefly introduces the field set-up, where the fieldwork for the study has been conducted. It also explains the relationship between the state and society. Besides, based on relevant works, the chapter highlights the challenges in studying the state, which has various forms and manifestations.

Chapter 2 gives an account of the concepts, approaches and frameworks used in the study of governance. Locating governance within the larger social structure, the chapter discusses the idea of embeddedness in governance and the relation between governance and governmentality. It further discusses the paradigm shifts in the discourses of governance with the advent of neoliberalism. The chapter also discusses various models of governance. It recounts how formal structures of governance are generally adopted by the state machinery, but how informal structures are also important in the vernacular society. The chapter explores the possibility of studying governance through the lens of sociology. Finally, the chapter gives an account of the discourses on good governance and civil society and its impact on contemporary governance.

Chapter 3 presents an account of the demographic profile of the state of Assam and its ethnic, religious and cultural landscapes. It also provides a brief overview of the political systems of the pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial Assam. In that backdrop,

⁵ Literally, womens' association.

⁶ Shopkeepers' association

the chapter recounts the historical background of the Panchayati Raj Institutions and local self-government in Assam.

This chapter then introduces the villages selected for intensive field study and explains the rationale for the selection. It explains how the social and cultural diversities in Assam need to be considered to understand the implications of the process of governance at various levels. The chapter then describes and examines the three-tier structure of local governance in India with special reference to the specificities in Assam. People's perception of state and governance is also discussed. It also addresses the gender aspect of governance. Finally, the chapter examines the changes that the community life of villages is undergoing with the advent of Panchayat system.

Chapter 4 presents various data collected with respect to the issues under study, and analyses these data to gain insight into various government welfare programmes. The chapter examines the people's perception of development and governance in detail. While doing so, the study takes into account various indicators of social development like health, education, drinking water and sanitation and people's perception about them.. People's suggestions for improvement of various services are also enlisted. The chapter also discusses the people's interaction with various government agencies engaged in rural development.

The chapter then delves into the process of informal governance and the element of trust in the everyday life of the people. In this context, it explores the role of political brokers and clientelism in local politics. The politics around the issues of 'D' (doubtful) voters and citizenship is also discussed. These analyses enable us to compare and contrast the perspectives of beneficiaries of the welfare schemes with respect to ethnicity, caste, class, gender, age, education and so on.

Chapter 5 is based on the ethnographic study of three elections in Sonitpur District. Apart from analysing the voting patterns and voting behaviour, it explains electoral participation as a form of enacting citizenship. Further, it examines the political significance of electoral voting for various communities. It then analyses the question as to why people vote.

The chapter then discusses the campaigning and canvassing done by the political party workers and party leaders before the elections in order to understand the dynamics of

the election process. The study also highlights the activities that play out around the polling booth on the day of polling. It thus tries to capture the manner in which elections take the form of a ritualistic celebration.

Chapter 6 discusses the concept of neoliberal governmentality as developed by various thinkers such as David Harvey, Raymond Plant and Wendy Brown. It analyses the changing nature of the state in the context of neoliberalism, which implies the withdrawal of the state from various public welfare measures and explicates its manifestation and implications at the local level in the context Assam. The discourse on good governance has been mentioned with the political agenda of various international financial organizations.

Chapter 7 is the concluding chapter, which first presents a brief summary of the main arguments of each chapter of the thesis. It emphasizes the need to understand the dynamics of governance in multi-ethnic democracy like India from the micro level without ignoring macro perspectives. The conclusion outlines the implications of contemporary governance for the backward rural societies in India with special reference to the state of Assam.

Chapter 2

Sociologically Situating the State and Governance

In present times, if one looks at the dynamics of the state, its changing characteristics (from welfare mode to security mode) become evident. This chapter will discuss the ways in which the state has transformed and acquired a new avatar. In contemporary debate, it is acknowledged that the disciplining technology of the state looks less penetrative in terms of interfering in people's everyday life. It is also seen that state is trying to encourage individuals to take care of the self and family in terms of welfare mechanisms. It is introducing various modern mechanisms such as information and technology to collect revenue and taxes from the citizens. At the same time, investment in public expenditure has been reduced. Starting from health to education, in most of the critical social sectors, state is withdrawing its welfare mechanism. In a way, this has facilitated the privatization of the social sectors through the backdoor.

This chapter examines approaches and frameworks relevant to the study of governance, especially in relation to the state. It explores the possibility of studying governance through the lens of sociology. It locates governance within larger social structures and broader sociological processes. It also discusses the changing nature of the state and the shifts in the discourses of governance in recent times.

For conducting any research, internet sources and search engines have become imperative. When the word 'governance' was searched in the most popular search engine: Google, it gave about 145,000,000 results in 0.33 seconds. But most of the links it provided after the initial three pages were related to either good governance or corporate governance. Therefore, it is evident how the word governance is related to the corporates and how it has become a key term in the present world where neo-liberalisation has enmeshed the most parts of the globe. Anne Mate Kjaer reports that the term 'governance' in the Social Science Index during 1986-1998 occurred in 1,774 articles. But within the span of three

years from 1999 to 2001, the index enlists 1,855 articles. It shows the expanding popularity of the idea of governance in academia (Kjaer 2004).

In common parlance, 'governance' means the process or act of governing. Thus, it involves anything to do with the process of governing. It may include self-governance, state, family, community. The rule of law denotes the formal governance where as social governance is related to the community, which is a part of informal governance. But very often the meaning of the term 'governance' is confined only to the governance which is performed by state, leading to the confusion between government and governance. As mentioned, governance is a process or outcome of an action of an institution or an organization. There are various institutions, organizations, or bodies who are involved in the process of governance. It may be family, corporate organization, association, or government. The word governance can mean different things to different people depending on the time and context. So, it may be problematic to follow a particular pattern of governance or define it in a fixed term. Governance should be defined and conceptualised according to the context where it is practiced. In following section some of the meanings and patterns of governance are discussed.

Governance: Etymology and Concept

The origin of the word governance is obscure. Earliest usage of the term is found in Plato's work, *The Republic* (2007). Even Kautilya has used the idea of governance in the magnum opus *Arthashastra*. Etymology of the term 'governance' is derived from the Greek verb *kubernân* (to pilot a vessel or a tank) that was used for the first time in a metaphorical manner by Plato to imply to govern the men. It gave birth to the Latin verb *gubernare* that carried the same meaning. It has since then generated many terms in several languages. The term in French has first been used in the 13th century as equivalent of 'government' (art or manner to govern). In the 14th century, it was passed on to the English language, giving birth to the term governance (action or manner to govern)¹.

¹ For more discussion on this, please refer to < http://ec.europa.eu/governance/docs/doc5_fr.pdf accessed on August 16, 2009 >.

To define what is governance² is a difficult task. Though one of the main core issues of this study is governance, it will not be feasible here to do a survey of its different definitions, neither is there scope for surveying all the theoretical debates around it. This work intends to understand the process of governance in a particular field situation in sociological sense. Therefore, conceptualization and operationalization of the term 'governance' is limited to needs of this empirical study.

The concept of good governance is rooted in liberal philosophy and was later co-opted by multilateral financial institutions like the World Bank and IMF. However, it is often alleged that in the name of good governance, the state is acquiring the features of corporations and, through alliance with global finance capital, is acting against its subjects in many ways.

Generally, when we talk about government, it denotes machinery and institutional arrangements for the exercise of sovereign power for serving the internal and external interest of the political community, whereas governance has a foggy connotation, which is different from government (Mander and Asif 2012, 11). In fact right from antiquity, there have been rulers and kings who have been concerned with 'governance' through governing communities in various manners.

Governance as an idea is not new. Now the modern states, following the democratic constitutional demands, are involved in governance through a transparent mechanism of check and balance. Thus, in this study we discuss the patterns of changing mode of governance as experienced in this region. During last decades good amount of literature on governance are produced debating the nature and scope of governance. This work intends to add to this genre with empirical work.

The theme of governance is associated with social formation since antiquity. The necessity of governance became a core part of the society as it evolved from a simple to complex form. Therefore, the governance system is simpler in simple society and complex in most modern societies. It is not a new phenomenon. It was operated in simplistic manner when

² For more discussion on the definition and ambiguity of the concept governance please see (Jose 2009, Bevir and Rhodes 2003, Kjær 2004, Kooiman 1999, Newman 2005, Pierre and Peters 2000, Rhodes 1997)

division of labour was not very complex. Various social processes were managed within elementary units. But it became more sophisticated and complex with the advent of the modern state.

With the advancement of the society, changes in the process of governance took place in various stages. Even in the feudal system and under the rule of monarchs and kings, the issue of governance was important. The kings and chieftains have always claimed to have the 'divine right' to rule. Some have even claimed to be descendants of God . The priests often agreed to legitimize this divine kingship by manufacturing myths and scriptures (Mander and Asif 2012, 7). Similar worldview is part of *Vaishnavite* tradition in Odisha. It is believed that the king of Puri, who serves lord *Jagannath* and works as a keeper to the heritage, is an incarnation of lord Vishnu and should be given the respect of a God.

Sharma has drawn attention to Indic concepts that existed in ancient India. In his analysis of *Shantiparvam* chapter in the epic Mahabharata, he refers to terms Rajadharama, Dandaniti, Arthashastra, Rajyashastra and Nitishastra, which are the terms which guided the kings to ensure good governance. These terms are often used in the study of politics in ancient India. Sharma rightly claims that the Mahabharata is presumably the first Indian treatise on the science of governance. In Mahabharata, there are sections such as Rajadharama, Sabhaparvam and Vanaparvam, which deal with the issue of governance. The Rajadharama section constitutes part of Shantiparvam. Sharma observed that Mahabharata strongly condemns anarchy. Thus, the epic coaxed the people of kingless state to welcome any invading king because anarchy is the gravest sin on earth (Sharma 2003, 110–117).

The concept of citizenship with freedom in all aspects is attributed to the modern political system. It is also an integral part of the modern governance. Indeed, the idea of governance is variously embedded in polities of the ancient world. With the advent of enlightenment philosophy, a new awakening grew. People started questioning the authority of church and other religious institutions. People started participating in political activity with a rational thinking. They realized that the governance system is not managed by God or his representative king. They strongly felt that they are the ones responsible for their own lives. People realized that they can govern themselves.

In the writings of Confucius, Kautilya, Machiavelli, Akbar, and many other ancient scholars from the Greek, the issue of governance is discernable. They advocated on giving more power and authority to State. They have also suggested to exclude certain sections of society from participating in the process of governance (Mander and Asif 2012, 9). Governance as a concept and idea is dealt with in many disciplines such as political science, economics, geography, international relations, planning, public administration, social anthropology, -and sociology. While the governance was meant to be the act of government in the past, the new governance has implications and scope towards market and networks. This study will deal with idea of self-governance in terms of decentralized bodies involved in various programmes and relate this experience with broader neoliberal agenda, propagated by capitalist countries.

Mark Bevir writes, "Governance refers to all processes of governing, whether undertaken by a government, market or network, whether over a family, tribe, formal or informal organization, or territory, and whether through laws, norms, power, or language, Governance differs from government in that it focuses less on the state and its institutions and more on social practices and activities" (Bevir 2012, 1).

When the concept of governance is analysed, it gives different meanings. According to Jose, "governance is a concept that brings together multiple and diverse connections between ideas, interests and institutions. But 'governance' is more than simply a concept in the above sense; it is also a constitutive and transformative term. It is a constitutive term because it appears within numerous diverse fields of scholarship and analysis as a conceptual or theoretical means to harness and mobilise other concepts and ideas to form particular knowledge and understandings" (Jose 2009, 2). He argues that there are difficulties in defining governance because it is subject to transformation; it moulds and is moulded by other concepts, practices, and institutional locations (Ibid).

One of the oft-quoted works on governance is produced by sociologist Garry Stoker. He discusses the various characteristics of governance in the context of Britain. He mentions five propositions useful to formulate a theory of governance.-

1. Governance refers to a set of institutions and actors that are drawn from and also beyond government.
2. Governance identifies the blurring of boundaries and responsibilities for tackling social and economic issues.
3. Governance identifies the power dependence involved in the relationships between institutions involved in collective actions.
4. Governance is about autonomous self-governing networks of actors.
5. Governance recognizes the capacity to get things done that does not rest on the power of government to command or use its authority. It sees government as able to use new tools to steer and guide (Stoker 1998, 19–24).

Overall, Stoker argues that the governance perspective is similar to a map. It is time and place specific. It has meaning only in a particular context. The governance perspective should be developed in an evolutionary method to understand the changing process of governance. He writes “the world of governing is changing in ways which mark a substantial break from the past and that that changing world is worthy of study” (Stoker 1998, 26). Governance is ultimately concerned with creating the conditions for ordered rule and collective action (Stoker 1998; Jose 2007).

While discussing the concept of governance and its characteristics, Frantzeskaki *et al* define reflexive governance as the interactions between different actors and structure where each of them should be reflexive to each other and it should also incorporate multiple interests and uncertainties (Frantzeskaki *et al* 2009, 4). They conceptualise certain transitions in governance. On how the focus has been shifted from the state point of view to the interactive form of governance, they write, “interactive governance could be in this way, the foundation of a transitions governance paradigm given that it points at the dynamic nature of a societal system recognizing the complexity of social issues and problems” (Ibid, 5). Their idea of reflexive governance or interactive governance may be wonderful in concept and theory but in reality, it is very difficult to practice. In the field, where study has been conducted, majority of the people do not have participation in

governance, rather they are at the receiving end, mostly used as vote banks. Only during elections, these marginalised people have some power to exhibit and bargain with the members or leaders of the political party.

Ranabir Samaddar also talks of a transition of governance in Indian democracy from colonial period to post independence period. He discusses the governance of transition and how democracy negotiates with this transition. The question of democratic governance acquires particular relevance in the context of governing a wide variety of cultures. Along with the old governmental culture of 'mai bap sarkar' (government as mother and father) and 'huzur hazir' (Master/Lord/Sir, here is your servant ready to listen to your command) we now have 'e-governance' and 'virtual freedom' courtesy of the new electronic media (Samaddar 2010, 478). The idea of transition of governance from a traditional system to modern e-governance, as pointed out by Samaddar, may be useful in the urban context where most of the people are literate. But in a place like Napam, where majority of them are not literate or do not know the language of governance, e-governance may not be very helpful. They have to depend on the intermediaries with whom they have a love and hate relationship.

Various Models of Governance

a. Multi-level Governance (MLG)

MLG has entered the governance literature recently. Bache explains MLG in terms of two dimensions which are vertical and horizontal. The term MLG can be understood in two ways: MLG which has vertical significance, refers to the increasing interdependence of actors situated at different territorial levels such as supranational, national, and subnational region; and MLG, which has horizontal connotations refers to the increased role of non-state actors in decision-making (Bache 2007).

In MLG, (which is a non-hierarchical than other forms of governance), the state loses control over policymaking. European governance could be considered as one kind of MLG. It is drawn from the EU model. Kjaer refers to the MLG as complex and non-hierarchical nature of policymaking. But MLG need not necessarily involve all regions (local, national, and transnational) and unlike old, top-down forms of governance, gives importance to

horizontal networking (Kjaer 2004). Hooghe and Marks differentiate between two types of MLG. Of these two, one type of governance bears a resemblance to federalism. This model focuses on institution or governmental organization. It does not focus on the policies or the issues. The other type of MLG is comparatively complex. In this model, numerous jurisdictions overlap with each other. These are also flexible as it might demand certain kind of alteration as and when required. Here institution or authority is not important; rather issues and policies are. (Hooghe and Marks 2004).

One interesting feature of the MLG is that it emphasizes the location of power from the local to global. Here, every sphere has the ability to operate when it is necessary and required. MLG focuses on the continuously changing interconnections between various agencies located at various levels. It includes both public and private bodies.

Critics point out that in MLG hierarchical assumptions cannot be ruled out. Even when levels are not based strictly on hierarchy, it is bound to exhibit some sort of discrimination. This model does not seem to be compatible with reference to market and corporations vis-à-vis the state. This model of MLG does not clearly explain the role and power of the state.

b. Global Governance

Another form of governance which is discussed in governance literature is global governance. It is generally defined as the web of formal and informal organizations, their relationships and processes involved between state, international organizations, CSO, NGOs and market. Rosenau popularized this concept in many of his works. He refers to global governance or world governance as the political interaction of international and transnational actors where there is no power dynamics involved. The framework of global governance is used in solving a common problem that affects many nations (Rosenau 1995).

It is understood that due to globalisation there has been a significant change in the relationship between countries. In the process, global mechanisms developed to manage the international and transnational affairs. Rosenau defines global governance in terms of all regulations directed towards different institutions, organization, and centralization of all societies on a global scale. He points out that global governance can regulate the

interdependent relations in the absence of an overarching political authority, such as in the international system. Governance in the old sense denotes controlling or steering various organizations. Rosenau proposes the idea of governance without government (Rosenau and Czempiel 2000).

Global governance should not be confused with the term like world government. It became popular where two or more countries were affected by a similar kind of problem, which needed to be solved through international collaborative mechanisms. There are various forms of globalizations like economic, political, environmental, health, education, military and so on. International governance institutions deal with various issues related to environment, health, education etc.

Bevir explains global governance in terms of the involvement of NGOs, markets and networks that emerge around the transnational and international issues. It does not confine itself only to the action of state and international institutions. Global governance shifts attention from sovereign states in an anarchic international society to the creation, enforcement, and change in global patterns of activity (Bevir 2012, 83). Issues of peace, security, conflict resolution, poverty, health, and education are the concern of various countries. They try to solve these problems through the pattern of global governance.

Since last two decades, it has been seen that the institutions of global governance are mostly controlled by few western nations. In the pretext of addressing global problems, these countries try to hijack issues which are concerned to most of the developing countries such as basic health, environment, education and livelihood. Mostly it is seen that on the issues of global warming and nuclear proliferation, some powerful countries are trying to enforce their agenda on developing countries. So it can be inferred that the whole notion of global governance is not neutral or benevolent. It is having some sort of hierarchical or power relations within it.

c. Collaborative Governance

Governance literature emphasize that governance does not include only the affairs of state. Due to the advent of neoliberal policies, welfare state is outsourcing most of the welfare subjects like education, health, transportation, sanitation etc. to NGOs and CSOs. Then

governance demands a new form of rule. Policy makers have advocated a new form of governance, which is different from traditional form of governance. The demands of NGOs have become important in this respect. In this process a new form of governance has emerged which is called collaborative governance.

Defining collaborative governance, Bevir writes, “collaborative governance refers mainly to cases in which citizens play a more active role in policy—making or service delivery. Typically collaborative governance is an interactive process in which myriad actors with various interest, perspective, and knowledge are brought together” (Bevir 2012, 109). Ansel and Gash opine, “over the last two decades, a new strategy of governing called ‘collaborative governance’ has developed. This mode of governance brings multiple stakeholders together in common forums, with public agencies to engage in consensus-oriented decision-making” (Ansel and Gash 2007, 543). Bevir writes, “Collaborative governance differs from network governance, therefore, because it involves the citizens affected by a policy or service, not just private or voluntary sector organizations with which the state forms a contract or partnership. Again, collaborative governance differs from whole-of-government approaches because it brings citizens’ groups into the policymaking process, not just diverse government departments and agencies” (Bevir 2012, 109).

Ansel and Gash argue that collaborative governance has emerged as a response to the failures of downstream implementation and to the high cost and politicization of regulation. They define collaborative governance as “a governing arrangement where one or more public agencies directly engage non-state stakeholders in a collective decision-making process that is formal, consensus-oriented, and deliberative and that aims to make or implement public policy or manage public programs or assets” (Ansel and Gash 2007,545).

Participatory development and participatory decision-making processes have been eulogized much. They have also faced criticism. Collaborative governance also seeks participatory decision-making process, which is in much vogue now. It is alleged by the critics that in the name of participation, only some powerful people who have voice, represent the community. Often dominant individual or groups participate in the name of community participation. In this case, disadvantaged categories like women, ethnic minorities, religious minorities, landless workers, and vulnerable poor are left out. Cooke

and Kothari argue that participation is new form of tyranny in the process of participatory decision-making process. They articulate in a sarcastic manner that tyranny is the illegitimate exercise of power and participatory development facilitates this tyranny (Cooke and Kothari 2001). John Harris has shown how development has been depoliticized. An institution like World Bank has been using various terms and concepts like social capital in the arena of international development. Harris debunks the agenda of depoliticization by showing how institutions like World Bank systematically obscure class relations and power in the ground level (Harris 2001).

Berner offers a critique to the process of participation, he outlines four main categories, namely ritualistic, exploitative, exclusive and substitute participation. Ritualistic participation means little willingness on the part of development agencies and experts to share effective decision-making power, and consultative meetings become mere rituals to legitimize preconceived plans and to manipulate rather than facilitate the process. Exploitative participation is a disguised form of participation. In the name of creating ownership and improving efficiency, development agencies often require beneficiaries to contribute work and money. Exclusive participation deals only with leaders and powerful key informants in the name of community representative participation. Substitute participation looks for manipulation or distortion in the representation (Berner 2010). Collaborative governance can be one of the powerful tools but most of the times it can be hijacked and misused.

Pachayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) are somewhat modeled in the framework of collaborative governance. Government of India planned according to this model and implemented local level self-governance after the 73rd amendment of the constitution. In an area, where the majority of people are not conversant with the language of governance, or how to deal with official procedures, it is difficult for them to participate in the process of governance on their own. So in the name of participation and representation, as it is seen from the field study, local elites and petty political intermediaries most of the times take the benefits. Even if in principle collaborative governance sounds good, in practice it still has to deliver with respect to inclusive participation.

Formal and Informal Governance

Indigenous or tribal governance is seen as different from modern governance. Modern governance is based on a rational, legal aspect whereas indigenous governance follows a long tradition of community practised in the culture of that community. In contemporary times, it is seen that there is a conflict between the modern laws and customary laws. In many parts of India where tribal laws and rules were in practice, government has also recognized their practices as customary law. Most often there are clash between two systems of law and thus enforcing a decision becomes difficult. Often, lawmakers try to subsume the traditional law into the fold of modern laws. Scholars have discussed the prevalence and vibrancy of tribal institutions and customary laws in Nagaland, Meghalaya and other northeastern states where the practice of customary law has constitutional support (Das 1993; 2005; 2013).

Reilly argues indigenous governance should be accommodated within the framework of formal governance. Australian government has done it but not in a substantive way. He argues it should be more prominent and concrete. He writes, “indigenous governance describes the way indigenous people observe and practice their own laws independently of any obligations they have under mainstream law. It is also about how indigenous people negotiate the intersection of their own laws and the rights and obligations they have under the central legal system” (Reilly 2006, 407). The definition and patterns of indigenous governance law differ from context to context and country to country. In India schedule V and VI, recently introduced Forest Rights Act, 2006 try to provide justice to India’s tribes.

In the sociological framework, governance can be defined into two types. One is formal governance and another one is informal governance. Formal governance is based on rules, legal sanctions, encrypted legal codes and rationality. Whereas informal governance is based on social embeddedness where various social elements like kinship, ethnicity, language, religion, and community aspects come into play.

In a more comprehensive explanation of formal and informal governance Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith write:

All nations have both formal and informal governance systems—that is,

systems within which citizens and government officials interact. Governance involves both public decision-making and public administration. The formal systems are embodied in constitutions, commercial codes, administrative regulations and laws, civil service procedures, judicial structures, and so on. Their features are readily observable through written documents, physical structures (e.g., ministry buildings, legislatures, courthouses), and public events (e.g., elections, parliamentary hearings, state-of-the-union addresses, city council meetings, legal proceedings). The informal systems, by contrast, are based on implicit and unwritten understandings. They reflect socio-cultural norms and routines, and underlying patterns of interactions among socioeconomic classes and ethnic groups. Their manifestations are less easily noticed and identified. Thus, governance systems have a dual character; formal and informal elements exist side-by-side, and are intimately connected in diverse and not immediately obvious ways (Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith 2002, 2).

Many social scientists agree that most of the societies in the world are having both formal and informal governance. Guy Peters writes that ‘informal governance’ is conducted by actors and processes outside formal government (Peters 2007). This institutional dualism has its roots in the historical evolution of social relations between rulers and the ruled, from tribal chieftaincies, to kingdoms and empires, to feudalism and the emergence of the nation state. Yet, the changing blend of formal and informal governance elements does not connote a continuum from ‘traditional’ to ‘modern’ (Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith 2002, 2).

Wittek writes “informal governance combines the following elements: (1) The major determinant of individual action is social incentives.(2) Positions and roles in informal social networks determine access to information, and form the starting point for the emergence of norms. (3) Legitimacy of rules is not grounded in a formal-legal basis. Non-compliance, therefore, also cannot be legally enforced” (Wittek 2007, 81).

In a country like India, it is very difficult to understand the overall process of governance. There are diverse societies with multiplicity of religion, ethnicity, and language and so on. Many societies still practice their age-old traditional form of governance. Like in many

tribal and hilly regions, they have their own traditional bodies of local governments who decide most the problems and even try to resolve the conflict within the community in extra-legal manner. Examples of such governments can be found in the Khap Panchayats in Haryana and the traditional Panchayats in many other societies in India. It is generally thought that these traditional institutions are defunct or are not having any influence on the formal governance structure. However, it is not true. These bodies influence the working of the local level governments. Traditional bodies also considerably influence the election process in the local level elections. They also have importance in selection of the beneficiaries and development projects in their area.

In this condition, there is a blend of both modern and traditional forms of governance. If one tries to look at it from sociological point of view, it will not be wrong to bring in the informal governance into the study of governance. In most of the informal governance systems, the power to define right and wrong does not necessarily rest on the legal authority or written codes but on the elders, headmen, and other local specialists who are authorized to explain local customs. Thus, informal governance is dependent on informal 'leaders' who have social positions and are traditionally recognized. From this study, it emerges that in Napam area where the study has been conducted, informal governance has a strong presence. This will be discussed in the Chapter 4 how individuals run private bank, which does not have any relation to the government or tax department. They run it on their own, villagers deposit money and eventually get loan from the individual banker. This can be articulated under the system of informal governance and embedded governance. This can also be seen as a patron and client relationship, where they get loan only if they are dependent on the moneylender who runs the bank. This also implies how paper works, documents create a wall between state machinery and people who want to avoid documents work.

Understanding Social Structure

One of the main objectives of the sociology until date is to understand the structure of society and the social processes within it. As the title of my study—sociology of governance—suggests, it is important to understand the idea of social structure in relation to different processes involved in governance.

To begin a sociological inquiry, it is important to figure out the social structure where the study is being conducted. The word social structure is one of the most debatable and contested concepts in social sciences. Particularly in sociology it is often so. The concept social structure is not very clearly defined and operationalized because it has a very vague meaning in sociological literature. To illustrate this problem, Lopez and Scott write “indeed, social structure is treated as a taken-for-granted concept that is not in need of any explicit definition or discussion. Actual uses of the concept, however, are strikingly nebulous and diverse. As a result, there is little consensus over what the word means, and it is all too easy for sociologists to be talking at cross purposes because they rely on different, and generally implicit, conceptions of social structure” (Lopez and Scott, 2005:1). In this study, it is out of the scope to deal with the debate on social structure or discuss its historical and theoretical traditions but I am interested in looking at the social structure in the field of governance. Often it is seen that there is a continuous negotiation between the society and governance. Briefly looking at the idea of social structure will be helpful to understand the larger framework of governance in the society.

Lopez and Scott state, “the meaning of a concept cannot be determined with reference to every language; its meaning has to be understood in the context of the conceptual discursive networks in which it is embedded and used” (Lopez and Scott 2005, 2). Various postmodern thinkers and post-structuralists argue that meaning of a concept is open to multiple interpretations but in social science one has to define and operationalize the concept and only then can one proceed and explain the social processes that one observes in the field of research by using the concept.

Lopez and Scott discuss that there has been a long-term coexistence of two different conceptions of social structure. One is institutional structure, which comprises the cultural and normative pattern that underlines the expectations that agents hold about each other's behaviour and their enduring relations with each other, which in the larger framework are governed in the society as expected from each other. The other one is relational structure. As Lopez and Scott write, “(H)ere social structure is seen comprising the social relations themselves, understood as patterns of causal interconnection and interdependence among

agents and their actions, as well as the positions that they occupy” (Lopez and Scott 2005, 3).

Then what kind of relationship among people in a society will be helpful in explaining the dynamics of governance. Here in this context another approach to social structure might be useful. Lopez and Scott term the idea of social structure proposed by Giddens, Foucault and Bourdieu as ‘embodied structures’. This concept might be helpful to understand the ground level reality in the field where study has been conducted. The fundamental way in which people respond to a situation which is grounded in relational and institutional structure is on the basis of the knowledge available to them (Lopez and Scott 2005, 90). Lopez and Scott write, “the social structure of society, then, consists of the particular complex of collective relationships and collective representations, forms of attachment and regulation, they give the society its specific characteristics” (Lopez and Scott 2005, 16). Redcliff-Brown writes “The social life as a phenomenal reality is a process consisting of a multitude of actions of human beings, more particularly their interactions and joint actions. The particular events of the social life are the facts to which all our concepts and theory must be applied” (Radcliffe-Brown1995, 118).

Radcliffe-Brown argues, “(I)n social structure the ultimate components are individual human beings, thought of as actors in the social life, that is as persons and structure consists of the arrangement of persons in relation to each other” (Radcliffe-Brown1995). He maintains, “the structural features of social life of a particular region consist of all those continuing arrangements of persons in institutional relationships which are exhibited in the actions and interactions that in their totality make up the social life” (Radcliffe-Brown1995, 123).

Social structure plays an important role in shaping the nature of society in terms of intercommunity relationship to the governance. The idea of ‘embodied structures’ is relevant to understand the field situation in Napam. Access to various provisions of the state is mediated by various axes of identity such as religion, caste, ethnicity, class and gender. People who are in power are often related with the supposed beneficiaries of the welfare schemes though these linkages. Chances of accessing state provisions are greater if

somebody is linked to the officials or Panchayat functionaries on the lines of religion, caste or ethnicity. This is discussed at some length in Chapter 4.

Governance and Embeddedness

It is evident from the preceding section on formal and informal governance that how non-state actors are involved in certain practices, which do not come under the formal rules and regulations of the state. Then it leads to an interesting facet, the idea of embeddedness. In this study the idea of embeddedness is used to some extent. Sociologists and social anthropologists have pointed out how certain obligations always remain crucial in the sphere of formal transactions in the everyday interaction with the state.

In explaining the idea of embeddedness in governance, I have borrowed the concept from Karl Polanyi and Mark Granovetter. In his historical study of British economy, Karl Polanyi has argued that market and sociopolitical institutions are embedded within each other. Polanyi states that applying economic models to non-market societies will not be compatible and feasible. Economic processes were always embedded within noneconomic institutions like kinship and religious institutions (Polanyi 2001). Taking the concept further, Mark Granovetter argued that even in modern market conditions, economic activity cannot be seen separately from the society. Various kinds of obligations and loyalty come into play during the economic transactions that people are involved in (Granovetter 1985).

Granovetter tries to find a middle way between under-socialized behaviour and over-socialized behaviour in economic action. He questions how behaviour and institutions are affected by social relations. In sociology and social anthropology, it has been analysed how economic action is embedded in social relation but Granovetter believes it has been over emphasized. Economic action and rationality are embedded in a social relationship, which cannot be seen in isolation. Conventional economic analysis considers that economic behaviour of the individual is not affected by any kind of social relations. The concept of embeddedness argues against this idea. It asserts that economic behaviour of an individual is embedded in social relations. Later sociologists believed that due to modernization, economy was separated from the society unlike pre market societies and they did not pay

much attention to the analysis of market and economic behaviour as an object of sociological research (Granovetter 1985).

The concept of embeddedness holds the core argument for Granovetter. He writes, “a fruitful analysis of human action requires us to avoid the atomization implicit in the theoretical extremes of under- and over socialized conceptions. Actors do not behave or decide as atoms outside a social context, nor do they adhere slavishly to a script written for them by the particular intersection of social categories that they happen to occupy. Their attempts at purposive action are instead embedded in concrete, ongoing systems of social relations” (Granovetter 1985, 487).

Trust is considered an important aspect of any kind of social transaction in society. Even if this factor has sometimes been downplayed by economists, in sociological analysis it is very important. From the field data, I have tried to show that during the time of distribution of resources and goods, trust and social relations help. Even people belonging to very poor strata deposit money with the individuals who runs private banks, only on the basis of trust and that trust is generated through social network and prior relationship. People deposit money in expectation of getting interests on their deposit and most important expectation is to get loan from the individually run private bank. Here they have both the element of trust and calculations. This trust eventually put pressure on the individual who collects money from the villagers and petty shopkeepers to restrain from doing any kind of malpractice. Even for Granovetter, trust is a feature of social network and social relations. He writes “the embeddedness argument stresses instead the role of concrete personal relations and structures (or ‘networks’) of such relations in generating trust and discouraging malfeasance” (Granovetter 1985, 490).

Then it will not be correct to state that trust is over emphasized category in the analysis of economic behaviour. There is always an amount of trust in any kind of social transaction. Granovetter argues “the embeddedness approach to the problem of trust and order in economic life, then, threads its way between the oversocialised approach of generalized morality and the undersocialized one of impersonal, institutional arrangement by following and analysing concrete patterns of social relations” (Granovetter 1985, 493).

Governance is framed according to various rules and regulations. It has its own framework and mechanism of delivery. But when it comes to practice, it takes its own course. The well-defined procedure and legality does not always work in the ground level. It takes through various permutations and combinations in the delivery of the goods and services. Various interpersonal relationships based on caste, religion and ethnicity come into the scenario. So most of the times, believing too much in the bureaucratic plan and policy may not give the desired results. So in this kind of situation, relying on purely codified form of governance may not give us the correct representation of the ground reality. When we acknowledge failure of governance, it might be more useful for us to understand the grassroots reality. It is apt to acknowledge that human behaves in both ways by mixing the formal and informal mode of governance. Therefore Granovetter suggests that “most behaviour is closely embedded in network of interpersonal relations and that such an argument avoids the extremes of under- and oversocialised views of human action” (Granovetter 1985, 504). During fieldwork, many people opined that there has always been favouritism based on various considerations like kinship relation, religious affinity and political party affiliation.

There has been a shift in sociologists' approach towards studying the state and governance. Sociologists and social anthropologists earlier engaged in the study of society in micro terms. But recently they have started studying the local process through ethnographic method while contextualizing the phenomenon in global terms. Governance is no longer limited to the nation, state or government. It includes the international agencies as well as non-state actors. Presently, it is acknowledged that there is hardly anything that can be referred to as 'local' literally. The global process becomes more penetrative in everyday local practices. Various forms of governance and state are related to the global phenomenon in political, economic, cultural aspects.

The idea of embeddedness of social structure in governance is important to analyse in a sociological inquiry. In the Napam area, it is found that people feel more connected if somebody is placed in the government offices or holding power in Panchayat. Even if it is not always true, majority of the respondents feel that beneficiaries are selected on the basis of relationship with Panchayat functionaries. Gaon Sabhas are not conducted according to the rule of the PRIs, so decision making processes largely are with Panchayat functionaries.

Thus, various social elements are embedded in the governance system, and determine the outcome of any kind of decision at the local level. This issue is dealt with in detail in chapter 4.

State and Society: A Porous Link

If we try to understand sociology itself, it's one of the goals is to understand governance in formal and informal forms. When it comes to governance in various forms, it includes how human beings govern themselves to endure in the larger process of governance. In the later part, we will discuss about the governance that is related to the state. But we govern ourselves in everyday life without necessarily involving the state. As per Foucauldian argument through governmentality, we develop certain custom and norms. Custom may be the closest word that Foucault tries to explain through the idea of governmentality. May it be the culture, politics, economics or any other social processes; there governance is significant in playing a role in it.

The object of research for sociology and social anthropology has been changing quite substantively since last few decades. Shift from studying community to state has also gained popularity. Here the crucial thing, which is not to be missed, is the changing nature of state and the relationship between state and society. Thereby, it calls for a change in ethnographic gaze to study the new state and its characteristics or manifestations.

One striking point of this study is the language of governance. This study will delve into the idea of a language, which is very important to handle the process and power of governance. The study found that people who are aware or equipped with the language that governance demands are better placed in the social structure of governance. Others who are not well equipped or simply do not possess the skill of the language of governance are at the receiving end. It is very critical and interesting to note the role of NGOs or civil societies in the process of community development. It will not be wrong to say that in many cases NGOs are the extension of the state itself. As the name suggests, NGOs perform certain activities that the government should carry out. From various ethnographic studies conducted on state and development, we can see that hardly there are cases where these civil society organizations and NGOs are challenging the age-old established practices

rather than reproducing the same with a different name (Mosse 2005; Harris 2001; Kamath 2002).

Theda Skocpol argues that states are not always capable of intervening in different areas of socioeconomic life of people. States are also involved through different international activities like global finance and investment. She writes, “states necessarily stand at the intersections between domestic sociopolitical orders and the transnational relations within which they must maneuver for survival and advantage in relation to other states” (Skocpol 1999, 8). Skocpol emphasizes the relationship and nexus between state and society. She urges for a new theoretical understanding of states in relation to social structures. “We do not need a new or refurbished grand theory of ‘the state’. Rather, we need solidly grounded and analytically sharp understandings of the causal regularities that underlie the histories of states, social structures, and transnational relations in the modern world” (Ibid: 28).

From this fieldwork, it is evident that some people still consider state as a paramount structure whereas some people think it is not as important in their day to day life. For some poor people, state is perceived not as an antagonistic but as a benevolent structure. They have lot of expectations from the state. Most of the time people complain that state is not taking care of them as it should have. They believe they are powerless. Only state is their protector and guardian. In the time of destitution, it can help them and save them from misery.

Neither ‘society’ nor ‘state’ is a fixed or static category. Society keeps challenging and influencing the state and the state keeps changing from one position to another with necessary alterations with the society to sustain. State has its own limitations in many ways. It cannot put surveillance mechanism everywhere sometimes it backfires, in rural areas people make their own way by subverting to it.

Sociologically Locating the Study of Governance

It is imperative at this stage to trace the early ideas of the founding fathers of sociology, to see if they offer anything useful in understanding the process of governance. Among many others, Weber, Marx and Durkheim’s contributions to sociology of governance are worth mentioning. The Encyclopedia on Governance suggests that Weber’s theory offers more

avenues to understand modern governance than Marx and Durkheim. But Marx and Durkheim still help in many ways to formulate a quite comprehensive base to understand governance from a sociological perspective. As it has already been mentioned, one of the aims of governance is to control the known object. Here Durkheim's idea of morality and social control appear to be useful. Similarly Marx's analysis of class divisions in the capitalist society and control over the means of production can be analysed from the governance perspective. In a broader way, it can help us to understand capitalism which is related to the state and creates chasms in society. Apart from these forerunners of sociology, Robert Putnam, Pierre Bourdieu, Michel Foucault, James C. Scott, and Mark Granovetter have also contributed to the study of governance from sociological perspectives. Many more literatures are produced in and around sociology of governance.

Max Weber's contribution to sociology can form the solid pillar to sociology of governance. In the book *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretative Sociology*, Weber has outlined many issues with sociological insight. This can be in real sense termed as sociological in its analysis. Social scientists consider his intellectual contribution to social science literature as 'sociology of domination'. Marx, Durkheim and Weber's literature in sociology is the product of a modern society. All of their central themes centre on social change in modern and pre-modern society. It can be argued that Weber can be taken as the founding father of the sociology of governance because his works on rationality, bureaucracy, economic action, sociology of law, political communities, domination and legitimacy are essential to analyse the modern governance system.

In most of his writings, especially in *Economy and Society*, Weber has shown how society has changed from traditional to modern form. In the case of traditional authority, it had obligations to the community. Whereas the modern state system is more rational and neutral, the rational legal authority will take up the modern role without any prejudice. State has a power of domination and exerts coercive force with legal means. To explain more he analyses the concept of disenchantment. In its literal terms it means adopting rationality, which helps in demystification of society. Weber argues, in modern societies unlike the traditional one, people have faith in scientific, bureaucratic rationality as opposed to the earlier society, which believed in magic and myth. But, in reality, it is difficult to

demonstrate that. Even today, in Indian society, literate people believe in supernatural power and magic. During elections, performing *Puja* is an important act for many political leaders. In Chapter 5, it is explained, how certain leaders encompass magical power to influence people.

There is a shift in the analysis of power of the state. Weber's notion of power is different from Foucauldian analysis of governmentality. Weber stresses on state's power to exert force on the subject with legal means. This holds true even today in the contemporary analysis of the state. Whereas Foucault argues that modern state has developed various mechanisms in terms of technology of the rule, in explaining governmentality, he says the state does not necessarily employ the force to subjugate its population; rather, through subtle ways it moulds and creates subjects by which they can be best governed.

Blatter argues that from a sociological point of view, we need to develop more holistic approach to understand the relationship between the state and society. "The state is no longer an instrument for the realization of societal goals; rather the state and society interact as co-producers, in order to give society self-reassurance and identity, to mobilise self-regulatory potentials and to guarantee societal integration" (Blatter 2012, 9).

Fox and Ward suggest that from a sociological perspective, one has to look at how governance functions properly within a social context imbued with cultural values where power is distributed unevenly. They argue sociology can help us in analysing how governance affects individuals and institutions in shaping social organization. The authors emphasize that there is a "need to know where and when objects and practices become subjects for governance, how governance varies and adapts over time, and what this tells us about social organization, conflict, resistance and ideology" (Fox and Ward 2008, 1).

Fox and Ward outline three broad perspectives within sociology that have addressed the issue of governance. One is interest-based accounts, in which groupings with material stakes influence the shape of governance, second are value-based approaches, which assess how governance regimes reflect institutional values and cultural contexts, focus upon the 'macro' level of politics and state regulation. The third is governmentality perspective derived from Foucault's notion of technology of rule. It looks at government strategy to

rule the subject and the impact of governance on the governed population (Fox and Ward 2008, 5).

Wittek tries to formulate three approaches that are apt for sociological analysis towards the governance of organization. He writes there are three general theoretical frameworks that seem to guide research on governance. These are the rationalist, structuralist, and culturalist approaches. Each of them considers a different aspect of governance. He describes “rational choice theorists see governance primarily as incentive structures that influence individual interests. Proponents of culturalist explanations conceptualize governance primarily as the socialization and internalization of norms and values, and consequently consider governance practices as the definition of identities, structuralists consider the behaviour of individuals to be primarily determined by their position in institutionalized power structures”(Wittek 2007, 74).

Of late, it has been realized that governance is different from government as it involves the non-state actors. Community, civil society, market are all part of governance mechanism. Sociology facilitates us to understand society and provides us various perspectives to understand the same. Now many sub-disciplines have grown within the framework of sociology specializing in diverse themes. Until recently, governance was dealt with by political scientists in the domain of public administration and public management. It was used even in business management. Gradually, various factors compelled sociologists to analyse the issue of governance in relation to the society, but it is yet to be established as a fully developed sub-discipline of sociology like sociology of religion, political sociology, economic sociology and so on.

Sociologists mainly used to analyse the subject of governance under the purview of political sociology and economic sociology. Recently, the social dimension of governance has been emphasized. Therefore, there is a need to develop some perspectives that can be useful to study this subject. Entry on ‘sociology of governance’ in the Encyclopedia of Governance states, “If sociology is the study of society, and governance is the activity of managing or ruling human affairs, then the sociology of governance is the study of the societal dimensions of managing human affairs. No established subfield named the ‘sociology of governance’ exists within the discipline of sociology, ... this entry argues that

classical and contemporary sociology has much to say about the theory and practice of governance”(Ansell, 2007, 901).

Generally governance is understood as a function of managing or ruling human affairs. Until the late 1980s, there was no specialized subfield such as sociology of governance in practice but after that, some scholars have initiated to develop the sub-discipline of sociology of governance. To discuss the theory and practice of governance from a sociological point of view, it is important to mention the forerunners of sociology who have contributed to this subfield without specifying the field as sociology of governance.

Sociology of governance may take up the issues of dominance and power more specifically to analyse different dimensions to it; how people resist power or how consent is manufactured to rule them. Foucault and Bourdieu are interested in the societal dimension of power and how it operates in the society. Both of them have written quite substantively on the issue of power and state. Their works are more apt to be put under the domain of sociology of governance (Bourdieu 1993; Foucault 1984, 1991).

Ansell suggests that three different perspectives can be used to understand the relationship between society and governance. The first is basically civilizational or cultural. This suggests the societal perspective with the social dimension of human collectivities. Here personal relationship and sociality influence the social behaviour of human beings, which is a kind of social approach to governance. In the second one, he talks of differentiation perspective, which is generically linked with the modernization approach. It is believed that in modern society, economy is differentiated from the society. Society can be governed distinctly from the economy. This perspective has been criticised by many sociologists and anthropologists like Polanyi and Granovetter. The third one is the embeddedness perspective which emphasises that sociality is embedded in all spheres of activities. This approach argues economic and political activities have a social dimension, which cannot be ignored. Therefore, state, politics and economy are embedded in the society (Ansell, 2007).

Sociologist Andre Beteille suggests that the task of the sociologist is to understand the functioning of the society and working of the governance. Sociology is not a policy science, it is a reflective discipline. It should critically understand the functioning of the society. He

emphasizes the difference between policy analysis and policy prescription. He says even best designed policies have unintended consequences. He thinks sociology is at its best when it examines the unintended consequences of policy. For this, sociology of governance should focus on policy analysis rather than on policy prescription³. Ansel argues in the same line. He writes sociologists seek to understand the sources of power in society and how it is wielded to produce both desirable and undesirable outcomes (Ansel 2007).

Social scientists argue that over the period the discourse on governance has taken a very strong position in academic and political arena. It seems the development discourse has been replaced by the discourse on governance, but critics do not see it as a neutral term. They are skeptical about the idea of good governance. They feel it may not be what it looks from the outside. One has to go into the political economy of the term and in which sense it has been used. Ansell suggests that “it is important to acknowledge that governance may be a benign expression for domination or social control” (Ansell, 2007, 902). It may be true to a large extent, but we also need to look at the case of individual human beings where they try to govern themselves. In self-governance, it is not always about control or domination. Rather it is about orienting oneself to adjust in the society to be part of the process of governance in a broader scale.

Governmentality and Governance

A large number of social scientists have taken clue or inspiration from Foucault’s idea of governmentality. Though he has not directly discussed the concept of governance what we discuss generally in the present context, a meaningful analysis of his idea certainly leads to the idea and concept of present-day governance discourse. Foucault has emphasized in many of his works that it is difficult to point out state in a concrete structure. The state is produced from practices rather than as a thing. While defining governmentality, he writes:

“This word [government] must be allowed the very broad meaning which it had in the sixteenth century. ‘Government’ did not refer only to political structure or the management of states; rather it designates the way in which the conduct of individuals or states might be directed: the government of

³ Andre Beteille, personal interview with me on October 25, 2013.

children, of souls, of communities, of families, of the sick. It did not cover only the legitimately constituted forms of political or economic subjection, but also mode of action, more or less considered, which were designed to act upon the possibilities of action of other people. To govern, in this sense, is to structure the possible field of action of others” (Foucault quoted in Hunt and Wickham 1994, 24).

It is interesting to understand Foucault’s concept of governmentality and governance, and how it analyses the conduct of conduct. It tries to produce the subjects that are best suited for ruling. I am interested in people’s strategies to counteract the state. In the process of negotiation with the state mechanism, people often devise certain strategies to get the best deal out of the negotiation. I am also interested in citizens’ or subjects’ manoeuvring of the state. It is interesting to see how they try to change or evade rules and regulations best suited to them so that they can be ruled according to their convenience.

Hunt and Wickham discuss Foucault’s idea of disciplinary society, how certain state disciplinary mechanisms led to the emergence of a disciplinary society. Power is inscribed in social life and self-constituted itself as a subject (Hunt and Wickham 1994, 23). Various authors owe their understanding of governance to Foucault’s idea of governmentality. The simplest definition of governmentality according to me is ‘custom’. Foucault defines governmentality in terms of the conduct of the conduct that means how people govern themselves; government produces that technology of rule to shape people’s behaviour. Training and shaping of behaviour in family, schools, workplace and wider society are the best example of the technology of governmentality. Jose argues that equating Foucault’s idea of governmentality with governance will lead to confusion. He adds that it is doubtful that Foucault ever used the term ‘governance’, either directly as a distinct term or indirectly as a nun-named cluster of ideas that are now understood as ‘governance’. The presumed Foucauldian basis for ‘governance’ rests on a confusion of discourses (Jose, 2010a). Quoting Foucault’s various works he argues that governmentality is a mode of governance which shifts the state’s governing principle to the conduct of the population. This governmentality which is concerned with “identifying the mentalities of government and governing, about the specific institutional arrangements, understandings and practices, the

technologies of power (like governance) that those within apparatuses of governing bring to bear on any given problem of political rule” (Joes 2010b, 128).

Fox and Ward substantiate their argument with the Foucault’s idea of governmentality as a useful sociological category to analyse governance. This approach principally looks for the relationships between power, knowledge and subjectivity. They write governmentality studies examine the subjectivities produced by the disciplinary regimes that govern how people should act and behave. Broadly, sociological perspective on governance according to them focuses on certain key themes like power, interests, values and subjectivities (Fox and Ward 2008).

Structure, Agency and Governance

In the discourse of governance, the dichotomy of structure and agent will not be very productive to understand the nuance of the state and society relationship. In the sociological tradition, there has been a long debate on structure and agency. If we need to achieve any meaningful understanding, then we need to look at both structure and agency from a holistic point of view. Dealing with both structure and agency, Bourdieu analyses the practice of governance by explaining field and habitus. He focuses on the social practices and how it is embedded in the social structure. Anthony Giddens also shows that instead of looking at the structure and agency in a binary position, it is productive to look at both agency and structure simultaneously. Giddens explains that structures impose on agency at the same time through the continuous social practices, agency influence and create the structure.

David Swartz argues that for Bourdieu politics is the core of his sociological analysis. He writes “Bourdieu’s sociology makes no distinction between the sociological approach to the study of the social world and the study of the social power. Bourdieu sees all of sociology as fundamentally dealing with power. He therefore rejects the validity of a substantive area of investigation that might be considered as specialized in the study of only the power dimension of social life” (Swartz 2010, 140).

Swartz writes “Bourdieu sees the very foundation of the social order as a struggle among various collectivities to impose as legitimate their particular identities and definitions of the

social world. This occurs through struggle over the right to exercise that symbolic function. The task of sociology is to reveal the underlying character of those legitimation struggles. Viewed this way, all sociology for Bourdieu is in fact sociology of politics” (Swartz 2010, 143). Swartz in his analysis tries to locate Bourdieu’s concept and ideas, which can be useful in governance analysis. Policy makers and professionals with their so-called expert knowledge associate with the state to formulate policy. Bourdieu emphasizes on stratifying effects of culture in the political arrangements. “Bourdieu’s field analytical approach to politics, like the new governance perspective, brings into play a broader range of power centres contributing to political life than do the approaches focused on the central organism of government”(Ibid, 151).

Bourdieu’s notion of social capital and cultural capital are often regarded as important categories in the field of sociology of governance. Those who have community linkage and support base tend to do better in terms of receipt of goods and services in the local level. Here, Giddens’ idea of structure and agency could be useful to understand the social and political transactions in the ground level. Giddens argues it is not only structure that influences human agency; it is shaped by the agency as well. Structure is both medium and outcome of reproduction of practices. Like an individual’s agency is influenced by structure, at the same time structure is also maintained through the practice of agency. From Giddens’ idea, it is argued that social structures have no inherent characteristics without human action or a priori to human agency. Rather it is socially constructed and the agency’s reflexivity modifies the social structure where it operates (Giddens 1984, 1986).

Knowledge, Governance and Failure

Sociology of knowledge is considered to be one of the oldest sub-disciplines of sociology. In this domain, sociologists have contributed to a large scale on the politics of production and reproduction of knowledge. In its analysis, sociology does not look at knowledge from a neutral point of view. Often, knowledge is regarded as rational and apolitical. But various authors have argued how knowledge is a social construct. In the governance discourse, knowledge of the experts is taken as foremost and often not questioned but, through his study, James Scott has shown that how expert knowledge is prone to failure. Generally, policies are made in the centre without taking account of the local specificity. Similarly,

Timothy Mitchell has argued how the rules of the experts have failed in the context of Egypt (Scott 1998, Mitchell 2002).

Scott in his monumental work, *Seeing Like A State* argues that state always wants to domesticate its subject. He argues “state has always seemed to be the enemy of people who move around” (Scott 1998, 1). He further deals with the issue in his book *The Art of Not Being Governed*. Here he discusses how people in the Zomia⁴ stay away from the reach of the state. The issue here that I want to focus on, is the failure of governance. I would argue in the line of Scott how certain schemes and policies of the state are bound to fail because of their ill-conceived design. He writes “state always wants to make the society legible, to arrange the population in ways that simplified the classic state functions of taxation, conscription, and prevention of rebellion” (Scott 1998, 2).

Social scientists have argued that the main problem lies with modernity and with modern statecraft. In ancient times, prior to the modernization state functioned in a different manner. Scott argues that it is with the modern state that the process of standardization began. He argues, “(T)his process of social simplifications not only facilitated the system of modern taxation and conscription but also greatly enhanced state capacity in the discriminating interventions of public-health measures, political surveillance, and relief for the poor” (Ibid, 3).

Another issue that has faced severe criticism is the idea of social engineering. The modern idea of changing social things with technological intervention has backfired with the process of social engineering. Most well-meaning policies and programmes intended for the poor have failed, such as the concrete toilet scheme provided by the government. In Assam, people use this toilet to store grains since these poor people do not have a good place to store their food grains. Similarly, introducing a food pattern, cash crops or work culture alien to local people will tend to fail drastically. The introduction of cash crops into hill and tribal regions of Assam has failed. Cash and commercial crops in place of traditional crops

⁴ Zomia as a concept first used by Willem van Schendel which refers to the high land areas in South East Asia region. Later it was used by James C Scott in his work ‘The Art of Not Being Governed’

have hampered farming patterns thereby affecting larger social structures in the northeast region. If this continues, there may be farmer suicide cases in Assam like Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Kerala (Das and Nath 2013).

In a similar trend, Scott shows with various examples how schemes of social engineering have failed. He argues most tragic episodes of state-initiated social engineering originate in a pernicious combination of four elements, which create disaster in society.

- i. Administrative ordering of nature and society i.e. the transformative state simplifications
- ii. High-modernist ideology which is about 'interests' as well as faith
- iii. An authoritarian state willing and able to use the full weight of its coercive power to bring these high-modernist designs into actuality
- iv. A prostrate civil society that lacks the capacity to resist these plans. In sum, the legibility of a society provides the capacity for large-scale social engineering, high-modernist ideology provides the desire, the authoritarian state provides the determination to act on that desire, and an incapacitated civil society provides the leveled social terrain on which to build (Scott 1998, 4–5).

In a more systematic framework, Scott argues and demonstrates with various examples that modern knowledge tried to codify real and functional social order. These orders depend on many informal practices that undergo continuous improvisation, which are not possible. Eventually it fails both the beneficiaries for whom it is designed and the designers. He argues “schematic, authoritarian solutions to production and social order inevitably fail when they exclude the fund of valuable knowledge embodied in local practices. Finally, that most characteristics of human institutions, language, is the best model: a structure of meaning and continuity that is never still and ever open to the improvisations of all its speakers” (Scott 1998, 357).

Jessop writes, “most of the time there are tendencies of governance failure like market, state and even meta governance. Even then public private partnership is essential in securing the stability in terms of social, economic and community development. There

should be greater commitment to participatory politics based on stake holding and to sustainable economic and community development” (Jessop 2000, 32). For him, failure is a central feature of all social relations.

Malpas and Wickham argue that governance seeks control of its objects, “yet it can only ever take up those objects under certain aspects. Therefore it can never have control of its objects as such. Indeed, since governance can only take up its objects in certain specific and partial respects, so failure itself will always remain obscure from within any particular governing practice” (Malpas and Wickham 1995). Chhotray and Stoker argue, “the idea of governance failure draws upon a recognition that organizing governing through networks is far from unproblematic because it operates in the context of conflict and uncertainty. In this light, governance failure might occur because of irresolvable conflict between interests, a lack of trust between agents, inept steering by state actors” (Chhotray and Stoker 2009, 48).

Mayntz opines that governance failure might occur from implementation of policies where target groups are not willing to comply. He writes “this may be due to the lawmaker’s deficient knowledge of causal relationships that are of relevance to reaching a given goal (knowledge problem), or to the impossibility to intervene in a goal- directed way in certain system processes by means of the instruments that are available to central authorities (governability problem)” (Mayntz 1994, 13).

Jessop asserts that governance is always exposed to failure. One cannot ignore the issue of failure in analysing governance. He says there are different sources from where governance failure might arise. These governance failures are mainly concerned with the role of markets, states, and networks in capitalist social formations rather than more amorphous interpersonal relations (Jessop 2000). Sociologists have warned that without adequate knowledge of the object which needs to be governed an ill designed model is always prone to failure. Sometimes, a complex social system is understood by the policy maker in an over-simplified manner. Malpas and Wickham cast doubt over whether the object of governance could ever be manageable even with enough control mechanism and adequate knowledge (Malpas and Wickham 1995). Further, they argue that social life is made up of innumerable attempts to control all known objects, which sets the ground for failure to feature as a crucial element in the governance process. They emphasize that governance is

necessarily incomplete and failure is the result of targeting full control or total control of governance object (Ibid, 40). Malpas and Wickham emphasize the need for sociology of failure. They draw their argument from Foucault. How failure is centered around both known and unknown objects. They write “governance has to be understood in relation to its objects and the objects of governance can only be understood in relation to practices of governance” (Ibid, 45).

From Government to Governance

Governance is different from government both theoretically and empirically. In theoretical terms, governance is the process of governing. It is what government does to their citizens. But it is also what corporations and other organizations do to their employees and members. Whereas government refers to political institutions, governance refers to processes of rule wherever they occur (Bevir 2012, 3). Chhotray and Stoker write: “governance is about the rules of collective decision-making in settings where there are plurality of actors or organizations and where no formal control system can dictate the terms of the relationship between these actors and organizations” (Chhotray and Stoker 2009, 3). They opine that the rules in a governance system entail both formal and informal practices. While studying governance one has to consider formal arrangements and informal practices, conventions and customs (Ibid).

In sociological research defining a concept before taking it up for the study is important, as every term is having its own definitive connotation. Jose argues in Aristotelian sense and says that a given term or word has an essential meaning, that is somehow unique to it. Specifically, a word designates a particular entity or thing’s essence. The word or term is therefore ontologically committed to a unique entity (Jose 2009, 9).

As already mentioned earlier, governance is an eclectic concept where one finds difficulties in having a precise definition. Another aspect of the governance mechanism is the failure of governance or governance failure. In policy domain, the failure of governance is taken as a very serious issue in a negative sense or as an undesirable thing. Whereas sociologists and social anthropologists do not hesitate to acknowledge the idea of governance failure; some social scientists even acknowledge the failure of the governance model. Governance has

been discussed widely in the last two decades. Authors have conceptualised this concept differently according to their disciplinary locations. It is often argued that contemporary governance has to be looked at from a new perspective. It is different from government and it is a new process of governing. Various authors suggest that apart from state, market and society also have a stake in the process of governance. The process of governance is getting more into networks and interdependence (Rhodes 1997, Bevir 2012, Pierre 2000).

Mark Bevir outlines the broad characteristics of governance. Firstly, it combines the administrative arrangements with features of market mechanism and non-profit organizations. Secondly, it has a multi-jurisdictional or transnational character. Governance combines people and institutions across different policy sectors and different levels of government like local -regional, national and international. For example, in controlling food policy and quality, different levels of government bodies are needed to be involved. Thirdly, governance has developed the characteristics of increasing range of stakeholders from different sectors like third party organization to deliver state services. Governing became increasingly hybrid multi-jurisdictional and plural phenomenon. (Bever 2012, 5–7)

Social scientists have argued that in present times there is a shift from old governance to new governance. Old governance is usually referred to the controlling capacity of central government over other federal state government and local government. Economy and society are also controlled and steered by the central government (Peters, 2000). Besides, new governance emphasizes the need for policy networks with the advent of self-governance and public- private partnership. Old governance is considered as state-centric whereas the new governance is considered as society-centric.

Others have argued from a perspective that supports the participation of society in the process of governance. In this argument, it is proposed that society and state influence each other. This view emphasizes the relationship between the state and society. Here community and people also participate in the policy making and influence the government. These authors call for an approach in which one should not ignore the involvement of various networks and non-state actors (Kooiman 1993, 2003 Chatterjee 2004, Migdal 2004). Various models of governance are discussed briefly in the following section.

This approach to governance emphasises on the participation of people in the process of governance. Earlier governance was dealt with by the government. Now there is an emphasis on people's participation. But it is not always practically viable. In this study, as shown in chapters 3 and 4, some people who have power over others in terms of putting their voice in the matter of decision making process, always dominate the marginalised people. So it is difficult to say that the shift from government to governance is always beneficial for the poor and the marginalised.

Governance without Government

It has already been mentioned earlier that governance is often confused with the concept government. Researchers dealing with the issue of governance often emphasize that these two concepts are not the same. Governance is a broader concept than government. While discussing on the issue of governance and government, Rhodes proposed the idea of governing without government. He analysed the modern state with governance and argued that the nature of state is changing. Governance is no longer the subject matter of government only. Non-state actors are also part of the governance process and they contribute substantially to governance. Others have also shown how the governing process happens out of the purview of the government. Various formal and informal institutions are involved in the process of governance (Rose and Miller 1992; Mitchell 2002; Jessop 1998).

In recent times, the nature of governance has changed. Due to transnational transaction of cultural, political and economic affairs, a new form of governance has emerged, which social scientists think might weaken the state capacity to govern. In this context, Jessop argues, "there is a general trend towards the denationalization of the state (or, better, statehood). This structural trend is reflected empirically in the 'hollowing out' of the national state apparatus with old and new state capacities being reorganized territorially and functionally on sub-national, national, supranational and trans-local levels" (Jessop 1997, 573).

Jessop outlines that "state power has become less important in key respects in contemporary capitalism—as governance has become more important however, countering this trend is the survival of the national state as the principal factor of social cohesion in

societies and its associated role in promoting social redistribution” (Jessop 1997, 573–574). Khan marks that international agencies have failed to recognize the basic problem of corruption and governance in developing countries. They have overlooked the construction of capitalism, which is inherently divisive. It often rewards and deprives individuals in arbitrary ways. Ignoring this issue, it is not possible to understand the roots of political instability, political corruption and the extant political clientelism (Khan 2002).

Culture governance is seen as an altered form of governmentality approach. In contemporary times, political authority is trying to establish a connection with the community. Government is improvising on interaction and effective communication with the society. Political authority these days also considers culture in the administration process. It encourages the individual to transform their conduct. Henri P. Bang writes that culture governance is about how political authority must increasingly operate through capacities for self-governance and co-governance. There is a need to act upon, reform, and utilize individual and collective conduct, so that it might be amenable to its rule. For Bang, culture governance represents a new kind of top-down steering approach. It is neither hierarchical nor bureaucratic but empowering and self-disciplining.

Bang defines culture governance as “a new steering situation in reflexive modernity where the expansion of self and co-governance is becoming a prerequisite for welfare states (and all other kinds of expert systems) to supply them with the wholeness, coherence and effectiveness that they no longer can obtain by directly commanding and exercising control over their members and environments” (Bang 2004, 159). He is critical about culture governance and argues that it manifests itself in various forms of joined-up government and network governance. Culture governance proclaims itself genuinely democratic and dialogical. There by it constitutes a formidable challenge and threat to democracy, in attempting to colonize the whole field of public reason, everyday political engagement, democratic deliberation, and so on. It goes against the public reasoning and practices of freedoms (Bang 2004).

Globalisation has weakened the power of the state, this view may not be correct as state has taken a different characteristics by withdrawing from public provisions and penetrating more in controlling the subject through modern technology. More developed information

technology, use of mobile phones and internet might put surveillance on people. Subjects surrender themselves to the scrutiny of the state. The more civilized one becomes, the more is the surrender to the modern state. Scott rightly argues that those who stay outside of the state domain may not be civilized but are away from the modern governance structure (Scott 2009).

Contemporary literature on governance also emphasize on the shift from government to governance. Here the role of non-state actors is brought into the analysis. It is argued in the thesis that the role of government which is also a part of state cannot be downplayed substantially. It has its own mechanism on how to control the subjects. Even if it is governance, government still holds the upper hand. Some social scientists argue that the state has been hollowed out. But Bevir explains, “the states have expanded the mix of policy instruments. As the older coercive and regulatory instruments became less important, states developed softer instruments by which to realize their intentions and control other actor. In this view the state has emphatically not been hollowed out” (Bevir 2012, 76). State is more interested in control mechanisms and outsourcing its provisions of welfare services to NGOs like bodies. It then controls and regulates the service providers.

It is evident from the World Bank report that it wants to establish democracy in the developing parts of the world. It has mentioned in the report that its main aim is to establish democracy and weed out corruption. WB facilitates INGOs through global networking and tries to export democracy. This involves large-scale violence when developed countries try to intervene in the internal affairs of the countries like Iraq and Afghanistan. Increasing export of democracy creates a difficult governance problem. Different societies have their own way of governing. When outside parties intervene through global networking, it creates more harm than good. Creating the faith of citizen and in return having legitimacy is the state's responsibility. The WB and similar type international agencies are concerned with developing good governance in developing world. They primarily mean and focus on enhancement of administrative efficiency and reduction of economic and political corruption (Peters 2007).

Though there is a dominant argument which has become prominent in the discourse of governance in favour of less government and more governance, the actual delivery of governance is dependent on the grassroots situation. At the local level, it is seen that leadership holds a decisive position in delivering services. But governance at the ground level (which is supposed to be impartial and neutral) is embedded within various social categories like caste, class, religion, ethnicity and gender. So this study proposes to look at governance from a context-specific perspective.

Discourses on Good Governance, Development and Civil Society

It is well understood that the agenda of good governance has taken over the development discourse in developing countries. It is strongly argued in the WB report that good governance is prelude to development. After the advent of neoliberal discourse, the idea of good governance has taken a central place. Indeed the development aids being given to the developing countries are allocated with demand for change in their governance. WB promotes the idea that only good governance and corruption free society can bring change and economic development in true sense. Various neo-Marxist literatures were produced in 1960s on dependency theory and world system theory. Mostly Andre Gunder Frank and Immanuel Wallerstein have argued on the idea of plundering of wealth and surplus in the name of development. Developed western countries plundered the underdeveloped southern countries (Frank 1969; Wallerstein 1974) when the colonization process was over in most parts of the globe. Then the good governance agenda was set in motion to start a new chapter to transform the under -development processes.

The language of good governance soon became a language of power. In the name of development, many INGOs and international organizations started mushrooming in the southern countries. It was regarded as having immense power to transform the backward and corruption-ridden society into the imagery of modern west developed nations. International agencies demanded for civil society bodies and non-profit organizations to work without interference of the state in the developing countries.

In both academics and non-academic circle, people speak for and against the idea of governance. In recent years, governance has been seen as a pejorative terms by some

academics and activists. It has been used widely by World Bank, multilateral, and bilateral donors as a condition for giving aid to third world countries or developing countries after Second World War. It acquired prominence in its use after the introduction of neoliberal agenda. World Bank even professed that due to the lack of good governance, Africa is in crisis, and all the problems related to the issue of development have resulted from the crisis of governance. It has also given many tips on how to bring about good governance and how to fight corruption. It suggests for privatization and making competitive market more prominent without much interference from the state. "Since then, good governance or its versions with less normative adjectives such as 'effective' or 'sound' governance have dominated the development discourse" (Mander and Asif 2012, 1).

After World War II, discourse on materialistic development and progress began. Science and technology was viewed as the real savior from backwardness. Later it was contested by various alternative thinkers as it did not generate the desired results, instead it proved disastrous. At the same time, the discourse on development was replaced by governance discourse. All big donors and global financial capital organizations are now after developing countries to pressurise them to improve on their governance.

Traditionally, the state used to take care of its citizens through various social welfare policies, now these welfare measures are increasingly outsourced to private organizations or corporations. The reason attributed to this is efficient delivery of services and goods. But this does not come for free. One has to pay heavy price for that as these private bodies have increased the price of the welfare services. Critics point out that developed countries cannot interfere in the internal governance process and policy matters of a so called developing or third world sovereign country. Therefore, through the idea of good governance, they make strategies to enter into the domain of politics and economy of other countries. By doing so, they protect their own interests which include economic plunder. Mander and Asif write "bogey of 'good governance' is used a tool like human rights and democracy to win over confidence of different countries. Motives behind it may not be always helping the country or people instead use it as an escape clause and punitive measures" (Mander and Asif 2012, 2-3).

Good governance as a concept initially introduced by the WB report in 1989 on Sub-Saharan Africa (WB 1989). WB emphasized on private investment, public sector management, accountability and transparency of information. In 1989, World Bank published a report, *Sub-Saharan Africa: From Crisis to Sustainable Growth* that evoked a 'crisis of governance' as a key underlying barrier to development in much of Africa. The WB began to use the term 'good governance' to cover both technical areas and civil society (Bevir 2012, 106).

In 1990s WB and other international donor agencies emphasized on corruption free society and good governance. They argued that good governance is prerequisite for the development of the third world countries. These countries need a strong civil society to counter the corruption and nepotism of the state. Marketization of economy and penetration of these international agencies into the third world countries promoted the idea and practice of good governance with the objective of utilizing development aid in a decentralized manner through the civil society.

Mustaq H. Khan writes that the conventional analysis of good governance is based on a neoclassical approach. State is associated with economic development without hampering the private interest (Khan 2004). Similarly, Jose argues, "World Bank's view occupies an influential position in the discursive construction of governance relations. World Bank perceives the political rule by governments and their relevant state apparatuses when seen through the governance lens was merely a matter of economic management" (Jose 2010, 121).

There is a close link between neoliberal programme and decentralized governance which pave the way to market driven development process. Panchayat can play a greater role to facilitate the idea of good governance. Panchayat where people can participate, ensures transparency and accountability. Sarmah argues that the role that has been assigned to facilitate the process of decentralized governance can be termed as a paradigm shift (Sarmah 2006, 2). Sometimes academicians and activists confuse PRIs with civil society and NGOs. Though the ethos of PRIs are participatory in nature, representatives are selected through election, in NGOs it does not happen. Gandhi advocated for self-rule or *swaraj* in full sense. A village should act as a sovereign unit where it will have full control

on its own governance. People emphasized Gandhi's idea but it seems the agenda of neoliberalism has hijacked the true essence of decentralization of power.

Social scientists like Chatterjee, Beckman and Mcduie-ra argue that civil society as a concept originated in the west and it is more relevant to their society. The Eurocentric nature of civil society is not compatible in Indian context. The social condition here is quite different from the European condition. If we try to impose this concept in a non-western society like India, it might mislead us from a better understanding. In India, most of the writers use this concept as synonymous with NGOs, non-profit sector and voluntary organizations. (Beckman 1998; Chatterjee 2001; Mcduie-ra 2009). Andre Beteille also argues on the similar line. He emphasizes that civil society as a concept is not very old in the Indian context. Indian scholars have used it in western context and gradually it has come to India in the academic as well as in policy domain (Beteille 2003).

The politics of good governance if analysed critically, gives a meaning of non-interference of the state. If one looks at the WB report on good governance, it emphasizes the strengthening of the private sector. That means good governance is prelude to privatization. In India, critics point out that in 1990s after neoliberal agenda paved its path into Indian economy, it captured the imaginations of different third world state. India went through the 73rd amendment of constitution. Under this provision, power is delegated to the local level government bodies.

Good governance agenda stresses that international agencies should directly work with the local level government without much intervention of the union government. Most of the time policies fail due to the friction between state, local government and international agencies. James Scott argues that the knowledge produced from high modernism's point of view is bound to fail as it tries to make every geo political space universal. It does not consider the local specificity.

In the context of Bangladesh, Parnini argues, "the donor-driven discourse in Bangladesh is geared towards enhancing policy effectiveness through 'good governance' conditionality and conceptually preparing the terrain for policy intervention, the guiding move of which has been towards the establishment of a new liberal global institutional pattern of

hegemony” (Parnini 2006, 193). It is evident from various examples from African and Asian countries where imported democracy and governance have failed. Concepts and practices are different in different geo political structure. Parnini writes, “the western concepts of so-called ‘civil society’ and ‘good governance’ can hardly help indigenous civil society to flourish for bringing about home-grown good governance in Bangladesh. The donor-driven governance conditionality is prescribing governance reforms in favour of trade liberalisation and privatization in the recipient country” (Ibid, 193).

Demmers et al. outline the attractions of good governance. They explain that good governance is “generally presented as a non-political and non-ideological programme, these three attractions of the concept of good governance—filling gaps, simplifying complex issues, hiding disagreement—tend to work in favour of economic liberalisation, both by strengthening its supporters and by disarming its critics” (Demmers et al 2004,6). Adrian Leftwich underscores the two meanings of the concept of good governance. One is related to the WB in administrative and managerial terms. The other one is associated with western governments, which is political in nature. He emphasizes that these two should not be confused with each other and should be kept distinct (Leftwich 1993, 606).

Jan Aart Scholte argues that actors’ lack of clarity and orientation in the civil society has led to little success of global civil society movement. They lack clear strategy frameworks. He writes “in short, civil society efforts to promote more legitimate global governance are hampered to the extent that the advocates lack a clear conception of what, beyond the issue immediately at hand, they are advocating” (Scholte 2007, 320). Scholte suggests convention like World Social Forum can challenge the global hegemony and injustice done by many countries and international agencies. Network should be created though internet and modern social media to form solidarity and counter the hegemony (Ibid).

Duncan Mcduie-ra contends that civil society is a more complex and contradictory sphere than it is understood in the political, social and academic sphere. Often civil society creates a difficult situation for the marginalised population. He argues inequalities and power structure within civil society is under-evaluated in the discourse of civil society. The political issue is most of the time depoliticized. There by it creates a camouflage kind of understanding of the issue of civil society (Mcduie-ra 2009, 4).

These scholars whose works have been discussed above are largely critical about the existence and role of civil society in the larger governance processes in India. During the 'India Against Corruption' campaign which occurred in Delhi in April 2012 with mostly middle class people participation where voices were raised against corruption, discussion of civil society got more prominence during that time. Civil society is considered to be an urban phenomena among the literates. But places like Napam, where the study has been conducted are devoid of such civil society. People are mostly dependent on the resources of the state and have a marginal position vis a vis state. It is difficult for them to raise their voice in such a condition even though they are subjected to various kinds of discrimination and exploitations. This is discussed in detail in chapters 3 and 4.

Governance and Elections

Regular elections are one of the markers of a good democratically governed country. A nation state is considered a better state if it holds free and fair elections with inclusive participation. This is also a process through which nation state draws legitimacy from the subjects. India is regarded as one of the largest democracies in the world. It is fascinating to observe the diverse communities representing multiplicity of religion, language and ethnicity to participate in the electoral process. The subject matter of elections was dealt by political scientists in earlier days. Now sociologists and social anthropologists have started studying electoral politics. Sociologists contribute more towards this field by conducting in-depth fieldwork during the time of elections.

A volume published with a collection of essays on fieldwork conducted in different parts of India, Shah emphasizes the importance of in-depth fieldwork. Shah writes that their approach was grounded in the study of small communities through intensive fieldwork, an approach often associated with social anthropology. He quotes Srinivas who often said that this approach provided the worm's eye view of the society that contrasted with bird's eye view offered by most other social scientists (Shah 2011, 2).

Shah in his sociological study, claims that their study is not the kind of macro studies, generally termed as hit-and-run studies. Such studies depend on data collected at the district or subdivision headquarters in a very short span of time. One cannot rely on the results or

conclusions drawn by such studies (Shah 2011, 2). Even political scientists have urged for an anthropological study of electoral processes and a strong interpretative approach to this kind of study (Yadav 1991).

Shah argues that according to democratic theory and electoral law every voter is a free individual and he or she can vote according one's own will. But their study suggests in practical situation the decision to vote for a particular candidate depends on the pressure and obligation, it may be coercive or subtle depend on ones membership into various social groups, classes and categories like religion, region, caste, tribe, class, faction, neighborhood, trade union, family, or gender (Shah 2011, 8). Various groups and individuals might even use such an election as a weapon to settle local scores. Where this present study has been conducted, people talk about elections in terms of game. They use the phrase playing in election instead of contesting an election. Like one respondent said '*jiye jiye eibar election kheli ase, teulokar majot ejono bhal manuh nai*' (not a single person playing in elections this time can be considered good). People in Rampura village where Panini conducted his studies also talked in the similar language by describing the elections as games (Ibid).

To understand the overall process of governance in Assam, it was pertinent to study elections. To find out the nuances of elections and how people act during elections, three types of elections were studied in Assam. The first one was parliamentary elections. The second one was assembly elections and the last one was Panchayat elections. It furnished interesting comparative results, which are discussed in Chapter 5.

Geographically, Assam is the second largest state in northeast India. In terms of population, it is not only the most populous state in the region but also considerably multi-ethnic in character. Over a period, the political field where elections have been conducted gives a very interesting picture. Political situation in Assam is a very complex phenomenon due to the presence of multiplicities of communities. During the election process, it becomes a challenge for the political leaders to seek votes from diverse communities other than their own community. "In ethnically divided societies small groups of voters can have great strategic importance, so inter-ethnic group vote-pooling and the development of positive-sum electoral strategies to garner second choice votes makes political and electoral sense"

(Taylor 2005, 438). Theoretically, people should vote their own candidate or party formed by the members of their own community, but sometimes it does not happen. It is seen that people oblige the party workers, middlemen and their patron by voting for them. “Some indigenous people have voted for the main parties for clientelist reasons or because these parties represent their views on other policy issues, but many indigenous voters have opted for other parties that have made greater efforts to cater to the needs of indigenous communities” (Madrid 2005, 692).

Apurba Baruah and Sandhya Goswami write, “electoral politics in Assam shows a new trend. The one-party dominant system is giving way to a multiparty system in which political parties of various ethnic groups or smaller cultural communities play significant roles. A number of smaller parties articulating the interests of smaller ethnic communities and religious and linguistic minorities have also been making their presence felt” (Baruah and Goswami 1999). There is always a danger that a members of a particular community may hold on to the power most of the time because of their majority. It is not a healthy sign in an multiethnic democratic society. Taylor holds, “the consociational model holds that in ethnically divided societies majoritarian electoral systems are dangerous because they encourage permanent conflict between ‘in’ and ‘out’ groups. Consociationalism seeks power-sharing and an important factor encouraging power-sharing is proportional representation” (Taylor 2005, 438).

Madrid shows in the Latin American context how ethnic cleavages have contributed to electoral fragmentation but not in a drastic way like the social cleavage literature would expect. He writes that “the failure of the main political parties to adequately represent the indigenous has weakened the support for these parties among the indigenous, which has contributed to party system fragmentation in indigenous areas” (Madrid 2005, 692). Conventional thinking and democratic theory view voter ignorance as being generally bad for democracy. The rational ignorance theory does not support this idea. It argues that voters always try to find out information through short cuts, and they rely on the political elite or media to obtain knowledge before voting (Arnold 2012). In a place like Sonitpur where this study has been conducted, it is seen that the politically less informed voters mostly get political information and knowledge from their kinsfolk and family members. In

a large family, the head of the household collects information from the political party workers or the intermediaries who helps them in most of the government-related work.

Political knowledge differs from people to people. It is found that even in advanced countries like the USA, people have little political knowledge. Political knowledge also depends on the affinity towards political parties and group (Andersen *et al* 2002). Toka argues that a better-informed electorate helps producing greater collective welfare. However, the effect only materializes over multiple elections, and may not extend to all aspects of good governance (Toka 2008).

This study suggests that sociology of governance should focus on election studies with greater methodological rigour to obtain meaningful insights from the electoral process. It should try to understand why and how people vote. Sociological analysis of elections should focus on the individual's location in a social context and in the campaign dynamics (Knight and Marsh 2002, 173). By understanding the nature of the society, it needs to explore the nature of social cleavages and partisan dynamics. One has to be objective in terms of observation while describing the individual's location in the social structure, social class, reference group, and party identification. Marsh and Knight suggest that one has to understand "membership of and position in, the main social cleavages of a country, with class, religion, race, or ethnic identity as primary elements to discuss more meaningful voting process" (Knight and Marsh 2002, 181). In chapter 5, it is discussed how and why people vote in a multi-ethnic society such as Assam.

Chapter 3

Locating the Field: Society, State and Governance

This chapter sets the background to the present study. It depicts the demographic profile of the state of Assam, located in the north-eastern region of India, and describes its ethnic, religious and cultural make-up. It provides a brief historical narrative of Assam, and introduces the socio-economic setting of the villages selected for the study. Apart from this, it also discusses the three-tier structure of governance in India with special reference to Assam.

The present political Assam consists of three distinct geographical parts divided into twenty seven (27) districts. Twenty two of them are in the Brahmaputra Valley, 2 in the hilly south-central region, and the rest 3 in the Barak valley. Present Assam is only a shadow of the colonial province of Assam, which included the neighbouring states of Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland. These states were gradually made into separate political units starting with the creation of the Nagaland state in 1963. According to 2011 census, the total population of Assam is 31,205,576. The sex ratio is 958 females per 1000 male. Literacy rate is 72.19 percent while the density of population per square kilometer is 398. Assamese is the state language of Assam. Other important languages spoken in the state include Bengali, Bodo, Karbi, Mising, Sadri, Nepali, Hindi, etc. Of the total population of Assam state, around 85.90 percent live in the villages¹.

Pre Colonial Period

The social and political landscape of Assam, known as Kamrupa in ancient times, was dominated by the various groups of the Mongoloid stock since ancient times up to the advent of British colonialism in the early 19th century. Some of these groups gradually experienced a relatively higher level of social development and a process of state formation

¹ Census report, Government of India, 2011

in early first millennium itself. Migration of Aryan settlers with superior agricultural technology and revenue administration also facilitated this process of state formation and social development in the region. The Burman dynasty, who reigned over parts of the north Bengal and the central and the lower Assam (known as Kamrupa then) from the 5th to the 8th century A.D. are perceived to be Hinduised Mongoloid tribals. Other Mongoloid royal dynasties following the Burmans also embraced Hinduism. Following the royal dynasties, many autochthons also came under the fold of Hinduism.

The Ahoms came to Assam through upper Burma in 1228 AD, established their rule in the eastern Assam and subsequently went on to dominate the Brahmaputra valley for almost six centuries. Though initially the natives resisted the Ahoms, finally they succeeded in establishing its authority and supremacy. Their contact with the natives strengthened to the extent that they even entered into marital relations with them, embracing local customs, practices and language. Gradually the process of adopting Hinduism or Hinduisation gained momentum from the sixteenth century, especially with the expansion of the Ahom kingdom from toward more Hinduised central and western Assam.

The Ahom state was based on very systematic political and economic organizations. The political system was elaborately organised from the king at the helm, the ministers, the governors posted at various parts of the kingdom, civil and military officials, to the ordinary soldiers and producers known as *paiks*. The *paiks* were then organized under a production system based on compulsory corvee labour service which brought every male individual of the state between the age group of 15 and 50 under its control. Each individual was called a *paik* and a cluster of four *paiks* was called a *got*. The members of a *got* worked in rotation, each rendering state services for three months a year. Their works included land reclamation from forests and marshes, leveling of highlands for cultivation, construction of dams to resist flood, construction of roads, temples, buildings etc. In case of need, *paiks* were required to play their role as soldiers too. Thus, the *paiks* were always at the service of the State. In brief, "(I)t was a state-organised system of compulsory labour exploitation" (Sharma 1996, 34). It was this system of labour exploitation which in course of time gave rise to intense conflict and civil war in the Ahom state since the late 18th

century paving the way for the incursions by the Burmese and eventually the annexation of Assam by the British.

The Colonial Period

Colonization of Assam took place much later in comparison to the rest of India. Assam came under the rule of the British by the treaty of *Yandaboo* in 1826. Gradually, they captured or brought under their control other areas neighbouring Assam like Khasi Hills, the Jaintia Hills, the Garo Hills, the Naga Hills, the Lushai Hills, and areas inhabited by tribes like the Daflas, the Abors, the Akas, the Mishimis, etc in the present Arunachal Pradesh. With colonization, there came several changes. The system of administration in Assam was completely altered. Monarchy was replaced by the modern English system of bureaucracy and a new monetized land revenue system was put into practice. New land holding systems, land revenue, imposition of taxes on agricultural produce, trade rules, etc. are some of the significant changes brought about by the British.

One of the most significant fallout that left far-reaching impact on the society, polity and economy of Assam was in the domain of demography of the state arising out of the colonial policies of encouraging migration into the state. Assam has been a habitat for migrants since ancient times. But the wave of immigration gathered serious momentum since the time of colonial rule. It further accelerated during the post-colonial period. Prior to the colonial regime, Assam was scarcely populated; it was full of uninhabited land. This picture however drastically altered when the colonial rulers encouraged migrants to cater to their needs and work for their interest. Colonial rulers found the land favourable for tea cultivation and this discovery marked the beginning of socio economic transformation of Assam. The possibility of large-scale tea production enthralled the minds of the British and lured them to invest on tea plantations. Forests began to be destroyed and tea gardens were set up. Thus, there emerged the need for labourers. To cater to that, the colonialists transported people from outside the state to work in the plantations, as they could not convince the local people to work in the tea gardens. This demand for labour in tea plantations was the first major reason to turn to immigrants (Barua 1999, 46).

Along with tea, the discovery of oil fields, coal etc. led to economic transformation of Assam. Oil fields, coalmines, construction of roads, buildings, and railways also attracted immigrant labourers. Apart from labourers, immigrants who were educated and had knowledge of English came in to occupy administrative jobs. Thus, thousands of people from outside stepped in to the region in search of jobs and livelihood. One of the oldest immigrant groups is the tea labour community comprising of members from Santhal, Mundas, Oraons, Kharias, Gonds and other tribal and non-tribal groups from Chotanagpur region of central and eastern India. Their movement into the region was not voluntary. Rather they were forcefully and repressively imported by the colonial rulers as indentured labour. But gradually they started settling in Assam after the contract period was over as they were left with hardly any means of returning to their land. Hailing from a poor socio economic background, their life in plantations was also not easy as they had to work almost like slaves in a strict, regimented system with little autonomy of their own. Even after having internal differentiation amongst them, they are usually recognised in Assam as belonging to one single community named as either '*Adivasi* community', 'Chah Janajati'. Further, even if they were in friendly terms with the larger Assamese population and shared a common identity, in the recent decades they too like many others have been claiming a separate identity. They are also aspiring for the scheduled tribe status to avail various government facilities and schemes.

The Hindu Bengalis from the East Bengal were one of the early immigrant groups encouraged by the colonial regime to come to the region. They came here to work as clerks, supervisors etc. in government offices, courts, and later in the tea plantations. Another predominant section of the Assam's population today comprises of the Marwaris, a commercial trading community from Rajasthan. Even before the advent of British, the Marwaris had their business enterprises in Western Assam and being blessed with no competitors, trade and commerce in the state gradually became their monopoly (Sharma 2012).

The Nepalis from Nepal immigrated into the region in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and with the approval from the colonial administration settled in some of

the excluded areas of Assam. They were predominantly engaged in the milk business and buffalo herding. Monimala Devi claims that the real immigration of Nepalis into north-east India began in early 19th century to employ *Gurkhas* in army. She writes that Nepali migration continued in the post- colonial period as well. They came to Assam to settle down in the riverine tracts and subsequently on the outskirts of towns along the hill slopes to sell milk and milk-products in the urban areas. In this manner, Nepalis came to constitute a sizeable population in Assam (Devi 2007).

Further, immigration accelerated with the introduction of commercial agriculture and profit driven motive pursued by the colonial rulers. They encouraged immigrants from erstwhile East Bengal mostly from Muslim peasant community. Members from this community are regarded as expert in farming. The British administration settled the Muslim immigrants in the wastelands in order to earn more revenue. They were also encouraged to engage in commercial jute cultivation. Since the first decade of the 20th century, western and central Assam witnessed massive waves of immigration of these East Bengali peasants bringing about a dramatic transformation to the social, demographic and the political landscape of the state. However, immigration of different communities did not confine only to the colonial period. After independence, Assam witnessed migration of groups mainly from Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh. They come from marginal socio-economic background and are engaged as construction workers, thella or rickshaw pullers, barbers, cobblers, and other petty jobs (Sharma 2012, 301). They too gradually settled in Assam and their numerical strength grew with time to the extent that they have become a powerful constituency of the state.

Post-Colonial Assam

It is already mentioned above that colonial Assam came to be divided into five states beginning with the creation of the Nagaland state in 1963. Subsequently, Meghalaya was given statehood in 1971; Mizoram was made a union territory in 1972, Arunachal Pradesh which was earlier known as North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) was made a union territory in 1972 and subsequently a separate state in 1987.

The disintegration of the colonial state may be attributed to several crucial factors. I would not like to go into a discussion of the individual factors since it is not germane to this discussion. However, issues of insurgency against the Indian state among the Nagas and the Mizos, the language policy of the government of Assam in making Assamese the official language in the multi-ethnic state; political and economic aspirations of the emerging middle class among the tribal groups, etc. played an important role in the division of Assam. Further, the means, methods and policies adopted by the central government to address the challenges in the region also played a major role in the disintegration of Assam.

The provision of tribal autonomous districts, although evidently a progressive policy, under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution also fanned tribal aspirations. That this process of division of Assam did not stop with the carving out the four states of Assam is a testimony to that. More and more tribal (and even non-tribal) groups in the state are raising demand for autonomy and separate state creating a serious challenge to the governance and social landscape of the state.

The above discussion gives us an idea of the multiethnic society in Assam. This multi ethnic character greatly influences the political and economic process of the state. Without an understanding of this, it is not possible to grapple with the functioning of the local governance in Assam and how it is influenced by the ethnic or communitarian sentiments.

Panchayati Raj Institutions and Local Self Government in Assam

To understand the dynamics of present local governance, it is important to understand how PRIs evolved in India and then took shape in Assam. This section deals with the historical evolution of the PRIs in India and Assam.

India has a three-tier local governance system known as Panchayati Raj system. The institutions under the latter are known as the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI). The history of the PRI system dates back to the pre-independence India. Especially, Mahatma Gandhi propagated the idea of Swaraj. He emphasized that every village in India has to become a self-sufficient republic.

After independence, however, the political leadership in India hailing mostly from urban or privileged and feudal background from rural areas was not interested in implementing Gandhi's dream of village Swaraj. Therefore, most of the policies designed for the decentralisation or devolution of governance could not work. In the central government, industrial capitalists held important positions while in state or federal politics landowners had a strong hold. The nexus between the new urban political leader and landlords in the rural areas shifted the focus from community development to agrarian promotion. In 1950s, most promising community development programmes were failed because it was hijacked by the corrupt landowning class (Varshney 2006, Sarmah 2006).

The concept of village council or Gaon Sabha is not new in India; it existed in the traditional village society as well. The PRIs have got the constitutional status after the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments. The idea of participatory development and democracy is the main essence of the local self-governance. As an institution of self-government, panchayat basically puts emphasis on maximization of local autonomy and minimization of control by higher authorities thereby providing the scope of greater involvement of the common people in the governance of their own areas.

It is believed that the vast possibility of the grass root democracy can be realised by the means of the panchayati raj institutions. But such a possibility has been questioned by the critics saying that the institution of caste and other factors will come in the way of the modern political institutions. As Mathew (1994) writes, "the long history of panchayat as an institution of local self-government in India is associated with many controversies regarding its working and efficiency". In this context, it will be interesting to look at the impact of such traditional institutions on the modern political institutions and vice versa. Lele has given a comprehensive account of how bestowing decision-making powers to the Gram Sabhas manifests itself in the form of conflict with the traditional power structure of the caste, class and patriarchy. This crisis of legitimacy ultimately results in the non-functioning of panchayat, if they do function, they are poorly attended. Another demerit is that Gram Sabha are not bestowed with the decision making power. He posited that with

social hierarchy and the inequalities that exist in the civil society, it is not possible to pass the decision making power to the marginalized communities (Lele 2001, 4702-4704).

Although the 73rd amendment to the constitution was expected to bring a new era in the history of decentralized government there is a need to critically look in to its working and evaluate the functioning of the PRIs. The duality of centralization and decentralisation with a trend towards decentralisation is the basic ethos of the Indian governance in the present time. It necessitates the need to look into the question of power that the people actually enjoy at the local level through such institutions and their perceptions about it. The complex social structure of the Indian society has a vast impact on the working of panchayats in many ways ranging from the selection of the beneficiaries to the voting patterns in the elections to these institutions.

In resonance with the 73rd amendment to the constitution, the Assam assembly passed the 'Assam Panchayat Bill' on 9 April 1994. Though PRIs are given more power under this new act, its operation still suffers from deficiencies in the lay men's perception. There have been contradictory observations and perceptions about the changes and the nature of the governance system. People perceive PRIs as institutions run by their own people, yet at the same time, it deprives its own people from the fruits of development. Participatory approach to grass root democracy has to be seen on the basis of the working of the Panchayats along with its sociological implications especially with respect to the dynamics of political participation among the marginalized groups.

Development of Panchayati Raj Institutions in India

In the following sections I argue that there is a correlation between the constitutional reforms done in the year 1993 delegating power to the local level body through 73rd amendments and neoliberal agenda of the state. The traditional system of village government in India provides the basis for the PRIs in India although the local self-government of India today owes very little to local self-government that existed in ancient and medieval India. The change in the local self-government institution over the period with the demand of the socio political situation ended such a possibility (Rao 1980).

Besides working as important force in the economic life of the village, traditional village panchayats performed many important functions being the centre of village administration and community life. The community spirit of the medieval ages helped to manage local affairs independently along with keeping the village community functionally united. The existence of the village *sabhas* and *samitis* (assemblies or councils) in ancient system of village are mentioned in the *Vedas*. The panchayat in the ancient times was an assembly of five persons to look after the affairs of the village with the police and the judicial powers (Aslam 2007, 9). They were elevated to the sacred position of authority by the custom and religion (ibid). The traditional village panchayat was, therefore, performing a number of functions so that they became the pivot of administration and the centre of community life besides working as an important economic force. But several changes were brought about in the structure and composition of the panchayat raj system in order to cope with the demands of the time and with the enactment of the 73rd Constitutional amendment in 1992, Panchayati raj institutions became functional institutions of local self government throughout India. The discussion on the structure and composition of the panchayati raj institutions gives us a clue to the nature of governance at the village level that has been going on at the village level through such institutions.

Mahatma Gandhi (1962) had visualised the idea of Gram Swaraj (village self-governance). He found that the mass poverty and destitution in India can be fought through the idea of gram swaraj. He argued for giving credence to the self-government. The political freedom of a village will lead to the economic and social freedom. His idea of gram swaraj is that it should be a complete republic.

Various committees were setup to evaluate and improve the working of the PRIs. For detail discussions please refer to the - annexure I.

Community Development Blocks

The introduction of the community development blocks on 2 October 1952 marked a very important step in the direction of the process of decentralization during the post-independence period. This date was deliberately chosen to make the programme coincide

with the birth anniversary of Gandhi. In the initial stage, this programme encompassed 55 backward areas of the country each having almost 300 villages (Saikia 2005). In 1953, the Central government reduced the area of the community development block to a population of 66,000. In order to implement community development programme (CDP), a new structure was created below the state level called community development blocks.

The CDP was intended to ensure the direct participation of the people in the rural development programmes. To ensure such participation, advisory bodies with citizen membership were set up at various levels. The block level advisory committee consists of representative of village committee (wherever these in existence), the member of the state legislature and parliament, representatives of the co-operative societies, progressive farmers etc. Although this programme could generate enthusiasm at the initial stage, but within few years, instead of being a people movement, it became a government programme and thus CDP lost its initial momentum and the participation and involvement of people gradually declined.

In spite of many drawbacks of the CDP, it was the first comprehensive programme aimed at rural development in the post-independence India. The success of the programmes lies in the establishment of a well-organised administrative set up at the national, state, district and block level that would ensure peoples participation in the development programme with a greater aim of making them self-reliant.

Panchayati Raj Institutions in Assam: A Historical Background

Local self-government institutions in Assam are not new. But these institutions are not the institution of the local self-government in the modern sense of the term because they were functioning without elective and territorial character. The evidence of such institution in Assam is seen in the Report of Moffat Mills on Assam (1854) which suggested the reconstitution of the village councils and the appointment of influential class of men as 'gaonburas' (village headman) for the management of the local affairs (quoted in Rao 1980, 6).

There were some local organisations like '*Mels*' and '*Khels*' that were working before the advent of British into Assam and which provided the base for local self-governing institutions in rural areas. '*Sarumel*', '*Majumel*', '*Dekamel*' and '*Gabharumel*' were acting as powerful local government institution during the Ahom rules (Gait 2005). These *Mels* were of three types: *Mels* comprising of the village elders for the settlement of the minor disputes, *Mels* consisting of the king's officers (*Barmel*) to whom the king made consultants on necessity. *Mels* created by the king for his relatives which had two types- male and female *Mels*.

The *Khel* system became more active and strong after the establishment of the *Namghars* and the *Satras* by the great neo-vaishnavite social reformers of medieval Assam, Sankardev and Madhavdev. *Namghar* and *Satras* worked not only as the organisation working for the propagation of the neo-vaishnavite religion but they also worked for uniting the people of an area on a community basis. Thus, they ensured the formation of groups that can undertake various community works apart from some other local judicial works like giving judgment on some local conflicts. There was a distinctive organization of such *Khels* consisting of '*Medhi*', '*Barek*', '*Hatula*', '*Pasoni*' and '*Melki*' etc. If some people were found guilty on the judgment of such *Mels*, then they were given punishments. Thus, it can regard as one of the primitive institution of Assam possessing the character of panchayat (Saikia 2005).

But it needs to be clarified that *Namghar* and *Satras* were totally different from the present day PRIs because community set up of these organisations are different from the democratic elected composition of the panchayat. The working of the *Namghar* can be equated to that of a Gram Sabha, which is comprised of all adult members of the village and worked as decision-making bodies for the village panchayat. But the presence of the Gram Sabha in Assam in the true sense of the term is questioned. This will be discussed in a later section. History of decentralization of power in Assam during the British rule can be traced back to the practice of the panchayati raj that was introduced in Assam in 1870 through the Bengal Chowkidari Panchayati Raj Act (Konwar 2006).

The colonial Government of India took up reforms from time to time to empower the local bodies. The resolution of 1881 and Ripon's reform in 1882 had an impact on the local governance system. A resolution was also passed by the Government of Assam on 17 November 1882 to delimit the administrative areas of the local boards to subdivisions. Assam Local self-Government Act of 1915 was formulated to give legal basis to the local boards based on the guidance of the Royal Decentralisation Commission. Local Self Government Act, 1926 was passed to give more decision making power to people. In the post independent era Assam Rural Panchayat Act, 1948 was passed for the realisation of village panchayat. More detailed discussion is provided in Annexure II.

Field Description

The Tezpur Lok Sabha constituency is located on the north bank of the Brahmaputra River. Tezpur town is the headquarters of the district known as Sonitpur and is considered to be the cultural capital of Assam. It has also a large military base. Its total population according to 2011 census is about 1,924,110. Out of which males are 983,904 and females are 940,206 respectively. Density of population in Sonitpur district is 370 people per square kilometer. Out of the total population in Sonitpur district 9.04 percent lives in urban regions where as 90.96 percent of population lives in rural areas of the district. Basically, it is a district where 90 percent of the population lives in rural areas.

The demographic structure of the Napam panchayat where the field work or the present study was conducted is heterogeneous with communities like the ex-tea garden community, the tea garden tribes known as *Adivasis* in Assam, the Bengali-speaking (Mymensingha) Hindus and Muslims, Nepalis, Boros, Kacharis, Biharis and Assamese caste Hindus. Most of the people are involved in agricultural activities, while poor sections depend on wage labour in construction sites besides agricultural activities. While the villages under study were located in Napam panchayat, one village is also called Napam, which is located adjacent to Tezpur University; one is village Amolapam, which is located in the other side of the University. Bhitor Parowa and Noorbari tea estates are located near the Tezpur Town.

Noorbari Tea Estate

Most of the people in the village are daily wage earners. The women folk of this village are tea leaf pluckers. Some are permanent and some are temporary workers. The permanent workers get an amount of Rs. 500 per week and the temporary ones get Rs. 400 per week. Most of the people are from the tea garden community who are known as tea tribe in Assam. People dwell in kutchha houses, made up of thatch roof and bamboo and hay walls. The type of family found is nuclear family. People living in this area lead a difficult life. They also suffer from social and geographical exclusion as there is less communication with others. The issue of tea garden community and their everyday life is discussed in a following section.



Map of Napam area where the fieldwork has been conducted (Source: Google Maps)

Napam

It is a village where a number of ethnic and religious groups are living including Nepali, tea tribes, Assamese, Bengali, Bihari, Bengali Muslim and others. The Nepalis are counted under Hinduism whereas some of the tea tribes are Christians. The village has a Namghar and a Church. They also have a lord Shiva temple in the locality. Most of the people residing in the village are agriculturalists. Cultivation is their main occupation. The main crops that they cultivate include rice, jute, sesame, mustard and vegetables like cabbage, cauliflower, okra, potato, etc. Apart from agriculture some of the people are engaged in carpentry. Some villagers, both men and women, are engaged in Tezpur University either as salesperson, security guards or for some menial jobs. There are also people residing in the village whose lands were washed away by the river Jiaboroli flowing nearby.

In Napam there are three Anganawari centres (pre-school), three primary schools- i. Napam M.V. School, Madhavdev Sishu Niketan, Azad Memorial School. Madhavdev and Azad memorial schools are private schools.

Amolapam

Out of the 14 villages in Napam panchayat, educated people are found in more numbers in this village. This village is also adjacent to the Tezpur University. People in this village are engaged in agriculture, in petty casual employment in Tezpur town and inside the university. Nepalis from this village are engaged in milk trading. People of this village are relatively better off as compared to other villages.

Bhitar Parowa

Bhitar Parowa village is mainly inhabited by people who migrated from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Most of them are involved in agricultural activity, petty trade, and transport business. Few of them are also involved in the semi-skilled jobs like motor mechanic and so on. Most of the farmers in this area are involved in sugarcane farming. Since sugarcane is a cash crop the farmers have a steady income instead of unpredictable paddy agricultural income. Some people have acquired machine to extract sugarcane juice and they also prepare jaggery.

The above-mentioned villages are mostly dependent on mono crops. Very few cultivators go for double crops. River Jia Bhoroli flows nearby these villages. There is no forest located around these villages. Therefore, the question of collecting forest product is out of question. From the month of March until August, these areas receive heavy amount of rain. That is why, most of the time villagers face the problem of flood.

Governance process leads to people's interaction with various state level institutions. Hence in order to understand this process multiple approaches were employed during fieldwork. This survey was conducted in the Napam panchayat of Sonitpur District in Assam. Sample size was drawn from the voter list. Random samplings were drawn in proportion to the population size of a group in the voter list.

This area is known as a backward region in terms of governance indicators such as health, education, amenities, hygiene etc. Napam panchayat has a population of 18989 under it. The people from the panchayat claim that this is one of the biggest panchayats in Assam in terms of population size. The objective of this survey was to understand the various nuances of the governance and people's perception about them. The main objectives were to know the status, affordability and accessibility to the services like education, health and various social welfare schemes.

For the convenience of analysis of data, age group was divided into four categories. First one is clubbed between 21 years of age to 30 years of age. Second category covers the age from 31 to 45. Third one is between 46 to 60 and the last category formed by clubbing all persons having more than 60 years of age.

This clustering of age will give us better understanding of the nature of the composition of the households. From the analysis, it is evident that maximum numbers of people who head their households belong to the age group of 31 to 45 years. This is an indication that most of these households belong to nuclear families coming out of the joint household system. In this kind of situation, the competition for survival become more acute as each nuclear family has to depend on its own earning unlike in a joint family.

People do various kinds of job to sustain themselves and their families. Sometimes it is difficult for them to get a job or earn due to lack of enough working opportunities. One advantageous position for people in this area is the presence of Tezpur University. Here many people are engaged in construction work as wage labour. Women folk work as domestic help in many of the households. Some of the men folk work as gardeners in residential quarters and hostel; some of them are also engaged in hostel as cooks. Apart from getting opportunity to work in the university area, they often go to Tezpur town to work as daily wage labour. Few of them also work in stationery or grocery shops as helpers. A majority of landless men and women works in the agricultural land.

However, local landowners often complain that they are not able to generate any earning from agriculture. They do not get people to work in their land. They attribute this to two main factors. One is Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) which gives temporary employment to many people. The landowners claim that since it is a government project, there is much laxity. With less amount of work they can earn a full day's wage. Hence people do not want to come and work in the agricultural field where they have to produce certain amount of work in presence of the landowner. It is also seen that in the study area, many people even if they have substantial amount of land, they do not prefer to cultivate it. They have started leasing it out to other professional farmers who cultivate cash crops or vegetables with high amount investment and use of chemicals.

Another factor they attribute to the lack of labour force to work in the agricultural field is the presence of a brick kiln. A lot of manual labour is needed to work in the kiln. Mostly the owners of this industry pay good amount of money in advance to the labourer. So they prefer to work in this sector though it demands lot of hard work. Labour force cannot leave work half way as they have to enter into an agreement before starting this work. The brick kiln industry is an exploitative system which contractually employs whole family to work in kiln including children. In Napam panchayat area recently many new brick kilns have come up. The other categories of service in the area include teaching and other employment in government and non-government sectors.

There are people who are engaged in small business, owning petty shops in front of the university area. Main business centre in this locality are Napam centre and Panchmile centre. A market area in this locality is called as the centre. Market area here needs a special mention. In Tezpur town, most of the shops close by 7.30 pm but these centres are mostly open until 11 pm. This shows the embeddedness in the market area wherein Tezpur town market is symbol of anonymity. In these two market centres people discuss various things starting from religion to governance, politics, and economic activities. The cultural symbol of this region is *tamul* i.e. betel nut. People are seen taking *tamul*, drinking tea and having various locally produced snacks. Unlike the market in Tezpur town, women are visible in this area until late evening.

Though Tezpur University is located in the Napam panchayat, it has not contributed much towards the growth in the educational status of people in this region. There are various factors responsible for this. Out of the surveyed households maximum proportion belong to primary level education and then people with no education. Very few come under the category of graduate and above. People with higher secondary level of education formed just 18% of the surveyed population. During the survey and interview, it was found that though people are interested in education they cannot afford it. The present generation has started sending the children to school because of the mid day meal (MDM) scheme of the government and free elementary education system. Most of them feel that though their children get free food in the schools, the quality of education is not good in government run schools. They feel that private schools are better than government schools though it is more expensive than the government schools. This issue is discussed in more detail in chapter 6.

Napam panchayat is inhabited mostly by people adhering to Hinduism and Islam. They are Bengali speaking Muslims and Hindus. The Nepalis, tea tribes, Assamese, Biharis and others follow Hinduism which has maximum followers in the Napam area. The population in India belongs to different categories on the basis of their socio-economic status making them eligible to different kinds of social, economic and political benefits under the affirmative action of the Government of India. These categories are Scheduled Tribes (ST), Scheduled Castes (SC) and Other Backward Classes (OBC). Those who are considered

socially advanced are known as 'General' category, who are not eligible to avail any benefit under the affirmative action policy of the government.

The study was interested to examine how these categories of people in the Napam area have accessed welfare schemes in relations to each other. 54 percent of the sampled population informed that they belong to general category. 33 percent are OBCs whereas SCs and STs are 12 percent each. But most of the people put their category under general as they do not know their category exactly. Another reason for this is that they have never used the social category for acquiring any kind of services or schemes.

Table 3.1- Income category wise distribution (based on monthly income per-capita)

Income category	No of HH	Percent
Up to 900, Poor	88	46.8
901 to 1300, Vulnerable	30	16.0
1301 to 2000, Non-Poor	31	16.5
Above 2001, Affluent	39	20.7
Total	188	100.0

***Note: Average household size of the sample households is 5.49 and average monthly income is 7769.73.*

#Monthly per capita income categories are obtained roughly corresponding to the monthly per capita consumption expenditure categories defined by NSSO 66th round of survey for rural Assam with an estimated average Engel's ratio of 70 percent.

The division of income group for the purpose of analysis is divided into four income categories. Those who earn an income of up to 900 rupees per month are categorised as poor. Those who earn between 901 to 1300 rupees per month are categorised as vulnerable. This category is not clubbed under poor although they are separated from poor by a thin margin. Any time due to vagaries of earning they can slip down to the poor category. They can also shift to an upward category by earning more. Those who earn between 1301 to 2000 rupees per month are categorised as non-poor and those who earn more than 2001 rupees per month are categorised as affluent.

To have a better understanding of the local level governance, it is important to discuss how the government has initiated various pro-poor welfare schemes in the area and how various government departments coordinate with each other in implementing these measures. In the following section, I will discuss the functioning of the local government.

Politics of Local Governance in Assam

The Assam government passed the Assam Panchayat Act 1994 as per as 73rd Amendment Act of the Constitution. Accordingly, the system was implemented all over Assam in the rural areas except the autonomous districts which were governed under the Sixth Schedule of Indian constitution.

From the discussion in the preceding section, it is shown how the panchayat systems developed in India and Assam. The following section discusses the complexity and interrelation of functioning of the PRIs in Assam and role of various structures which were created and their implications in the local governance. It also discusses whether the PRIs served the purpose for which they were created or they create unwanted and undesirable conditions for the rural population in the grassroots level.

Provisions under Assam Panchayat Act 1994

Assam enacted the Assam Panchayat Act, 1994 on the basis of the guidelines given by the 73rd constitution amendment act, 1992 (Part IX of the Constitution). The State government of Assam constituted panchayats at the district, block and village levels and entrusted them with duties and responsibilities with a view to enabling them to function as institutions of self-government (The Assam Gazette, 2007). The Act gave legal power and responsibilities that would enable the state to transfer funds, functions and functionaries to the PRIs of Assam. It identified 29 subjects² for such transfer in Assam to achieve maximum possible decentralization of the governing situations. The list covers almost all basic and developmental dimensions. In this regard, activity mapping was done in respect of 29

² List of 29 subjects are provided in annexure III

departments and government notification was issued to this effect on 26 July 2002 (Government of Assam 2007).

In the next stage, the District Planning Committees (DPC) had been constituted in all 20 non-Sixth Schedule districts. It was believed that the DPC will play very important role in the decentralised planning for the each district but it proved to be a failure. In accordance with the procedures prescribed under Section 3 of the Assam Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 by October 1, 2006 the state government of Assam undertakes to put in place DPCs. In view of the planning commission's circular of 28 July 2006 advising that the eleventh five year plan and all annual plans in the eleventh plan period commencing April 2007 was be based on district development plans prepared in conformity with the provisions of article 243 Z(D) of the Constitution. It was also noted that the Backward Regions Grant Fund (BRGF) releases are contingent upon the submission of district plans for the districts concerned. There was further plan with respect to the subjects devolved to the panchayats for taking steps to merge all parallel bodies including District Rural Development Agencies (DRDAs) with Zila Parishads so that the panchayats acquire an appropriate instrumentality for planning (PNRD 2006).

If the issue of PRI is examined carefully, one can find the link between decentralisation of power and the agenda of neoliberalism. The agenda of good governance is put forward by the World Bank (WB) to facilitate privatisations and market driven growth in third world countries. Similarly the decentralised governance process and market economy go hand in hand. There is clear correlation which can be analysed. The local government bodies are suggested and directed to work with NGOs where the role of the state in delivering welfare provisions to the citizens are minimized. NGOs are expected to make new provisions for better service delivery in the grass root level. Criticizing this view of WB, a scholar writes "instead of greater accountability of the State, decentralisation in the neo-liberal perspective implies withdrawal of the state from its autonomous role in the social sector to create space for the market and NGOS, which are neither accountable to nor constituted by representative of the people" (Sarmah 2006, 3).

Gram Sabhas in Assam

It is well accepted that the Gram Sabha is the essence of the working of the panchayats in India. Although, various types of traditional *Mels* existed in Assam, they cannot be equated with the Gram Sabha. The Assam Panchayat Act, 1994 and the rules made under the Act have made it mandatory on the part of the gram panchayat for convening periodic meetings of the Gram Sabha on a quarterly basis which was later increased to six times in a year. It was essential for democratic working of the panchayats as the Gram Sabha, which is constituted of all the adult members of the village entrusted with all the decision making powers including the selection of the beneficiaries in the panchayats (PNRD 2005).

Gram Sabha is constituted of the electoral roll of the village and the main decision making body of the panchayats. Assam does not have Gram Sabhas in actual practice although there was clear indication of some community having their own decision making system. The government of Assam claims that it plans to take steps to constitute diverse sub-committees of the Gram Sabha dealing with subjects listed in the eleventh schedule of the Constitution including matters such as education, health, midday meals, women and child welfare, agriculture, animal husbandry and PWD works at the gram panchayat level. The Gram Sabhas were provided with the powers to make legislation and rules regarding the selection of the beneficiaries; approval of plans, programmes and schemes; authorization of utilization certificates and to conduct social audit to strengthen it (PNRD 2005). But in practice, nothing substantially is functioning in the ground level.

This study shows that there is no Gram Sabha constituted and more than 90% people in the study area are not aware about the power and function of the Gram Sabha.

The accounting and audit system of the panchayat which should work according to the guidelines, is hardly in existence. I have discussed in chapter 4 how the language of governance is not known to the villagers and they need a person or middlemen who generally work on their behalf. People expressed that even if they know they have right to get welfare provisions provided by government, generally they do not get it. For that, they need to have a connection; patron or need to pay money to get their works done. In this

case, it is very difficult for the people to get into the mechanism of social audit. After the RTI Act, social audit became a popular tool for accountability of the authority. Social audit has been successful in many part of India as the basic ethos of the community participation in the audit process makes it more practical at the panchayat level. But where this study has been conducted there was not a single social audit done on behalf of the community or public within the last five years. Even if the state government of Assam tried to strengthen social audit, it does not seem to work at the ground level.

Gaon Sabha or Panchayat Sabha

Assam Panchayat Act 1994 made the provision of Gaon Sabha. The Gaon Sabha has to be conducted in the ward, rather than in the gram panchayat. Each panchayat generally has 10 administrative wards, so technically Gaon Sabha should be conducted in each ward. Gaon Sabhas are responsible for the developmental planning of the village, selection of beneficiary for welfare schemes and even Gaon Sabhas are responsible for the community collective labour devoted to for a community development programme or common good.

During the Congress government rule in Assam, the government started a different version of Gaon Sabha. They called it *Raijor Podulit Raijor Sarkar* that means redressal of people's grievances at people's doorstep. It has to be conducted quarterly. It should be based on a specific theme. The Deputy Commissioner (DC) is responsible to conduct it in the respective districts. It is mostly dominated by bureaucrats and panchayat secretary (Sarmah 2006, 185-187). This system of organising meeting ruined the true spirit and essence of Gaon Sabha. It is perceived by the people at the GP level that its meeting has to be organised only when they get notification from DC. This practice defeats the ethos of Gaon Sabha.

In Assam, one department calls one meeting and it is agenda specific. They discuss a particular programme in that meeting which is called by the respective government department or agency. For example, if DRDA calls a meeting, then they might discuss the issue of SGSY scheme or related issues with it. They will not entertain other issues that a village confronts. It is convened by government and they give a date. But Gaon Sabha is

not agenda based or issue based. Gaon Sabha is meant for the participation of villagers irrespective of their social position. But this was not so in Assam. People, however, came to believe that the procedure which the Assam government follows to organise a Gaon Sabha in practice is not the ideal Gaon Sabha.

It is mentioned that Napam panchayat is having 10 wards. But the Gaon Sabha is organised in the panchayat office. I have attended a few Gaon Sabhas, which were organised in the panchayat itself. It looks like as if it is routine affair or rituals. The notice for Gaon Sabha will be sent to all the villages under Napam panchayat stating the date of the meeting and the issues to be discussed there. The president of GP will welcome the people. The Secretary will put forward the agenda of the meeting then people will be requested to speak in the meeting. It is called *Vishesh Gaon Sabha* (special Gaon Sabha).

In this meeting, which is conducted in the panchayat office, people do not speak much. Only the community leader, political intermediaries and occasionally school teachers speak in the decision making process. One of the important personalities in this area for the common people is Mr. Sheikh Sahabuddin who is a teacher by profession. His wife is a member of the ZP from the Napam panchayat. Many people regard him as a benevolent person who helps the needy while some of them opine him as a intermediary or broker, one who takes money or votes in return for rendering his services. His help is sought by people mostly to deal with the court cases or to get documents related to land. People perceive that he knows the language of governance because of which he is powerful and commands some form of respect from the local people. I will discuss this issue in the section on clientelism in the next chapter.

But it is interesting to observe that, though it is a Gaon Sabha and according to the Assam Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 each revenue village or ward should conduct Gaon Sabha but the case in Napam panchayat is different. They do not organise Gaon Sabha in the village but in panchayat office itself. Question arises whether it should be called as Gaon Sabha or Panchayat Sabha. This study finds that it is practiced not only in Napam panchayat, it is a regular practice all over Assam. The practice of *Raijor Padulit Raijor Sarkar* was replaced by the meetings in panchayat. This kind of practice ruined the true essence of

decentralisation and participatory decision making process. It perpetuated the practice of elite leadership or hijacking of the decision making process by the few.

District Planning Committee (DPC)

Article 243 Z(D) of the part IXA of the Indian Constitution provided the scope for the establishment of the District Planning Committee (DPC) in every district to ensure bottom up planning for preparation of the plan for the district as a whole which is to be put forward to the State Planning Department. The composition of DPC including its chairperson was left at the discretion of the state legislature. Besides, there was provision for ensuring proportional representation of elected members from both panchayats and municipal bodies in the DPC as it is given the task of preparing the draft plan for the whole district. Thus, the formation of DPC was aimed for providing a decentralisation in the planning process.

When government decided to transfer 29 subjects to the panchayat, it realised the necessity to merge all parallel bodies including District Rural Development Agencies (DRDAs) with ZPs by January 1, 2007. It was believed that panchayat will acquire an appropriate instrumentality for planning and development. ZP president and vice presidents are nominated from among members of ZP. One representative from each GP comes as a representative of Anchalik Panchayat. There by from 15 GP, 15 AP members are elected. Among the 15 AP members, one president is elected for the AP (PNRD 2005). DPC is a complex phenomenon where elected representatives meet bureaucratic executive. Most of the times, it creates confusion and becomes nonproductive.

A Chief Executive Officer is the bureaucratic head of ZP where he looks after the developmental activity in the district level whereas BDO is the developmental head and executive of the block level APs. In GPs, the secretary is the executive head who is a government appointee while the GP President is elected by people (more on this in Chapter 5). All these systems of hierarchy and bureaucratisation are replica of the state's federal structure.

The Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) was implemented by government of India in the year 1980 throughout India. The objective of IRDP was to enable rural poor

families towards upward mobility by providing productive assets. Later IRDP scheme merged with another scheme called Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY). DRDA was created to look after the developmental programme in the district level, in Assam. A project director looks after DRDA. In his absence, DC may take over as the chairperson. The governing body of DRDA consists of MP, MLAs, GP, APS and ZP members. Officials from government departments, bank employees, farmers and civil society representatives are members of the governing body. The governing body in the DRDA prepares agenda and the implementation works to be done at the district level.

IRDP was planned and designed by the Government of India with its own objectives. But at the district level, DRDA along with ZP takes care of the developmental programmes. Development programmes like MGNREGA is looked after by the DC. Technically, CEO is constitutionally sanctioned and empowered post but in practice, this post has no power. DC should be concerned with revenue and law and order issues but looks after development programmes as well. In Assam, schemes such as MGNREGA, SGSY, IAY, etc are handled by DRDA while BRGF works in the Sixth Schedule areas.

The tenth Five Year Plan emphasised on the collaborative role of PRIs, civil society, voluntary sectors in the local level governance. It was visualised that NGOs and CSOs will be recognised partner in the developmental activity with PRIs. They will also participate in implementation of various social welfare programmes. National Advisory Council (NAC) and Planning Commission of India have designed guidelines for the incorporation of NGOs and CSOs. As per the centralised plan, all state government implemented different flagship programmes like MGNREGA, Bharat Nirman, SSA, NRHM, Water and Sanitation Mission (Swajaldhara) and Mid-Day Meal in the area of health, education, sanitation, etc.

National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) was constituted to serve the rural health sector. To fulfill this goal, the state health mission and district health missions were constituted. Chairman of ZPs looks after the working of the public health institutions and leads the programme. Then, at the village level, Village Health Committee (VHC) is formed and president of GP looks after the VHC, which is supposed to prepare the health plan. ASHA personnel are selected by GP.

Sarbasikshya Mission or *Sarva Sikshya Abhiyan* (SSA) was designed to enhance the enrollment at school especially in the primary level. In the village level, the president GP usually acts as the chair person of the Village Education Committee (VEC). Ward member of the village is also a member of the VEC. Headmaster of the school is the member secretary of the committee. Members from NGOs and local citizen are also part of this committee.

Swajaldhara is a scheme on clean water facility for providing clean drinking water to the villagers. The Chairperson of ZP is the chairperson of District Water and Sanitation Mission, CEO of the ZP is the Chairperson of District Water and Sanitation Committee. President of GP is the president of village Water and Sanitation Committee (VWSC). Again, apart from GP members, NGOs and CSOs representative are also part of this committee.

How the agenda of neoliberal policy facilitates the process of privatization can be seen from the analyses of a few programmes. VECs are constituted to look after the quality and status of school education in rural areas. When 29 subjects were transferred to PRIs, education was also one of the subjects. It is clear that PRIs will supervise and manage the local schools, which are run by government. Then question arises what is the role and need of VEC where constitutionally approved body like PRIs exist. The 11th Schedule of the Constitution brought about democratic decentralisation and according to it, primary education has to be managed by GP which is an elected body. VEC is constituted taking members from various sectors such as local citizen, GP members and NGO members. Justification for VEC is given that, it is decentralizing governance and making people participating in the process of governance.

If one carefully looks at the policy and procedure of SSA, NRHM, and such other programmes, all of them came into existence after 1991. In the name of transferring power to people various committees are formed like VHS, VEC etc. During 1991, government of India changed its economic policy and liberalized the economy with minimal control. This period saw a change in the nature of the state. The state started withdrawing from various

social welfare provisions and this period saw the cut in budget allocations to welfare measures.

The bodies like VHC, VEC and VDC, were justified by the policy makers on the ground of better form of governance and improved delivery of public goods. However, in reality it does not happen. The neoliberal state is using these projects for its own end. In the name of good governance, projects are being implemented with partnership of NGOs and private bodies which can be seen as one of the techniques of gradual privatization of the welfare activities of the state.

Is there any constitutional provision under which the three elected members such as the MP, the MLA and PRIs members can come together? District planning Committee is the answer provided by government of India. According to article 243 ZD, the role of the DPC is to consolidate and converge the district level developmental planning. The motive behind this convergence of the schemes is to avoid repetition and duplicity of programmes and projects. Most importantly to create functional assets at the grass root level. But in practice does it happen? The area under study has more than 10 primary schools and 4 high schools. But in 90% of places, the toilets are not functioning. For example, a good toilet would require a RCC building, toilet base and water supply. School building will be built from SSA grant whereas the sanitary toilet base has to be supplied by sanitation campaign. This is looked after by DRDA. Water supplies to the toilets are taken care of by the Public Health Engineering Department (PHED) of the Assam government. Therefore, without convergence of all these three sectors there is no possibility of a good functional toilet. (Refer to photograph in the annexure IV)

Many studies have shown that the lack of toilet leads to a huge dropout of female students in the rural areas of India. In the schools under the Napam panchayat, hardly any functional toilet facility is created for the students. Even female teachers face problem in using a toilet. Male members of the schools can go to outside whereas it creates a difficult situation for the female teachers and students.

Another reason for non-convergence of departments or creation of functional assets is the constitution of DPC itself. DPC is constituted by elected members like MP, MLAs and PRI members. PRI members do not have a strong say in many matters in DPC because they are low in the hierarchy. But MP and MLAs are generally motivated by political interests. Therefore, there are difficulties in arriving at a consensus on implementations in the areas where the pork barrel politics come to play their own role. Secondly, they want to give the contract to their own people where consensus generally is not built. Hardly any convergence of consensus between MP, MLA and PRI members occurs in the ground level. Therefore, it is always very difficult to create functional assets in practice.

People's Perception of state and governance

What is *sarkar* and who is the *sarkar*? Is the government important for them? When these questions were asked to people in the study area, interesting answers were given. According to some of them, *sarkar* means political parties, for some it represents the public, and others viewed that the *sarkar* is nothing but full of corruption who plays with the emotions of the poor people. Few of them interestingly opined that they do not need any government. Moreover, the panchayat is not able to provide the facilities properly though they promise to provide them. Most of them said that they do not need government because the government has done nothing for them. They only used to give false hope, they make fool of the innocent people. Thus, now they do not want to wait for any kind of governmental schemes or help.

They mentioned that government possesses both good and bad qualities. Though there is corruption in the governance, somehow the government manages to run the country. Some people also opined that government is an important organ of the country because it implements laws and maintains rules and regulation to form a civilized society. These poor people, however, feel that government gives importance to those people who are powerful and rich.

In the views of some people, *sarkar* is a governing body, which is formed through their votes in the elections. Government is seen as an instrument that is having power to control others and give security to the people. Some of the people opined that government is necessary to look after the country while some others viewed that they do not need government because they can survive without it. One elderly woman with an aggressive tone replied “*amiei sarkar*” (We are the government). They also said that government is an organ that can control the price instability.

Significant percentage of people feel and articulate that for them government is a different form of corruption. Government is busy in unnecessary things, which are not useful for citizens, but ignores many necessary and important things. Few of them said that government has the power to rule over the general masses. But the powerful and people having vested interests misuse the power for their own benefit. Many respondents accuse *dalals* for mis-governance of their society. Some people opined that the rules and laws are not so strong for which the tendency of corruption is increasing continuously.

One principal remark made by many respondents in the study area effectively was that of corruption. It is widely discussed and argued by urban middle class populace which is concerned about the issue of corruption. India recently witnessed the ‘India Against Corruption’ movement led by Anna Hazare. This anti-corruption movement has caught people’s imagination. Capitalizing on this campaign, Arvind Kejriwal with his supporters formed a party called *Aam Aadmi Party*, which formed the government in Delhi for forty nine days. Electronic media and print media equally carried the live coverage and news stories of the anti-corruption movement. These events had an all-India impact due to the continuous electronic media coverage. Even the rural masses who were hardly concerned about the big corruption at national level came to understand some of these issues. They were concerned about the immediate livelihood issues and challenges they face in everyday life. Under the influence of anti-corruption discourse many people even in rural areas started believing that corruption is the root cause of all sorts of evil in governance. Many of the respondents stated that they need a powerful and corruption free government to bring changes and development to the country. One of the respondents said that only during the

election several political parties come to different villages and request people to vote for their party. They give hope for their development by providing various facilities. But after the elections, they become invisible.

Mintu Chetry of Amolapam village, who is about 35 years of old, belongs to the Nepali community. He said that for him government is meaningless. He feels that to become successful in life, we must not depend on government. The political parties use the people for their own self-interest as most of the people in his locality and even in many rural parts of India are illiterate. He says though Indian National Congress party is not doing its duties sincerely, still many people supported it by casting their valuable votes. However, to bring in any change in government, people must be aware about the true worth of the political parties, their positive and negative intents.

Sarita Devi, a young lady from Napam, hails from the Nepali community, maintains that the government possesses both good and bad qualities. She says that the government provides full financial support to the people for development purpose. But in the process of monetary distribution, some groups with vested interest, generally known by the term 'Syndicate'³, take away the resources made for the poor people causing them serious sufferings. She emphasised the need of good leaders who can take the country on the path of progress and development. She opines that Congress party represents the government. According to her, earlier *sarkar* was good and the present Congress *Sarkar* is bad. It is mainly responsible for corruption and price hike. Many people feel that *sarkar* should work for the poor people, as rich people can do things by their own.

Shewak Upadhyya a middle-aged man, from Amolapam village who is a fruit seller, equates *sarkar* with the political parties. Though the Congress has been ruling since the last 15 years, they have not been able to fulfill the main target of development. So he feels that AGP *sarkar* will be a better *sarkar* than the Congress. He directly opined that the Congress

³ In Assam, people generally refer to Syndicate as an organized group of individuals formed to do some illegal activities. It denotes to the racketeers who are responsible for hoarding, collecting illegal tax and price hike of essential commodities.

is a corrupt party that is why the country is not developing. He said that the officials, bureaucrats and the politicians are embroiled in severe corruption. It adversely affects the common people, especially the ones who live below the poverty line. He also mentioned that corruption is the main reason why the gap between the poor and the rich are increasing day by day.

People of Napam have a tendency to equate government with political parties, such as Congress, AGP, BJP etc. For them, the government is a 'necessary evil'. Society takes care of their everyday need while government creates more trouble for them. Most women folk feel that government is not doing anything for their upliftment. According to them, the political parties constitute an important part of government. They are quite concerned about the present political situation. Mainly, they have pointed out that the government does not give any importance to the development of backward areas.

While defining *sarkar*, Phool Devi a middle aged woman from Bhitore Parowa said that public is the government. This is because they have the power to select and elect the ministers, so that they can work for citizens. But after getting the power the ministers think themselves to be the government and utilize the power wrongly. Another respondent said that government is the office where people with high status work and control everything. That is not for common people. Some of the respondents said that they did not understand all these (politics, government etc.) things, because they are illiterate. They also said that there is no need to know it further, because they spent half of their life without knowing all these. Another old lady from tea garden community identified ministers with government. Many respondents feel that government is something which is beyond their reach. That is why in villages people do not consider PRIs as *sarkar* or government. For them, *sarkar* is an entity which holds a high position and very powerful and it is out of the reach of the common people.

Subrota Mandal who is in her late thirties, from a Bengali Hindu community from Napam village said that government provides facilities to people. It is necessary for a country especially for one like India where poor people live in large numbers. Mohammad Abdul Salam from Amolapam, a middle aged Bengali Muslim opined that government is

everything. It is the most important thing in any country. He asks back, whether there is country which runs without a government? Without government a country will become instable. So, for him, government is important to control our society. He emphasised that Congress is the government everywhere. They are in power both in Delhi and in Assam. In his view, the political parties manage the governance of any country. Another person interestingly opines that the BJP is the *sarkar* of India, because it handles problem better than Congress.

From the views gathered from various respondents it appears that many understand that a government or *sarkar* is formed by their votes. Government is formed by the support of common people. According to them, government is an important part of the country because they implement laws and regulations. But there are also some people who view government as a necessary evil. It is mainly the poorer section of people who are deprived of the welfare schemes said government is an unnecessary thing. One can survive without government. Dependence on government, according to them, is like wasting one's life without any meaning and achievement. So, for these people government is not important. There are also some people who said government is both good and bad.

Governance and Bureaucracy

Government officials generally show a typical attitude of indifference. Very few officials are interested in the real implementation of policy, programmes and development of effective governance system at the grassroots level. In last five years, government is trying to implement the e-governance system. It is believed that e-governance system is an efficient form of governance. Most of the government officials including the District Information Officer feel that the e-governance system is helping in reducing the red tapism and corruption in governance. He, for example, pointed out that issuing passport today is much easier in comparison to the earlier days. Similarly, in court cases, judges get cases on the basis of computerized shuffling system. In earlier days, there was a possibility that an individual judge could choose his cases based on some personal interest. But now computer programming will decide which judge will get which case.

Napam is part of the Balipara development block. BDO of the Balipara development block said that MGNREGA is a very good poverty alleviation programme, but it is not working properly. He said the workers generally do not work as per the wage they get. Without generalizing the situation, he said that many MGNREGA workers, man and woman, sit idle at the work site. If officials tell them to work, they would threaten that this money is for them, nobody can take away the money from them. They even threaten to go for a *dharna* (protest). He feels that people do only half the work but get the full wage. They do not do quality work. He narrates that too much of political intervention is also a problem in India. He was reading an Assamese newspaper, he found a news item where Michelle Obama, the USA First Lady urged students to go to China and study the kind of development it has initiated. Then he opined that in a country like India where many people are still illiterate, democracy will not work. He said, "Look at China, even if it is an authoritarian country, it is developing much faster and is going to be a super power very soon." He also told that India is having some wonderful social welfare programmes, but the implementation and execution of these programme are miserable. There are various reasons for it. The interventions of politicians are the biggest hurdle to it, where all kinds of programmes, even with very good intentions, end up in disaster.

Gender and Governance

The role of gender in governance was witnessed in the house of the ZP member from Napam area. The husband Sheikh Sahabuddin, whose name we have mentioned above, is a teacher by profession and his wife is a member of the ZP from Napam. When we visited the house was filled with people, especially males, from different backgrounds who had come to discuss problems of the community or the village, welfare schemes and its benefits, personal issues, etc. It was expected that the woman who represents the people in ZP will give information and answers to queries. But to our surprise, it was her husband and his associates who interacted among themselves and the wife, the ZP member, was conspicuous by her absence in the interactions.

His wife did not even come to greet or see the people who gathered at her house. Thus, there was no scope of interacting with her. This situation seems to suggest two aspects i.e.

male dominance and woman's power (power to women is granted at rarest case). Male dominance was evident as the husband along with other male associates took decisions like when to conduct discussions, meetings with the local people and higher authority, resolve issues and so on. This patriarchal dominance is also major feature of the society. The decisions taken by the husband without the consent of his wife who is the member of ZP curbs the effective participation of the wife. It also indicates that woman's participation in decision-making is marginal at grassroots societies.

However, a kind of woman's power was reflected in the scene because I had no direct interaction with the wife. Neither did the villagers and people assembled there. It is assumed that it may be only on rarest occasion that the lady interacted with people and the people have to have prior talks with her husband to request the lady to come to the public.

Besides, the house was transformed into an office temporarily where people exchanged views about new and old policies and development of their area. People belonging to different religions assembled in the house and formulated developmental plans which were later made public to the members of their block or the villagers. All the men folk were of participatory spirit and dealt with issues with sheer attention. There was no single woman present in the meeting. Social relation seemed to be cordial among them and their actions spoke about their dedication. Their collective action helped to solve a shared problem. There was veneration for each other's opinion and interest and this helped to come at a collective consensus. They were aware of the prevailing scenario of their village and actively participated in discussion to provide benefits to their people. Their interaction helped to establish relation of understanding among them and apply the same in their meetings. Finally, the woman who was a member of the ZP sent tea through her aide to the people assembled in her house.

It is widely debated that though women have been granted reservations in the elected representative bodies in India, they are controlled by their male counterparts. Many people in the Napam area feel that it might empower the women in future. But presently most of the women who hold office are manipulated by the male members of their family. It is seen that women those who have been elected through women reservation quotas, hardly

participate actively in the activities of the PRIs. They are used as a symbol or rubber stamp by their husbands, brothers and fathers. Even some women respondents opined that though government has provision for us to enter into politics, it belongs to the domain of male. We are only good in earning livelihood, managing children and household activities.

When people were asked question on women's reservation in legislative bodies, interesting answers were given. Some such responses are mentioned here. Prahlad Singh is a middle aged man from Bihari community in Bhitari Parowa area. He states that women should not take part in political activities. For him, it is an unnecessary activity for a woman to take part in political affairs as they are born to do household work and not to rule the country. They are more emotional and sentimental compared to men. So, he thinks women cannot do justice to politics.

A woman from tea tribe community named Susita Tapno from Noorbari tea estate articulates that the reservation policy in legislative bodies for the women help to improve their status as well as their conditions in the society. She supports women in participating in politics because she feels that women are more capable to understand the problems of women as compared to men. For example, a woman will be able to understand the emotion of a rape victim more intensely than that of a man. She states that women need reservation to assert their voice and also added that equality is the right of every citizen. So, people must support women in the domain of politics.

Mohammad Jalaluddin, an old man from Bengali Muslim community from Amolapam stated that reservation in legislative bodies would only help those women who belong to the elite groups of the society; therefore, by gaining political powers they would marginalize the poor and deprive the backward sections of women. He also mentioned that women are more sentimental than men. He also said that women are physically weak for participating in political activities. Even if there is the reservation policy, it is only going to serve the rich and powerful who will rule through their wives. The biggest problem today is that politics is getting alienated from the common people. It is controlled by the elites and rich. So, no reservation system can solve this problem. He thinks reservation in politics will not

be useful. He opined that women do not have the capacity to change the scenario of the present governance system.

Rubina Begum, a young woman from Muslim community in Noorbari area stated that women are playing a significant role in various spheres in our country. Reservation does not mean women are weak, neither it a charity. In fact, it is the first step, the government can logically take to make women come forward and unleash their creative power. Once women use their power, the society and the present generation will be empowered. So, we must support women reservation in the domain of politics.

A woman from Nepali community in her mid-thirties named Tilasori Devi of Napam says that women reservation has changed the views of people on the capability of women. It has changed the status of the women as well; this has helped them to think differently. It has motivated other women to raise their voice and participate in the political activities. In India, women have the equal right to vote and in this process they have to get equal opportunities to get elected. Nowadays, women are educated and they must get the chance to come forward and participate in all the social, economic and political spheres.

Some people supporting women said that women are more able to understand the problem of women than men. Some others viewed that women who belong to the elite groups are gaining upper hand, therefore, by gaining political power they deprive the backward and poor ones. But some women strongly opined that this is the beginning. Men have started realizing the power of women and very soon women will be accepted in politics. They will contribute better than the men as they understand and handle social problems in better ways.

Napam Panchayat Office

In the Napam panchayat office around 1:30 pm, there was nobody in the office except the chowkidar and there was a man outside the office making some noise and abusing the chowkidar. When he was asked about what happened, the man replied with anger that he

has been coming to the office for many days to get a 'road pass'⁴. But he does not find anybody in office except the chowkidar, who does not have authority to issue this pass. The man, named Abdul Hasim was shouting, "*kono nathake office ot... kiman dinor pora ahi aso mor eko kam howa nai,, heiya sauk, president or chaki... khali hoi ase..*" (Nobody is present in the office... I have been coming here for so many days but none of my work has been done yet... look at that President's empty chair).

When it was asked to the chowkidar that whether president will come to the office that day or not, he said no, because of his personal work he will not come that day. He said that it is the time of panchayat elections, and president is busy in several party meetings, therefore it is hard to meet him. Abdul Hasim, while shouting again, said that he was not a *Bangladeshi*, so actually he need not procure a trans road pass, but nobody listend to the poor man... we are not Bangladeshis but we are made Bangladeshis. Shouting, he came out of the office. Then, he came to me and said, "please, come to my house. I can provide many data relating to panchayat". I followed him. He lives at Puniyani village near Baghchong village. He is a painter by profession.

He stated that, "*Puniyani schoolor head master e mok kosisil kone kone BPL card pabo tar list bonabo, kintu xeiya koribo golei manuhe muk bea pabo...*" (The head master of Puniyani school asked me to make a list of people who need to get BPL card, but people will hate me if I do so). He implied that there was much corruption in selection of beneficiaries of the BPL card. He even said that officials take bribe to provide any official document.

He narrates that "*ami sorkaror prapyo nohoy, sorkar amar prapyo...jiman sakorial manuh ase ei bharotot, sob congressi manuh. Sonia Gandhi, Indira Gandhi bhal manuh, xeiya amar ma-deuta hoteu koi amiu kou... Kintu ji eibur step by step (he means bureaucrats) manuh jene member, president, councilor, xeibilak beiman, dalal,... Ami congress ok support koru karon ma deuta e koi 'haat'⁵ nohole kamei nohoy.. kintu congress e aji amak*

⁴ To enter into the army cantonment area in Solamar region, one requires a permit.

⁵ *Haat* means hand which is the electoral symbol of the Indian National Congress Party.

eiya dise... congress e amak diya nai, beleg sorkar howa hole dile heten...ami Muslim holeu Bangladeshi nohoy...Muslim holei konob Bangladeshi hoi najai. Hoi iyat Bangladeshi ase. Puniyani gaon ot motamoti dui sha Bangladeshi ase...)

(“Government is our right; it is not the other way around... All the people engaged in government services are Congress party supporters... Our parents said that Sonia Gandhi and Indira Gandhi are good people and I also agree. But these ‘step by step’ people (bureaucrats) like member, president, councilor etc. are actually corrupt and become *dalal* ... We supported Congress because our parents said that nothing can be done without a ‘Hand’. You look today, what Congress has given us. We would definitely be benefited if there were another party in rule... We are Muslims... we are not Bangladeshis, one does not become a Bangladeshi being a Muslim. Yes, there are Bangladeshis here. There are almost 200 Bangladeshis in Puniyani village. They do not have their name in the voter list of 1995 election, but they get control card⁶ in their name. Therefore, I think that only Congress betrayed us. All the Muslim (*miya*) people and government servants are Congress supporters; others do not support Congress...no other party can stand before such a huge support. But these corrupt *dalals* (presumably MLAs, bureaucrats and gundàs) polluted the party.”)

Hasim continued that the fees of a lawyer is Rs. 120/-. But if you go to court today, they will demand rupees 500/- for the initiation of a case. If you go to police station, they will take rupees 50/- for registering a case. So many wine shops, opium business and gambling are in operaton in Puniyani village... these things are known to Panchmile police station, Goroimari police station, Tezpur main police station, even DC and MLA know this. MLAs and MPs take money from these police persons and wine shops. So how can they take action against all these criminals. We cannot provide money, but we provide more valuable thing than money, that is our vote. We give our vote to make them win. In the conversation, Hasim was frequently talking about ‘*dalals*’. He does not blame the Congress party or the

⁶ Colloquially, the ration card, through which one is entitled to receive a certain amount of sugar, kerosene, rice, and wheat is called control card.

state as a whole, but merely these *dalals* or power hungry bureaucrats and officials, who exercise power over the masses.

Panchayat and the Community Life of Village

Post 73rd Amendment phase is vital for the village society in India. As an institution of local self-government, Panchayat got legal status with this amendment. But the amendment also had vast impact on the community life of the people apart from giving legal status to the panchayats. Caste system constitutes one of the most important components of Indian village society. The complex nature of the village society and the factions formed on the basis of the caste group is seen as an impediment to the implementation of the 73rd amendment. In Assam, even though the practice of caste system is not as rigid as it is found in northern and southern India, it still exists in a very subtle form. The Brahmins and other higher Hindu caste groups in Assam downplay caste as a dominant social category. But people belong to lower caste groups including dalits assert that caste still plays a greater role in high level politics, may it be in legislative arena or in bureaucracy sphere. It is interesting to note that although the caste or various other affiliations played an important role in the working of the panchayat, there are some effects of the panchayat also on the life of the people in the village. The impact of the community on the working of the panchayat ranges from the selection of the beneficiaries and effect on various decision making process. On the other hand, the impact of the institution of the panchayat on the community life is reflected in term of the group formation on the basis of different political parties.

From a sociological perspective, it is very interesting to look at the issue of community life and its changing patterns with the advent of the panchayats. In Assam, the institution of *Namghar* used to work as the mobilising force for the community in the village. It not only works as cultural institution, but it was also a place of village bonding, means of identity and the place for the decision making. The importance of the *Namghar* in Assam also lies in another context. Assam does not have Gram Sabhas in the modern sense of the term. It has been the *Namghar* which performed the function of the Gram Sabha in the Assamese Hindu villages of the Brahmaputra valley. It is because people used to gather in the

Namghar to discuss various matters of social importance including the village development activities. Besides, small conflicts are also resolved in the *Namghar*.

It is observed that the introduction of the panchayat with the 73rd Amendment became a point of conflict within the community life based on *Namghar*. There is a visible trend in the shift of the group identity of the village from the community based on *Namghar* to the faction based on the political parties. The clash in the village on the party line is becoming common nowadays. The situation has reached to such a stage that people have even started performing various religious activities with the people who are from the same political parties.

The mobilisation of the people in the village on the party line is organised specially at the time of elections. The election campaigns provide the occasion for the identification of the people and their political affiliation: Nowadays, it is becoming essential for the people to campaign for the party or to identify with a party to get various material benefits after the elections. Three elections in five years (parliamentary, assembly and panchayat) gave ample opportunity to mobilise the people on the basis of party affiliation. The conflicts that occur in the village are sometime based on the line of politics. I am trying to suggest that there is a clear shift in the nature of grouping in the villages after the advent of the panchayats. This phenomenon is not unique only to the Hindus, is also observed among the Muslim electorates. Those people who previously used to form groups according to religious affiliation have started showing their affinity in terms of political parties. People from Muslim community here in Sonitpur district mainly support Congress and recently the poor Muslim electorates have started supporting AIUDF led by Badruddin Ajmal. This issue is discussed at some length in the Chapter 5.

While electioneering provides a periodic occasion for mobilization of people, the association of villagers with panchayats is a regular phenomenon. People are complaining that the panchayat brought the menace of corruption to the village. Some people stated that those who are in power in the panchayat do not even feel ashamed to indulge in corruption. They do it to fulfill their narrow interests. The beneficiaries of the various schemes are selected mainly on the party lines as well as on the bases of community and kinship ties. In

the process, the actual needy persons are left out from getting the benefit of the welfare schemes. Panchayat members have to oblige the party leaders, workers as well as members from their community. Samuel (2010) argues that India's system of Panchayati Raj Institutions offers great opportunities for inclusive grassroots democracy, but the federal political structure does not allow the transfer of power and autonomy to local self-governments through various ways. It is argued that there is decentralisation of the corruption rather than the decentralisation of power. The ultimate objectives of *electioneering and the institutionalization of panchayats*, as it is discussed above, are meant to ensure transparent good governance eventually. It is expected that such processes will lead to decentralization of power. On the contrary, however, what seems to have occurred at the ground level is that some corrupt and dishonest individuals with unholy alliance with broader level political leaders and administrative officials have disrupted and derailed these objectives.

Chapter 4

Seeing Like a Citizen: People's Perception and Engagement with State and Governance

Drawing on observation, key interviews, focus group discussion and surveys, this chapter examines how governance works at local level and how the supposed beneficiaries of the welfare schemes perceive governance. It tries to understand the notion of informal governance and the element of trust in financial transaction within the community at the local level. It also discusses the idea of legal citizenship through the official documentary practices. Besides, it also highlights the role of clientelism in local politics.

People's perception of development and governance

It has already been discussed in the preceding chapters how a gap exists between a government policy and its implementation at the ground level. There are many development programmes envisaged by both the central and the state governments to benefit the poor. But they often fail to reach the actual beneficiaries who are supposed to be benefited. Then questions arise as to why the target population do not get the benefits they are supposed to get.

People's Perception on Education

To understand the state of education, a question was asked with the help of interview schedule, whether the status of education has improved in the last 10 years. Interesting answers were offered and the summary is presented in table 4.1. Most people, cutting across the income categories think that education has improved during last 10 years. Only 17% of the respondents felt that the status of education has remained same. People feel that the numbers of schools are not sufficient. Even if schools are there, infrastructure is very poor. Due to lack of toilets and other facilities girl students often do not go to schools and dropout rates among them are high.

Table 4.1 - Opinion about quality of education

Opinion/Income category	Poor		Vulnerable		Non-Poor		Affluent		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Not good	15	(17.0)	3	(10.0)	1	(3.2)	6	(15.4)	25	(13.3)
Good	52	(59.1)	17	(56.7)	21	(67.7)	19	(48.7)	109	(58.0)
Better than earlier	4	(4.5)	6	(20.0)	2	(6.5)	4	(10.3)	16	(8.5)
Lack higher education	16	(18.2)	3	(10.0)	5	(16.1)	7	(17.9)	31	(16.5)
Cannot say	1	(1.1)	1	(3.3)	2	(6.5)	3	(7.7)	7	(3.7)
Total	88	(100.0)	30	(100.0)	31	(100.0)	39	(100.0)	188	(100.0)

But 60% of people feel that education is good in the Napam area. 13% population said quality of education is not good. 8% population opined that the current status of education is better than earlier days. However, 17% of them said there is a lack of higher education facility in the locality. People showed their concern about lack of college education in the Napam area. Students have to go to Tezpur town to attend college education which is around sixteen kilometres away. They have to spend a lot of money on travel. They emphasised the need for some more development in terms of increase in the number of educational institutions in the area. People think that curriculum of the government school is not good. That is why, in various competitive examinations which are meant for employment, they are lagging behind than the students of the private schools. Many people opined that the status of education is directly related to the economic condition of the family. Due to poor economic condition of the local communities the educational quality of the local schools is not improving, as the local communities are not able to intervene in the education process. Lack of teachers is affecting the quality of primary education.

Table 4.2 - Opinion on teachers' quality

Opinion/Income category	Poor		Vulnerable		Non-Poor		Affluent		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Not good	11	(12.5)	6	(20.0)	4	(12.9)	5	(12.8)	26	(13.8)
Good	63	(71.6)	22	(73.3)	24	(77.4)	24	(61.5)	133	(70.7)
Lack training	12	(13.6)	2	(6.7)	3	(9.7)	10	(25.6)	27	(14.4)
Cannot say	2	(2.3)							2	(1.1)
Total	88	(100.0)	30	(100.0)	31	(100.0)	39	(100.0)	188	(100.0)

I have discussed the issues of privatisation and corporatisation of the welfare provisions in chapter 6. Most of the respondents opined that government schools are suffering from shortage of teachers. Even if teachers are there, people feel that they not adequately trained, which affects the quality of education. It also affects the retaining rate and capacity of the schools. When students do not find education interesting they leave schools and join their family members to earn money. Around 70% of the poor people feel that the teachers' quality is good. Those who say quality is not good constitute around 30%. Many of the latter emphasise on the training aspect of the teacher. They feel that government teachers lack training and they are not performing at the expected level. People emphasise that better teachers, especially Teacher Eligibility Test (TET) qualified teachers should be appointed in the schools of the area. In many primary schools, there is a single teacher who teaches three classes simultaneously. Absence of new appointments is affecting the elementary education in the Napam area.

Majority of people feel that the infrastructure of the government run school is very poor. They lack proper building. In many villages, they are made from thatch, bamboo, and mud. People feel that they should be converted into *pucca* buildings. Students mostly use broken desk and bench. In some of the schools due to lack of infrastructure they even take classes under tree or in the school veranda. Some respondents informed that due to lack of buildings, in some primary schools, teachers take classes in their own houses.

Regarding the education of girls, almost everybody opined that girls' education is very essential and necessary. The respondents felt that higher education is necessary for girls which will make them aware of their rights. When a girl child is educated, it leads to the development of the family and society. However, one old man from the Muslim community opined that girls should be given only basic primary education. As they will have to look after the household after their marriage, there is no need for them to get higher education. If they have more education, they may not obey their husbands' command. This will create rupture in the family life. Therefore, there is no need for the girls to go for higher education.

Table 4.3 - Perceived problems in education

Opinion/Income category	Poor		Vulnerable		Non-Poor		Affluent		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Lack of teacher	18	(20.5)	7	(23.3)	6	(19.4)	9	(23.1)	40	(21.3)
Facility insufficient	14	(15.9)	5	(16.7)	5	(16.1)	7	(17.9)	31	(16.5)
Lack of affordability	11	(12.5)	4	(13.3)	4	(12.9)	10	(25.6)	29	(15.4)
Lack of accessibility	1	(1.1)	1	(3.3)	1	(3.2)			3	(1.6)
Poor infrastructure	11	(12.5)	4	(13.3)	4	(12.9)	7	(17.9)	26	(13.8)
Lack of awareness	3	(3.4)					2	(5.1)	5	(2.7)
No problem	18	(20.5)	6	(20.0)	7	(22.6)	3	(7.7)	34	(18.1)
Lack of trained teacher	12	(13.6)	3	(10.0)	4	(12.9)	1	(2.6)	20	(10.6)
Total	88	(100.0)	30	(100.0)	31	(100.0)	39	(100.0)	188	(100.0)

Problems affecting the education

One of the major drawbacks of the government schools is the syllabus. People feel due to the poorly designed curriculum, students from government schools are not able to compete with the students from private schools. The syllabus should be at par with the national level. Shortage of teachers in many schools is also a concern for many guardians. They assert that due to the lack of higher secondary schools in their locality, many students cannot afford to continue their education. Many teachers do not come to school regularly. Those who come to school regularly, however, do not take their classes regularly.

21% of people perceived that lack of teacher is a problem in the education system. 17% of population felt that facility is not sufficient. Due to lack of affordability, 15% of people feel that they cannot send their children to school. Only 2% think that lack of accessibility is a problem whereas poor infrastructure is the biggest challenge to quality education according to 14% of population. 3% of the respondents feel that lack of awareness among people is the main reason behind educational backwardness while 11% of them think that it is due to the lack of trained teachers. Interestingly, 18% of people think there is no such problem in the education.

People's poor economic condition, many of whom are daily wage earners, also affects their ability to provide education. Many parents instead of sending their children to school send them earn a working wage. Because of financial problems, they cannot continue the school education. Some people responded that they have to send their children to teacher's house for schooling. So, they are obliged to pay some fee to the teacher for this purpose. Availability of optimum number of schools is also a great concern for the parents in the locality. Guardians are often not properly educated. So it is difficult for them to intervene in matters related to the improvement of the quality of education in the local schools. But few respondents opined that no problem can affect children's education, if people send their children to school.

Maintenance of primary education by Panchayat

On the question of whether the primary education should be maintained by the Panchayat or not, 65% of people said that it should be the responsibility of the Panchayat. However, 35% of population thought that it should not be looked after by the Panchayat.

People believe that more benefits can be gained if the Panchayat is actively involved in schooling. Thus, for any kind of problem, the school can directly contact Panchayat members. However, the Panchayat must be corruption free. If Panchayat members are corrupt then corruption will enter into the education system. The Panchayat will know better about the school and education in their respective villages. They can understand the problems at local level and it will be beneficial if the Panchayat is active. People can discuss the problems of education and school with the Panchayat members. However, though people think that primary education should be run by the Panchayat, they feel that the higher education (from high school onward) should be run by the government.

The people who said that Panchayat should not look after the primary education, argued that Panchayat members are corrupt, they will siphon off the money and there will be no development. They suggested that primary education should be controlled by the government. Some of them also opined that it should be managed by the school committee. State government should look after the school. Many people believe that Panchayat is different from government.

Table 4.4 - Whether there is any VEC in the village

Response	No of HH	Percent
Yes	5	2.7
No	168	89.4
Cannot say	15	8.0
Total	188	100.0

VEC is one of the features of decentralised form of governance. When asked people said that often VEC is formed in the village but it is not functional. In two villages, there is no VEC. They said it was once implemented but after that nobody talks about the issue.

Health: Facility, Perception, and Participation

The people from Napam area mostly visit Kanaklata Civil Hospital in Tezpur town, which is a district level hospital of Sonitpur district under the Department of Health of the government of Assam. For immediate consultations, people from Napam area visit Panchmile health centre located around 4 kms away. Many poor people also visit the Mission hospital run by Christian Baptist Mission, located 15 kms away in the Tezpur town where the fee is relatively less. Those who can afford prefer private hospitals. This issue is discussed in details in chapter 6. People from Noorbari tea garden area often consult the garden hospital.

Noorbari tea garden area is one of the most backward regions in the Napam Panchayat in terms of health service facilities and people suffer immensely. One health centre, which is run by the tea garden management, is not very functional. People complain that diagnoses of the doctors are not proper. Patients have to sit a considerable distance away from the doctor. Many times the doctor writes the prescription without enquiring in detail from the patient. Most of the medicines are purchased from outside. They are supposed to get some basic medicines from the health centre and most often these medicines are out of stock.

One of the respondents in the tea garden said that “*Amar gaon ot etai sashya kendra ase, eitu companir hoi*” (In our village there is only one health centre, it belongs to the tea company). When asked about the services it provides, the respondents replied that “*ami akol dorob ekta duta pao. ketiaba bemar bhal hoi aru ketiaba nohoi. Aru dorob pale bhi bohut bemarot dorob nakhate.*” (We get few medicines, sometimes it helps and sometimes it does not. For many diseases, one does not get medicine here). These statements reveal that the quality of health services in the Noorbari tea garden area is poor. It also speaks of the medical facilities in the tea gardens of Assam. The sick person here gets limited amount of medicine from the health centre, which often does not cure the illness. Only a single compounder is available in the health centre. The health centre lacks infrastructural

facilities. People at first consult the health centre. Later, if the disease is not cured, then they take the patient to Kanaklata Civil Hospital in Tezpur town. “Amar gaonot 108¹ nahei” (in our village 108 ambulance service hardly come). A poor woman of the village said, 108 services has never been active in this village due bad road connectivity.

Why Health Services are Important

Informants articulate that the only wealth for the poor is their bodily well-being. Illness hampers earning which is crucial to their livelihood. Thus, good health is very much desirable. One respondent said, “*Swathya hi Sampada*” that means ‘health is wealth’. According to him, for the poor health is the biggest asset. If that is lost the entire purpose of living is defeated. Another respondent showed serious concern about the quality of vegetables available in the local market. He said mostly they consume vegetables sold in the local market which are brought from Kharupetia² region. They eat vegetables which are laced with chemicals and pesticides. One respondent believes that good health is essential as it contributes to the development of the country. 71% population feel that health service facilities have improved while 27% of population feel it has not. 2% population opine that it has improved elsewhere, but not in their village.

Table 4.5 - Whether government has implemented rural health programme

Opinion/ Category	Poor		Vulnerable		Non-Poor		Affluent		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Yes	58	(65.9)	22	(73.3)	23	(74.2)	35	(89.7)	138	(73.4)
No	30	(34.1)	8	(26.7)	8	(25.8)	4	(10.3)	50	(26.6)
Total	88	(100.0)	30	(100.0)	31	(100.0)	39	(100.0)	188	(100.0)

¹ This is an ambulance service provided by the state government without any cost.

² It is widely known that in Kharupetia village which is 100 km away from Tezpur town, many farmers are engaged in vegetable farming. It is infamous for using excessive pesticides and fertilizers to grow more vegetables quickly, to increase profit and win in the competitive market.

NRHM programme of the government is perceived as one of the most successful programmes. Few respondents said that they get iron tablets from the local health centre. Sometimes vaccination is done in the government run schools. The JSY, *Mamoni*, *Majoni*, *Adoroni* schemes are very much popular in these areas. These schemes are operational under NRHM in Assam. These are planned for mothers and babies. Most of the respondents claimed that they are beneficiaries of JSY, *Mamoni*, *Majoni*, schemes.

Table 4.6 - View about functioning of NRHM in villages

Opinion/ Category	Poor		Vulnerable		Non-Poor		Affluent		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Working properly	43	(48.9)	16	(53.3)	15	(50.0)	20	(51.3)	94	(50.3)
Not working properly	30	(34.1)	12	(40.0)	15	(50.0)	15	(38.5)	72	(38.5)
Don't know	12	(13.6)					2	(5.1)	14	(7.5)
Working in other villages	3	(3.4)	2	(6.7)			2	(5.1)	7	(3.7)
Group Total	88	(100.0)	30	(100.0)	30	(100.0)	39	(100.0)	187	(100.0)

People felt that the NRHM is running well in other places, but not in their villages. Of the many schemes running, only *Mamoni* and *Majoni* are working properly. Other health programmes are often not properly implemented in the villages. Some of them said that the health schemes are mainly good for the poor people. It is benefiting the poor people and is successful to a great extent. Most of the poor people are benefiting from schemes of NRHM. ASHA cannot fulfil the needs of the population as the demands are more than the services provided. It is interesting to note that 4% of the population responded that people outside the village are benefitted. 50% of the respondents feel that it is working properly in the village. 39% of population, however, opined that it is not working properly in their village. It is not being properly implemented and people are not benefiting. Many of them felt that NRHM scheme is good for poor people but they do not get much of its services. At the same time they also felt that it is a successful programme but their village is out of its

purview. The NHRM services are good is successful in highlighting the state of health of the rural people.

On the question of quality of health services in their village, only 18% feel that it is sufficient whereas 77% of the people feel that quality is not good. They said there is an urgent need for more facilities and schemes for the poor people and that it must be utilised for needy people only. They complained that often schemes benefit people who are related to the concerned officials of the NHRM. Few of them opined that rural health is improving even though sub centres are not working properly. However the poor and the needy are not getting much benefit. They commented that as poor people cannot afford private health care facility, the need for more government hospitals becomes imperative. One respondent vehemently articulated that in their Panchayat, the government provided many schemes but only limited people are benefitted from these schemes. Most of the health problems of women are handled by ASHA; sometimes they do not work properly. One schoolteacher informed that these health schemes are good but due to lack of consciousness and awareness among the people the programmes are not successful. The satisfaction level of the health facilities in the Panchayat is alarmingly low. Only 2% people are largely satisfied with the state of health facilities in the Panchayat. 63% of people are satisfied up to some extent with the existing health facilities.

Availability of Medicine

The poor availability of medicine in the Napam Panchayat is very disturbing. People said that medicines are found in very limited amount. Iron tablets are provided to the women. Only few are satisfied with the supply of medicine, others are not very happy with the supply and availability of medicine in the area. They informed that medicines are available only during the first and second week of the month. By the third and fourth week medicine supplies get exhausted. In the later parts of the month, people have to buy medicines from their own pocket.

Most of the people responded that facilities in the hospitals are either not good or not adequate enough. People get hospital beds with great difficulty even at the time of delivery

cases and receive *Adoroni*³ scheme. On a positive note, people have expressed their happiness over the availability of ambulance facilities. Many people agreed that the ambulance facility is very good in their area. Regarding the question of visiting ASHA in their locality, 81% of people said yes. 18% of people opined that they do not visit regularly. 2% of people said that they visit only when they are called or required.

In most of the rural areas, people are still dependent on the traditional healing practices. They believe that sometimes they are affected by foul air, which creates sickness. They believe such sickness cannot be treated by modern allopathic doctors. For this they consult either traditional healer or *Ojah*. 88% of the population said they do not believe in the traditional healer where as 9% of them opined that they have faith in the traditional healer. 3% of the population informed that they occasionally visit the traditional healer. It is interesting to note that when they their children get fever, stomach ache or minor sickness they see a traditional healer. Even for ailments like jaundice they consult traditional healers. But in the case of some serious illness like TB they prefer visiting an allopathic doctor.

Suggestions for Improving the Health Services

While offering suggestions people said that the government should take initiatives to improve the state of health facilities in the Napam area. Government should set up a hospital in this area that will help poor people. They opined that education and health are both correlated. If people get good education, they will be more aware of their health and lifestyle. Medicines should be available throughout the month. In the present conditions, it is available only in the first half of the month and the stocks are over by the end of the month. Good communication in terms of accessibility and better road should be developed. Infrastructure facility is not good. People demand the establishment of one health sub centre in the Napam Panchayat so that they can get basic health facility.

³ The pregnant women get free transportation to the hospital and back to the home after delivery. Along with this facility, they get free blood test and ultra sound facility. Free essential medicines are also provided to the mother

Mid-Day Meal

MDM is a nutritional scheme launched by the government of India that is functional in government schools. Students get free food in the lunchtime. In India, it has helped in retaining students in schools and up to some extent, has reduced malnutrition in children. Many people cannot send their children to private school, as it is very expensive. The MDM programme in the schools have helped them a lot, as one of the women in the village lamented, "*anganwadi school ot e amar lorai khua pai, ghorot tu ketiaba chowka nojolei*" (In anganwadi school, at least my son gets food, sometimes at home we do not even light the stove). Thus the MDM in schools are a boon to the poor. In some houses, people even cannot light their hearth to cook food, as the amount earned is not enough. Therefore, the MDM in schools provide some quantity of food for survival of the poor children. In some cases the parents who have to leave their home early in the morning to work cannot cook, so the children have food only in the schools. Accordingly for them MDM should be continued.

Majority of people felt that MDM is a useful programme. But almost half of the population felt that MDM is not the reason for children's presence in schools. Most people felt that the quality of food served is not good even though the MDM scheme is regular in the school. While expressing their opinion on the MDM people suggested that it can potentially attract students to schools. They also said that it is good for the poor people. Few argued that it should be discontinued as it has affected the quality of education, since more attention is paid to cooking than pedagogy. According to them, if at all government wants to continue this scheme then it should be managed by NGOs. It harms the classes and education quality as teacher are busy in managing MDM. One middle aged man opined that though it is affecting the education, it is nevertheless helpful for the poor children who are getting at least a meal a day. Therefore, the government should continue with the programme. One guardian who belongs to the non-poor category asserted that this programme should be scrapped as students are interested only in food and run away from the schools after having their meal. They argued government knows what is good for the poor people. That is the reason it has floated this scheme. It is very much beneficial for the students who do not get food at home.

People expressed their opinion like NGOs should be employed in managing the MDM. Food having more nutritional value should be provided to the school children. Teacher and authority should give more importance to education rather than to distribution of the food. The responsibility of preparing food should be removed from the teachers. Instead of food, government should provide books, writing note pad and uniforms. It should also take measures so that the issue of MDM should not harm the educational quality of the schools. If government is planning to run these schemes, reputed NGOs should manage this programme. Schools should emphasise more on learning than eating. Food should be hygienically prepared. Interestingly one respondent told that the government should provide money instead of food. Another opined that non-vegetarian food should be included in the MDM. Some people said that the food in Anganwadi school is bad, there is a need for good, healthy and hygienic food. One respondent said because of the MDM, children lose their attention at learning. Because of MDM activities, classes become irregular. Some parents informed that the food sometimes creates stomach pain among the children.

Source of Drinking Water

Many people do not have access to safe of drinking water. Many of them use open well for drinking purpose whereas very few have running water connection. Some of them use hand pump. The water is not filtered. Many of them said there is no proper facility for drinking water: 61% of people opined that drinking and rural sanitation programme in the village have been implemented whereas 39% of people said no there is no drinking water facility in the village. Sanitation system has had a great impact on the health of the people. The drinking water facility in the village was very poor. Some people have private wells for purposes of drinking, cooking, cleaning, etc.

In Napam village sanitation and drinking water facilities are of major concern to the villagers. Many poor people do not have their own source of water and they use hand pumps and wells of others. Some of them access hand pumps provided by the government which is far away from their home, so they face problems in collecting drinking water.

Regarding sanitation, the existing government schemes provide only 300 bricks, some amount of sand and cement which is not sufficient for making a toilet. Moreover, a monetary payment of Rs. 300 also has to be made to the government. There are some cases where people have received toilet facilities. They have built a *pucca* toilet with concrete roof. Instead of using that as toilet, however, they use it as a granary. When they asked why they have done it, they responded that this room is the sturdiest one in the entire house. So they cannot use this as toilet. It is better to use this for storing grains. This is another instance of James Scott's idea of planning and governance failure which has been discussed in the chapter 2.

Employment

One of the most important programmes on employability is Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). The MGNREGA guarantees employment for 100 days per household in a year which necessitates the creation of a 'job card' that details the employment record. People colloquially use the term 'job card' to refer to the MNEGRA scheme. They complain that though they are entitled to get 100 days' work, in practice they do not get work for more than a month.

Table 4.7 – Whether aware and avail any employment schemes.

Awareness	Benefit	Poor	Vulnerable	Non-Poor	Affluent	Total
Yes	Yes	19	3	8	6	36
	No	39	13	16	25	93
	<i>Total</i>	<i>58</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>24</i>	<i>31</i>	<i>129</i>
No	Yes	6	1	2	4	13
	No	24	13	5	4	46
	<i>Total</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>59</i>

In the rural areas of India, ensuring employment throughout the year is a big challenge. In the absence of employment people tend to migrate or starve. The above table shows that 129 people out of the 188 surveyed household are aware of the employment generating schemes of the government. Out of that only 36 people have benefited whereas 93 people have not benefited. Out of 59 people who are not aware of employment schemes of the government, 46 people have not been benefited whereas 13 people are benefited.

People in the village are aware of MGNREGA. Most of them are job card holders. But one of the respondents replied that *“job card kono kamor nohoi, eitue amar kam nidie aru dileo bosorot ek mah kam hoi aru-poisao ek mahor pai, aru eyato bohot dalal ase ji kam loi aru nijor porialor manuhak kamot logai. Kiba kam olale khobor nidie.”*(Job card is of no use. It does not help us. We get only work for one month in a year and are paid for it. There are many brokers around who give jobs to their kith and kin. They do not inform us in case of any job is available). Most of the villagers have job cards but it is of no use because sometimes they get job only for one month and the rest of the month they have to remain unemployed. Even if people have job cards, the Panchayat do not allot them with any work.

Many people have migrated from the Napam area to areas outside of Assam in search of jobs. Generally they migrate to Bangalore, Chennai, Hyderabad, Mumbai, Goa, Punjab, Kerala and Uttar Pradesh. Some people also go to Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland. They generally work in sectors like dairy firm, construction, hotel, shopping malls, private security agencies, etc. The reason for migration is local scarcity of jobs. For some people it has positive impact because they can earn money and send it to their families. But according to some people migration has a negative impact as in many families there is only one son. If that son has to go far away from home to earn money, their old parents face problems.

Solution of Villagers for Unemployment

The educated unemployed should be given loan by the government. Along with formal education, vocational courses should also be offered in the schools and colleges. Government should implement new schemes which will help the educated unemployed people. Local unemployed should be given more preference in employment opportunities.

Government should give importance to the agricultural sector as Napam area is known for agricultural activity. These days people have stopped farming their land. Government should encourage people to open small scale industry and industrial loans should be provided in every locality. Training in agricultural practices and other allied services should be provided to the youths. The youth should be encouraged and awareness campaign should be organised to impart training on self-employment.

Government should take initiative in this locality to stop outmigration of youth. Peoples mind set must change. Industrialisation can reduce the problem of rural employment. Various employment programmes should be properly implemented. By giving them employment opportunity, migration can be stopped. In the tea garden, workers suggested that the company should employ people not only for leaf plucking, but also for other types of work. Employment generation schemes should be implemented in the area. Work opportunities should be provided by the Panchayat. Training programmes on various vocational courses should be started. Enabling job opportunity at local level should be explored.

Dispute Settlement

In case of any kind of conflict or trouble people prefer going to various institutions such as Panchayats, courts, police etc. In Napam, the people informed that they initially try to settle the dispute among themselves. If it is not settled amongst them then they go to the village headman or the Panchayat for settlement of the dispute. For more serious issues they go to the police station or court. Land related issues are preferably settled at the village level. If it cannot be solved there, then they go to police station or court. But most of the time people said they prefer traditional Panchayat as it is more of informal in nature.

Some people told that they prefer Panchayat because they will be better informed of the nature of the dispute. Village headman will know the issue properly so they prefer him as an adjudicator in mediating disputes. But in the tea garden area people informed that initially they go to the Noorbari tea estate office, if it cannot be handled there then they go to police station or court.

People think it is better to consult traditional Panchayat-like bodies or village headman for the settlement of dispute because it will consume less money and time which is helpful for poor people. Local people will know the issue better and work out an unbiased resolution. Proper justice will be provided and people will be able to express the issue frankly without hesitation. Sometime the issue goes out of control for the village headman to mediate and then there is a need to go to the police station. But some people told that they do not prefer village headman. There is a chance that favouritism will be there. So there will be injustice to them.

Need of the Village

Most of the people opined that they need a hospital or health centre in their locality. People were concerned about the drinking water facility that results in illness. Electricity supply is very irregular in the Napam area. Road connectivity is required to all villages as in emergency ambulance often cannot negotiate their way in.

General complaint about Panchayat is that they indulge in corruption. They discriminate among people while selecting beneficiaries. Often favouritism is seen during distribution of goods and services. Beneficiaries are identified on the basis of ethnicity and religion. Thus, during the distribution of entitlements, people related through these factors to the Panchayat functionaries get more benefit. Sometimes people belonging to same political party also take the benefit. So people demand for better governance in PRIs.

Peoples' Suggestions for Panchayat

PRIs are considered to be the primary agency of development. In the Napam area, people do not consider Panchayats to be an organ of the government. They consider it a local entity whereas government is something which is superior and inaccessible. Many people suggested that a village development committee should be formed. Strict governmental rules and regulation should be observed and pressure should be built from the top. Panchayat members must be educated. Better inspection, strict rules and regulations should be put into the place. More pressure from the higher government officials is required. Educated and qualified, patriotic, social activists can strengthen the working of the

Panchayat. Senior citizen and learned people of the village should be elected to the Panchayats. On various village developmental programmes awareness should be created. Panchayat should have members who are concerned about the development of the village. They should have the capability to administrate. People should elect eligible candidates and not vote on the basis of their favourite party. The village urgently needs health and sanitation facilities as felt by the people.

Rural Development Programmes

Rural development programmes are implemented through the Panchayats. So in the everyday practice, people encounter the state through the workings of the Panchayat. People do not consider Panchayat as government because people from their locality only manage the works of Panchayat. There are people in the locality who may be more powerful than Panchayat members, so they consider Panchayat as a weak organisation. Many people responded that they have not got any kind of welfare benefits or schemes floated by the government of India. Out of the surveyed population 74% of people responded that they have not received any kind of government schemes. 26% of the people accepted that they have received some sort of government schemes floated in their area. Most of the people who responded in the affirmative to the government schemes said that they have received Indira Awas Yojana (IAY). After that the second highest category is for receiving any government scheme is free toilet given to people under the scheme SNHS. People also receive free electricity connection and subsidy in buying agricultural tools. The government scheme that provides free wells has been utilised by only two persons in Napam Panchayat.

The people of the village are only aware of IAY and JRY. For them it is the Panchayat which can implement rural development schemes which will enable their village to develop. They said beneficiaries of any government scheme should be identified by the people of the village. If it is left in the hands of the Panchayats, then only some sections will be benefited such as the relatives of the Panchayat members. People usually visit the Panchayat office for formal work such as to get signature of the Panchayat president or secretary in required documents.

Very few respondents believe that the socio-economically poor have benefited from various government schemes. Majority of them believed that either relatives of Panchayat members or those who have money and political power benefitted from such welfare schemes. For the villagers, especially of Amlopam, only the agricultural sector has been successful in implementing schemes since most of them are being provided with High Yielding Variety seeds, insecticides and pesticides. The respondents have stated that the panchayats can implement schemes and programmes but it often becomes dysfunctional. Thus it becomes useless for the villagers. They are aware that the benefits are being provided to only the relatives of the panchayat members and politically powerful people. One old man from Nepali community informed that most of the people here in Napam are poor and illiterate, so they cannot open their mouth and raise their voice against the panchayat members. In some cases the panchayat members are so clever that they take signatures or thumb impression from the beneficiaries even if they are not receiving anything. And thus panchayat members remain in the safe side. He exhorted that for the successful implementation of the rural development schemes and programmes, senior citizens of the village should be appointed to look after the working and functioning of the schemes. Then only will the rural development schemes and programmes be really effective in the development of villages. Existing facilities are not enough. People informed that they do not get much benefit out of these schemes. They said only NRHM is being implemented properly. There are many schemes but these are not working properly.

People from the Napam region have suggested that through the application process government should select who should benefit from the welfare programmes. The selection procedures should take the socio economic background of the people into the account. Those who are economically backward should get benefits. Some people mentioned that identification of beneficiaries and implementation of different programs should be left in the hands of panchayat but there must be some strict rules and regulations in the selection and the implementation of the programmes. In the Napam village, people mentioned that the panchayat president and members control all development programmes and plans, and also select beneficiaries. Generally, relatives of the panchayat president and members, people who have money to bribe and political power brokers get benefit. Many respondents

complained about corruption, discrimination, and nepotism on the part of the Panchayat members.

Government should set up a development committee that will look after the necessary developmental needs of the local people. One old aged male teacher from Nepali community commented that the major threat to any developmental plan is corruption and it should be tackled seriously. Poor people should be given benefits. Strict rules and regulation should be enforced. Government should appoint the administrative members to investigate the works of Panchayat. The Panchayat should not only control the plans, and that the government should have control over the developmental activities. The government should consult the people of the village about the problems. Senior citizens and officials from the government should be appointed to look after the functioning of the rural development programmes. People should be consulted at an early stage before the implementation of any developmental programme. People's awareness and participation is essential for which the Panchayat should organise campaigns and awareness programmes.

People's Experiences in the Government Office

In their everyday life, most people visit the court and the government offices such as agriculture, block development, Panchayat, Deputy Commissioner, post office, revenue office, District transport office, etc). Officials there ask for bribes even for routine work. The problem is especially severe in the offices of the Panchayat, Circle, and DC, and at the court and at the police station. For a caste certificate, one has to pay at least Rs 50 at the Panchayat, which is very difficult for poor people. Similarly, to get any work done at the circle or DC office, one has to bribe officials directly or indirectly. Government officials behave well with people who bribe them and do their work, but ignore people who do not bribe. State government officials do not come to office on time, do not give people vital information, and take lots of time to do even a small job. There is a problem of communication in terms of the language of governance and, often, people have intermediaries do their paper work. But government officials say people are illiterate, ignorant of paper work, and do not understand official procedure despite officers' best efforts to help.

The president of the Panchayat claimed that it has implemented many developmental schemes and programmes like IAY and MNREGA, from which 82% of the population of the Napam Panchayat have benefitted. Panchayat members said that it transferred all central and state government funds and benefits to the people, but the people say only a few benefit from Panchayat activity, and that its officials asked one IAY applicant to pay Rs 10,000.

Interestingly, when people from rural areas visit the court, they try to contact an advocate from their own neighbourhood, religion, or community, or one who speaks their language. They feel that they can trust only someone who speaks their language, which is one of the biggest obstacles in smooth governance. When people understand both the language of governance and everyday life, they prefer to visit the advocate who belongs to their own community.

Suggestions for Improvement in Governance

Corruption is often identified as the most important deterrent of governance. In Chapter 6, I will briefly discuss the issue of corruption as a discourse. The idea of corruption has taken a prominent place in people's imagination even in rural areas. People feel government departments are not functioning well due to corruption, and suggest various ways to improve government administration.

According to the people, eligible and efficient candidates should be elected, based on personal probity rather than on party affiliation. The government should scrutinize the Panchayat president and members from time to time. The government should implement rules strictly and inspect welfare schemes and facilities periodically to ensure that benefits are distributed equally among poor people. Senior government officials should go to the field to inspect the activity of Panchayat members. Also, the government should appoint officials to oversee the work of Panchayat members. Besides, people believe that the leaders should be patriotic; therefore, only patriotic members should be appointed, but they should also be eligible and educated. Frequent Panchayat meetings with villagers should be organised. There is no Gaon Sabha organised by the Panchayat. As soon as they are elected,

leaders forget the promises they made before the elections. The government should implement some strict rules and regulations regarding corruption and nepotism.

People strongly asserted that bribery in the government offices should be eliminated. To improve governance, leaders should be concerned about the village and its development. There should be efficient leaders and with a strong political background. Corruption should be stopped at the grassroots and people should be made aware of such issues. Eligible candidates should be selected as well as elected, for which people's consciousness is essential. The Panchayat president and all Panchayat members and government officials should work honestly. All the government officials and Panchayat members must meet people every month and inform them on government schemes and facilities.

The villagers believe that everything related to public welfare should be transparent and communicated to people, so that they can take advantage of it. A few respondents said they are deprived of food and rations because of corrupt officials. People are not getting basic necessities, so government should look at the basic necessities of the poor, and also utilize the schemes. Panchayat members do not listen to poor people; therefore, people need to have some group action. They said they need a good administration and a mechanism for lodging complaints. Officers should go to the field instead of doing desk work. Every department should be inspected like the education department. To improve governance, the distribution system should be inspected carefully.

When asked about the qualities of a good leader, there were various responses. The people opined that leaders should be conscientious, patriotic, honest, active, simple and concerned with the village and its people. He should think of others' benefit and not of his own. Most also felt that one should be impartial, experienced, sensitive to poor people and secular to be a good leader.

The local people in the Napam area had many opinions on governance and PRIs. One crucial issue was of intermediaries, who are reviled but also consulted by the people in their engagement with the state. The following section discusses the concept of *dalal* or broker in the light of the field data.

Clientelism, Brokers and Local Politics

Many social scientists argue against the problem of clientelistic politics in developing countries, as it violates the policy of equal distribution among the needy. In a clientelistic exchange, votes are exchanged for material favour. This is a two-way process: politicians buy votes and people pay for developmental work.

Political 'fixers' or *pyraveekars* exploit both government and the people by distorting information; mostly, they are considered a negative element in society. Reddy and Haragopal write, "(W)hile the pyraveekar with one hand applies pressure, pushes the files, lubricates the process, and extracts the benefits from the system, with the other hand he passes on incorrect information, misleads the target groups, and makes a private fortune. It is the negative and exploitative dimension of the institution that speaks against it and calls for its elimination through appropriate measures" (Reddy and Haragopal 1985, 1161). People feel that due to the growing incidence of ethnicisation, it is very tough for people to get resources if they do not belong to any ruling cluster. People say they have to fight very hard for resources they need to survive. Clientelism is also based on the line of party, community, religion etc. Many social scientists look at the issue of clientelistic politics from a negative side, whereas Nicolas Vande Walle argues that clientelism should be seen as an inevitable feature of the modern state (Vande Walle 2003). Clientelism can be based on political party lines, language, community, religion, or other factors also, but the defining factor is that poor people feel they need a mediator to access scarce resources.

Clientelism in the Political Arena

In recent times, social scientists have focused on the issue of clientelism. Earlier, this issue was taken as detrimental to the functioning of democracy, and, often grossly ignored by social scientists. The pork barrel politics⁴ is considered bad for any kind of democracy. It is believed that clientelism exists mostly in developing countries. To understand the political culture of a country and the political process, it is pertinent to discuss the idea and concept

⁴ 'Pork barrel politics' is the appropriation of government funds meant for some purpose by a representative in a particular area and used to gain popularity.

of clientelism. Researchers have claimed that poor people even in the Indian context enter a patron–client relationship because of the inefficiency and partiality of state mechanisms. To get public services in a country like India, where few know documentation and paper work, it is very difficult to access government services and schemes—from receiving PDS to getting a nativity certificate, ration card, voter card and for all sorts of provisions—and people therefore depend on a facilitator, to whom they express loyalty through vote and support.

Social scientists do not uniformly define ‘clientelism’, which is used synonymously with brokership, patronage, *pyareveekar*, etc. Sometimes, it is used in the context of buying votes during the election and after that it does not continue. But it has different connotations in many developing countries. This relationship is more or less a stable kind of relationship and it exists even after the elections.

Clientelism is understood in terms of some kind of power relations within society, and involves a hierarchical, patron–client, give-and-take relationship. Hopkin writes, “Clientelism is a way of describing the pattern of unequal, hierarchical exchange characteristic of feudal society, in which patrons and clients were tied to durable relationships by a powerful sense of obligation and duty” (Hopkin 2006, 2).

All multiethnic societies—including many north-eastern states and Assam—are getting more and more ethnicised. People from a particular community try to explore the possibility of a link where a network can be established, and compete for resources to survive. In a competitive developing society, as demand far outstrips availability, only people with political connections tend to get things.

Is there any difference between clientelism in the feudal period and clientelism in modern democracy? During feudalism, clients used to have a relationship with a particular feudal lord, and there was little scope for them to change their position but, in the modern democratic system, clients can switch to a different patron depending on the favour or scarce resource they get from the patron. As Hopkin argues, “(O)f course, the distribution of such benefits does not require strong clientelistic ties. The typology distinguishes between cases where club goods are made available to a group with a durable and close

relationship with the patron and cases where benefits are acquired on an ad hoc basis in return for short-term political support, or often money campaign contribution, etc” (Hopkins 2006, 11). It is not always easy to define what political clientelism is, as no precise definition exists in the literature. The NDRI report says it is “a more or less stable network of asymmetric dyadic relationships; the exchange of primarily private goods (and occasionally ‘club goods’) in return for political support and/or loyalty; benefits intended to influence political preferences and behaviour that include but are not limited to voting; and/or the assurance that even non excludable public goods reach their beneficiaries in a relatively expeditious manner” (NDRI 2010, 2).

Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith maintains, “in many cases, informal systems of clientelism and patrimonialism are key contributors to stifling popular participation, subverting the rule of law, fostering corruption, distorting the delivery of public services, discouraging investment and undermining economic progress. Because they are deeply entrenched, seldom authorized or openly acknowledged, and take different forms depending on their context, clientelistic networks can be both difficult to detect and to remove” (Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith 2002, 1). Similarly, Reddy and Haragopal depict political brokers or *pyraveekars* as scoundrels who pass incorrect and distorted information for their own gain and urge appropriate measures to eliminate them from the democratic system (Reddy and Haragopal 1985, 1161).

This argument is seen from the perspective of a modern state, where it is assumed that rules and regulations are followed strictly, and poor people receive due benefits. Generally, though, the benefits of schemes, however well intended, do not reach the people—for a variety of reasons—and clientelistic politics is the only source left to poor people to compete for resources they need to survive. In a brilliant ethnographic work of poor people’s politics and survival strategy in the Latin American context, Javier Auyero (2001) shows how in difficult situations people employ clientelistic politics to access various lifesaving provisions of food, shelters, drugs, etc. It is argued that in the absence of state mechanisms to deliver public service and goods efficiently to the deserving groups, people forms various networks, especially patron–client networks, which might provide an important alternative to the social safety net. It is often believed that the patron-client

relationship is seen more in multi-ethnic societies, where resources are relatively scarce. People have a tendency to form social network based on some common features like language, ethnicity, and religion and so on.

Janus-faced *dalals*

In a socially and politically unstable society, people tend to form a community network, so that the person in power can help them in the time of need. As Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith argue, “(U)nder competitive conditions, political bosses need criteria to single out and reward followers and to exclude non-supporters. Even as such benefits dry up, there is logic to voting for politicians from one’s own tribal or linguistic group, on the grounds that such a politician will tend to defend the interests of the group as a whole” (Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith 2002, 20). Ruma Devi, a widow from Noorbari, narrates a terrible story about intermediaries, whom she hates as they are very greedy and unreliable. She also mentioned that once, a few years after her husband had died and she had been having trouble meeting her family’s basic needs, she paid a *dalal* Rs 30,000 to get her son a job and voted as he told her to, but her son did not get a job and the *dalal* never contacted her after that. She said she regrets her mistakes.

Champa Paul and Latumoni Sabor from Noorbari agree to what Ruma Devi said. Susita Topno from Harigaon also says that people who take *dalals*’ help are bad too, as *dalals* harm society more because of their encouragement. She thinks that people from powerful and rich backgrounds have connections with *dalals*. Sanju Kumari, also from Harigaon, agreed with Topno, but Bimala Devi of Amolapam finds *dalals* helpful, as all they need is votes during elections and money for facilitating government work. Sukumar Pandit from Amolapam also finds *dalals* are good facilitators. Mohammad Jamaluddin of Amolapam feels that *dalals* are a necessary evil, and says a benevolent *dalal* once helped them get a bed in the hospital, and that it would have been very difficult for them to manage that medical incident without his help.

From the respondents in Napam area, it was found that there are rates fixed for paying the *dalals* for getting the benefit of various government schemes, which are supposed to be distributed free. People therefore demand prevention of corruption in the gaon Panchayat.

During this fieldwork, the villagers also informed us about many instances of discrepancies at the gaon Panchayat level. Brokers have fixed rates: pay Rs 10,000 for the IAY; between Rs1000–1500 for a latrine from the WASH scheme; and around Rs 300–500 for a tin roof — but the price may be discounted for a person loyal to the political party in power.

Among these people interviewed, there was one post office peon on contract. He said that there are rules and regulations. If you do not get your right then you write an application to the Panchayat president and you will get it. Another person replied strongly “*Belege jodi nilikhi pai, ami kyo likhibo lage*” (if somebody get something without writing any application, then why should we write?).

Some people who are keen to keep themselves updated politically are well aware about the situation, and know the legality of the PRIs. People are complaining that there is hardly any developmental work done by the Congress government. They are totally corrupt and they do not understand anything except money. *Dalal* is the biggest hatred entity for people. When it comes to the question of governance, they started abusing *dalal* but when they were asked if they hate the *dalal* that much, then why would they contact him always. It is there *mazboori* (compulsion) and because of the *mazboori* they have to contact a *dalal*. One respondent was arguing in front of the gathering that poor people do not get job cards and job through MGNREGA. Only rich people get. He challenged and said he can show how rich people get job cards and money. He said, “*konu din hatar kud eta dhara nai, si pai paisa*” means he has never held a shovel or spade but gets money from the MGNREGA scheme.

A man at the Napam centre spoke about the government and the governed in the context of the elections and their leader, and explained the election mechanism. He said the broker knows whom, how and when to contact. The night before elections, they pay anyone who might get them a few votes for Rs 500 or Rs 1000. It may not last more than a couple of days, but is enough to fool people for five years. Everybody is playing with one another he said. There are strings attached to us, we are like *khilonas* (puppets) in the hands of political leaders, and we dance the way they want us to. While he narrating this, the shopkeeper who

is an owner of the pan shop voiced the concern with him. They together emphasized how their village, especially the rural areas are in a very difficult situation.

One more interesting point he brought in was that the Education Minister Himanta Biswa Sharma, would not come and check their school. It was as parents their duty is to check and put pressure on the teachers and staff to run the school smoothly. Instead of taking interests in school, parents give some money to their kids and send them to school. They are least interested in schools affairs. That is why, teachers in the school are not at all interested in discharging their responsibility. Even the poorest of them are trying to send their children to private school as the quality of teacher is good in private school.

In the following I would like to present a few cases to illustrate the nature of functioning of the *dalals*.

Case 1- A male primary school teacher from Nepali community of Napam village collected money from around twenty five elderly persons @ Rs. 200/- per head saying that he would get them Old Age Pension. He told them that he knew officials in the block office to get this done. Till now, however, these people have not received any pension.

Case 2- A Muslim woman aged 30 from Rupkuria village who is an Angwanwadi worker took Rs. 1000/- from around thirty persons promising them Old Age Pension, various loans, ration card, etc. She told the people that their names would not be included in the list of beneficiaries if they did not pay bribe to the government officials at the block office. However, till now only 6 persons have received Old Age Pensions.

Case 3- The husband of an Anganwadi worker from the Muslim community from Bhalukjharan village collected around Rs. 5000/- each from around fifteen persons promising them jobs in Anganwadi Centres. Only two have been provided with jobs.

Documents and Body

Governance in Assam is challenged by multilevel migration, that is, migration both within the country and from outside the country. In the above section, the issue of out migration was briefly mentioned. However, it is the issue of in-migration especially from the neighbouring country of Bangladesh which is considered by the politicians and bureaucrats

as a big challenge. This problem of immigration creates the issues of livelihood, of access to resources and conflict of citizenship. In the following section, the issues of D voters and citizenship are discussed.

In a democratic country, rules and regulations are considered to be essential. In modern bureaucratic system, documents have a very important role. Max Weber in his theory on bureaucracy has analysed the importance of documentary practices. In a sovereign country, to prove somebody's legal status as a citizen, one needs certain official documents. It is interesting to know that few documents transform the biological body to a legal body or the absence of documents can convert the body into illegal body.

The biological body becomes a social body through certain social rituals and socialization. The body transcribed into the documents during the bureaucratic procedure. In the society, the social body is more important than the biological body. For people who are socially recognised as powerful, do not need any kind of documentary evidence to prove their biological body. But in the case of those, whose authenticity of citizenship is under question, the necessity of documents become more important. It is used to validate the social body and biological body. Therefore the perspective of sociology of body would be useful to understand the issue of documents and citizenship.

The practice of identity in the form of documents is an essential practice of the modern state. The practice of maintaining documents is a necessary evil for the state. Most of the times, it serves as a double-edged weapon. It does more harm than good to the citizens. In recent times, study of archives and documents has become an important area of investigations for social anthropologists, sociologists and historians. Scholars have started employing even ethnographic approach to study documents. Scholars like Annelisa Riles and James Scott have demonstrated how it is important to look at the everyday practice of the state. It builds its legitimacy through documentary practices.

One can see how it happens from empirical evidence. Let us take the example of the IAY scheme. The names of the beneficiaries are documented on the walls of the Panchayat office. One old lady from the tea garden community who hails from Noorbari tea estate was sitting in front of the Napam GP office since morning. I asked her why was she waiting

there? She said, 'I have been coming here for so many days but have not been able to figure out whether my name is there in the list of approved beneficiaries who are eligible to get IAY. The assistant who is dealing with the papers is not giving me proper information. Then the peon of the office asked her whether she can read or not. When she said she could not read, she was asked to bring somebody who can read the names written on the wall. After some time, I saw the Panchayat secretary coming out of his office and giving her a grim look. She was able to communicate with the secretary, who told her '*Naam nuthile kaam no hobo*' [nothing could be done if your name is not there (on the wall)].

It is interesting to note how these documents create unequal bodies. One form of discrimination and differentiation can start from a person's physical appearance such as face, body, height, look, dress and language, which is very much evident in everyday societal transactions. Pulera argues, "The observable differences in physical appearance separating the races are the single most important factor shaping intergroup relations, in conjunction with the social, cultural, economic, and political ramifications of this visual divide" (Pulera 2003, 9). Here Pulera is trying to suggest that race is one among other markers where an individual's social location is identified and dealt in the society. This kind of marker is created in the social history or biography of a person. It is all about power and is related to the identity he or she subscribes to. It then creates a hierarchy though it does not come directly under states agenda of discrimination. People occupying various bureaucratic positions in the states domain have the power to discriminate very subtly.

Humans get their identity both from biological as well as social body. The biological body is one which an individual inherits from the birth while it transforms into a social body gradually through socialization. The kind of social identity one would get from the body depends on the person's position in the society. That position might be determined through multiple factors such as sex, gender, class, caste, religion, and ethnicity and so on. Of late, looking at the whole idea of political and social body from the sociological perspective has received popularity in the discipline under the rubric of the sociology of body. In the era of modern market economy human labour is being used as commodity. Human beings and their bodies are used as resources. The image of body and body as symbol has emerged in a socio historical process.

According to Chris Shilling, “Our very ability to intervene in social life is dependent on the management of our bodies through time and space” (Shilling 2008, 7). Bryan Turner has argued that body has not been an important part of classical sociological traditions. However, it is important that one should seriously deal with the social body from sociological perspectives. Turner formulates the idea of somatic society whereby the body is regulated from a regimental domain. Modern medical knowledge is equipped with the power of classification there by controlling the body and society (Turner 1992).

Body can be used in various activities. The most horrific use of body happens in suicide bombing. Other than this, human beings seek alteration through physical exercises, beauty surgery and some other activities. Body is not only a biological entity, as it enters into the social field it captures a different meaning. Than different body that means the person who carries it get different value. The most common and suitable example can be insurance. The more one pays for it, the more value one gets for his/her body.

In the context of paper bearing citizenship, Kamal Sadiq argues that documents are important in qualifying for citizenship. Documents allow people to legally become the part of the community legally. The rule is designed by the state but at the same time state does not have much control over the production of documents (Sadiq 2009). Documents in a modern bureaucratic system have magical powers. Documents are identified with a person and they create being-ness. However, documents are always a double edged weapon and therefore with their own inherent problems. In this process, a member of a state without having a proper documentation may be branded as an illegal member of the country.

Sadiq in his book *Paper Citizens* (2009) demonstrates how people can challenge the documentary process of the state through their network and produce such documents to challenge states legitimacy. They put question mark on the mechanism of the state to distinguish citizen from non-citizen. He further establishes his argument by showing the importance of documents in acquiring citizenship. He tries to argue that it is not only state but documents can also produce paper citizens. He says the states challenge to non-citizen is countered with legal citizenship infrastructure. It develops into a standardised state practices to curb irregularities. Sadiq explains, “The purpose of the citizenship

infrastructure is to identify and order individual subjects so that they can be ruled by the state” (Sadiq 2009, 9). He emphasises that it is not possible for the state to counter the documentary citizen as states existence depends on the documents itself.

But at the ground level it is correct that even non-citizens from other countries with the help of documents become citizens of India. The critical point here is that even then the proof of their citizenship is based on forged documents and convinces the Indian state that they are real citizens. The local people, who are part of the society and community, do not, however, accept the paper citizen socially. They are discriminated on the basis of their dress, language and culture as ‘the others’. This whole idea of citizen and non-citizen come to play its role during the time of elections and at the time of getting resources from the state.

D Voter and the Issue of Citizenship

In the electoral roll of Assam, there is also a category of voters termed as D voters. The concept of D voter is unique to Assam as no other state in India is having this category of voters. Generally, D voter refers to a doubtful or a dubious voter. These categories of voters are not entitled for the suffrage due to the lack of evidence to prove their Indian citizenship. While some D voters do not know the how to address the issue, some voters enlisted in this category do not seem to care much about it. They express the view that they have been here for generations. Their parents’ names are enlisted in the voter list, so naturally their name should have been there. Even if due to some technical problems, their names do not appear, it is not their fault. Instead the government should take care of this important issue which affects their identity as Indian citizen.

It is exciting to analyse the politics surrounding the discourse on D voters. Human rights activists along with civil society bodies of religious and linguistic minority groups are fighting and alleging the government of favoritism and parochialism in dealing with the issue. If we look at published news reported in various newspapers, then the issue will be clearer. Both from field data and news sources, it is found that there are broadly two sides to the discourse. One argument is that most of the D voters are Bengali Muslims from Bangladesh; they should not get the status of citizenship. But, Bengali speaking Hindus should be granted citizenship and they should be elevated from refugee to citizen. On the

other hand, Muslim students bodies including other minority activists group allege the government of parochialism by saying that generally poor Bengali Muslims are harassed by the police and administrative authority. Measures should be taken immediately to stop and resolve the issue as soon as possible.

It is reported that while the Chief Minister sought the intervention of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to resolve the contentious D-voter issue, he also urged the PM to consider the case of Hindus who came to Assam after partition of Indian on humanitarian grounds (Jaiswal 2012). The state government now wants the Centre to consider the case of the Bengali Hindus who suffered during partition of India and then creation of Bangladesh. The community has been demanding citizenship instead of refugee status. Assam Health and Education minister Himanta Biswa Sarma mentioned in a rally that the state government will try its best to ensure that the police did not harass Bengali Hindus in the name of being D-voters. The estimation is that there are over six lakh Bengali Hindu refugees in the state (ibid).

Another complaint generally received from people that absentees in their homes during the survey in one sweep were branded 'D' voters on the electoral rolls. After receiving complaints from various civil and social bodies about the presence of a huge number of foreigners in the electoral rolls, the Election Commission of India on the 17th of July, 1997 issued a circular to the State of Assam to mark 'D' against the names of the voters who were found missing or absent. The D category voters should be put on trial before the Foreigners' Tribunals as suggested by the Election Commission (Chowdhury, 2012).

It is alleged by civil society members that BJP and AGP are trying to only elevate the status of Bengali Hindus at the expense of other non-Hindus community who are being harassed. The Muslim students' bodies criticize different party alleging they must stop addressing the issue with hidden motives and calls for a quick solution to the problem. It strongly criticized AASU and other political organizations of targeting poor innocent Muslim villagers as Bangladeshis (TOI 2012).

Baharul Islam raises few interesting questions regarding the issue of D voters. He asserts that thousands of Adivasis, Bengali Hindus and other communities were driven out of their

homes in 1993-94. Were they also 'illegal migrants'? It is easy to term Muslims as 'illegal migrants' and hence this invented 'struggle between the Indians and the migrants'. He argues that in Assam if you are Bengali speaking Muslim you are "infiltrator" but if you are Bengali Hindu then you are 'refugee' – this dichotomy of the BJP and the right-wing sections has now invented a new discourse of "struggle between Indian origin people and the Illegal migrants from Bangladesh". Islam argues that D-voter Muslims are very few than the Hindu in Assam. BJP and right wing forces bring in communal argument against Muslims (Zafar 2012).

Many of some 600 inhabitants of Khumri, near the Bangladesh border west of Goalpara (140 km west of Guwahati), are D-voters. Legal experts say the concept of D-voter is controversial. HRA Choudhury, a minority politician and an advocate opines, "(T)here are no clear criteria for D-voter as per law, and tagging them invariably depends on the subjective judgment of the electoral registration officer of each assembly segment" (Karmakar 2011).

Among the D voters I interviewed, some even make sarcastic comments on political parties. One of them said, "government is losing our precious votes by putting our names in the list of D-voters. We are losing nothing" (Begum 2011). According to an official source, EC records have about 1, 51,374 lakh "D" voters. The maximum number (26,484) of "D" voters is in Sonitpur district followed by 24,247 in Barpeta.

Table 4.8 – D voters in Assam (Source TOI 2011)

Serial Number	Name of The District	Numbers of D Voters	Serial Number	Name of The District	Numbers of D Voters
1	Sonitpur	26,484	12	Kamrup	2196
2	Barpeta	24,247	13	Kamrup (metro)	5293
3	Dhubri	14,898	14	Nalbari	3604
4	Goalpara	10,299	15	Morigaon	5112
5	Udalguri	11,481	16	Golaghat	2396
6	Nagaon	17,128	17	Jorhat	20
7	Cachar	6,877	18	Sivasagar	2
8	Karimganj	3,118	19	Lakhimpur	2822
9	Karbi Anglong	2,601	20	Dhemaji	5506
10	Kokrajhar	1,976	21	Dibrugarh	1065
11	Bongaigaon	1395	22	Tinsukia	2854
Total Numbers of D voters					1,51,374

On the issue of the D voter, it was reported that Arjun Namasudra age 32, a resident of Haritikar (Subodh Nagar colony) under Katigorah circle in Cachar district near the India-Bangladesh border, allegedly committed suicide on 8 June 2012 after he was declared a 'D' voter. He was not given the form for voter photo identity card. Citizens' Rights Preservation Committee (CRPC) functionaries claimed Arjun was an Indian but was tagged as a 'D' voter. His father, late Ananta Namasudra, came to India in 1950 and had a refugee card, but

Arjun was born in India. After the incident CRPC also approached National Human Rights Commission (NHRC). They emphasised that there has been harassment of a large section of citizens of Assam in the name of 'D' voter which needs to be stopped immediately (Times of India, 2012). Human rights activists argued that Namasudra was a poor daily wage labourer and could not fund the legal proceedings after a case was filed against him at the Foreigners' Tribunal alleging he was a doubtful citizen. Though he had received a notice twice from the Tribunal but could not appear in court because of his helplessness (Ibid).

Nirmala Devi, a Nepali woman of about 60 years of age, was complaining during the day of polling in the 2011 Assembly elections about the discrepancy which government has created. Her husband, sons and daughters all are having names in the voter list. But she does not have her name. Instead her name appears in the category of D voters. When she was asked about this, she informed me that when the enumerator preparing the voter list visited her house and in the absence of her husband asked his name to her, she replied that his name was Narayan Kumar. But the final voter list documents the name wrongly as Nayan Kumar. After that, her name was listed in the category of D voter. She is very angry with the government. She says *sarkar* does not give her the basic necessities. But one thing it can do is to remove her citizenship status as an Indian. Only because of a spelling error she became an illegal citizen from legal citizen.

Abass Halim, a middle aged man from Muslim Bengali community, says that his family have been staying in this Napam village since many generations. I do not even remember. Everybody in my family is having name in the voter list. But against my name D category is marked. I do not know the reason. The only thing I get is humiliation during the time of election as since last 4 elections I have not been able to cast my precious vote. When he was asked what situation he faces when election is not around, he said that he lives a normal life as everybody including the Panchayat members know about him. But only during the elections he feels like a non-citizen. In this area, people consider any kind of election as a carnival. They come out in a large number to vote. In a sarcastic tone, Halim said that during the election time I am a Bangladeshi, but otherwise I am an Indian. He said this because his name appears as D voter in the voter list.

There are many cases of D voters in the Napam Panchayat. It is mentioned in the above table that Sonitpur is having the maximum numbers of D voters in its voters list. Even few members from tea garden community are also victim of this problem. Asma Begum is a young Muslim woman who had her name in the voter list in her father's villages where she grew up. When she came to her in-laws house to Amolapam, her name surfaced under the D voter category. She narrates that it is unfortunate and awful to become a D voter from the regular voter. She asked, "What wrong did I do to Assam or to the Indian nation that they have given me this punishment?" Being in a D voter category invites social stigma and humiliation. There are many other stories which people narrate and express their anger and anguish against the government officials who have done this mistake. They say that due to some government officials' negligence we lose the status of the citizen of this country. Government must take serious action against such officials.

I interviewed two officers of the state and central governments, who expressed their opinions about the D-voters in the following manner: The Central Government official, who wished to be anonymous, said that the D voter issue is very political. Since there was a mass movement launched by student leaders to evict the 'foreign nationals', the state government is conscious about the issue of D-voters and their uncertain identity. At the same time, following the appeasement approach of the government towards the 'minority' voters the issue such as D-voter gets diluted. The present Congress government obviously plays the 'appeasement politics' which makes it very difficult to solve the issue of D-voters. He lamented that the politicians of different parties do not want to solve the burning D-voter issue as they are more concerned with the maintenance of their vote banks, that is, congregation of loyal voters.

Another officer from the Assam Civil Service added that generally D voters are marked on account of failing to establish citizenship during upgrading of voter's list. Indeed, she admits that sometimes the real citizens also face harassment in the process. She mentioned that the name of the wife of an Additional Deputy Commissioner also appeared in the list as D voters. Policy of the state government of Assam discussed in the white paper on foreigner's issue is provided in the annexure- IV.

It is evident from the expression of people how the tag of D voter is a stigma to them. Casting vote is an important activity for many villagers in the Napam area. During the time of poll everybody including the old aged and sick wants to cast their votes. This exercise legitimises them as the citizen of the country and at the same time they are saved from the threat of being disfranchised as Indian citizens. There is propaganda in this area that if one does not cast his/her vote then he/she will lose citizenship status. For this reason many of them come forward to cast votes and the area invariably experiences a high turnout of voters in the elections.

Informal Governance and Trust

An interesting feature of the Napam area is the nature of economic transactions prevalent among the villagers. In Chapter 2, I have mentioned about the idea of embeddedness and trust. The people of the villages under study go for some kind of savings which is not recognised by any government agencies. Even then, the people trust this kind of agency to invest their money with. They even get loans from these agencies. Such informal transactions and governance hold a very crucial position in the so called vernacular societies which are not counted as mainstream society by the policy makers or politicians.

In Chapter 2, the issue of informal governance has been briefly discussed. One of the interesting features of informal governance is governing the people by manipulating the rules and regulations. In the above sections it has been discussed how people often complain that those who have kinship relationship or party affiliation get most of the benefits of government schemes. One of the interesting features of the informal governance that I found from field research is the system of private or individual bank people run in this area. It is known by various names such as *Gaonlia* bank (village Bank), private passbook and *got* bank. There is a banking system where most of the petty shopkeepers have put their money as part of savings. Every day evening, one could see individuals moving in these places and collect money from the shopkeepers. The amount of money collected from each individual ranges from Rs. 20 to Rs. 1500. In this system, shopkeepers keep a passbook and each time they pay money to the agent, he would enter the amount and

put the signature with date. Hardly any regulations, copy of agreements or MoU exists between the agent and the shopkeepers. But they keep investing money without any hesitations. This is part of the trust network and rationality where they try to get optimal utilisation of their money. There is no proper information as to how many of such banks exist in the locality. But I have been informed that there are as many as 30-40 such banks within the Napam Panchayat area alone. Most popular banks are *Jeevan Mitra Sanchayan*, *Samaj Kalyan Sanchayan*, *Jeevan Kalyan Sanchayan* etc.

The owners of these private banks open accounts with petty shopkeepers and villagers. In Napam Panchayat most of the owners collect money by themselves. They give 7% interests on their deposit. If one takes loan from them they take 30% interests on it. I asked one shopkeeper what if somebody takes loan and does not pay. He said nothing can be done. Even government banks can recover loan forcefully or file a case against the loanee who is a defaulter. How could these private banks do that? When I asked how these people trust and deposit money with the owner of the bank, he said that it is all about trust: People know that the person who is collecting money is not a poor man. He is having some kind of business or a wealthy person. The person who deposits money can go anytime and take out things from his business or sit in front of his door from morning till night. Then the owner will be forced to give his money back. But till now, no such kind of incident has happened.

These banks are different from the chit fund system. In chit fund system, a group of people can open their chits informally or deposit money under a registered firms. They have to deposit money periodically and can take a particular amount of money depending upon the auction value. Recently, chit fund companies like Saradha group and Rose Valley came under such scanner of irregularities. Even big company like Sahara group was asked by the Supreme Court of India to return money to its investors. Sahara group owner is in the jail for not returning the money to Security Exchange Board of India. Time to time, there are many news and stories from different parts of India that some financial investment company has vanished with their customers' money. Even with the circulation of all these stories, it is interesting to see how these informal money investment schemes are run

without any distrust among villagers. I argue that this scheme is a part of informal governance system. Where many state-authorized banks and private banks fail to run the deposit and money lending system, how are these small private players running their business? It all depends on the trust and convenience. This is possible on the basis of Granovatter's (1985) concept of embeddedness.

The national banks have rigid rules for savings and loan system. This is the reason why people prefer *gaonlia* banks. One such woman account holder, who owns an eatery, told me that private local savings groups is a kind of short term policy, where the member may have to pay a little amount of money on regular basis and they get back a substantial amount of money after the completion of the duration of the saving policy. She also mentioned that she can utilize that money for her business purpose. She informed that she and her husband tried opening an account in the University SBI branch. The manager of the bank asked them for various identity cards and formalities which they could not fulfill. So they preferred to open one account with the *gaonlia* bank.

The owner of a sweetmeat stall informed that they have to pay a low amount of money on regular basis. In this type of groups they get more interest in less time and it does not affect their daily budget. He also said that it is the easiest way to save money. They do not have to go and deposit their money by themselves. Agents of these groups come themselves and collect the money regularly. The owner of a local restaurant stated that in local private groups there is less rigidity regarding the rules and regulation. They can withdraw the savings money whenever they want. Thus, he prefers these private groups.

Nurul Islam runs a *paan* shop in front of the Tezpur university gate. He says that they are not so economically stable, they think that this type of savings are more suitable to them in comparison to nationalized bank. People who are engaged with small business are not treated at par with the rich ones in nationalized bank. So, they mostly prefer the local banks for savings. He said that the private groups are more fruitful in comparison to the national banks.

Some shopkeepers, mostly those who are having bigger volume of sales or business, prefer nationalized or regular banks. They are not in favour of the kinds of small private banks

operating at Napam. They do not trust such type of savings in private groups, because there is lack of security of the money saved. They are apprehensive about these banks running away with their savings.

From the above narratives, it is evident that where the state is having complex and rigid system of governance, people tend to develop their own methods to solve local problems or try to achieve their goal. Whether it is the banking system or getting government services, they have their own mechanism. Thus informal governance is important, and it is just as equally important as formal governance in places like Napam where marginalised people live and compete with each other to sustain their life.

Seeing Like a Citizen

The state is seen and perceived differently by people in different regions in India. People in vernacular⁵ society often try to be governed according to their own convenience. The State organizes itself to control and rule through both formal and informal ways. But people in vernacular societies are more used to the informal way of governance. James Scott's idea of "seeing like a state" (Scott 1998) initiated much discussion on the development discourse in the developing countries. Stuart Corbridge et al. (2005) developed the notion of seeing the state. Where they have analysed how the poor encounter the state through various developmental schemes. I prefer to look at state from the perspective of common man who struggles in the everyday life to maintain his livelihood often misusing and subverting government rules and regulations, and at the same time, tries to get as many benefits from the welfare schemes. For this, one has to employ various strategies to get these benefits. These strategies are employed through kinship relationship, political party lines or through community association. Here, the idea of embeddedness is useful to explain the form of informal governance which is very important in many vernacular societies.

⁵ This expression is used in social science literature to denote something that is related to native or indigenous. This is considered as the language and practice of the ordinary. It is more a kind of informal set-up that is different from the formal or standard pattern established by the mainstream social and political systems.

Corbridge et al rightly point out, “‘the state’ still matters greatly to people in rural India. It is sometimes to be feared or avoided” (Corbridge *et al* 2005, 7). Most of the time, poor people complain about the *sarkar*. But it will be more apt to say that they have a love and hate relationship with the *sarkar*. They consider the government as their parents and expect everything from it. State is experienced by people in everyday life through various welfare schemes or when they have to get something done in a government office. People also experience the state when they get facilities through its programmes of affirmative action, popularly known as reservation in India. Otherwise, in the social sphere, they are often neglected. But with the help of reservations in education as well as in the job sector, they get a prestigious position. Local people are sometimes empowered by the presence of *dalal* or broker. They obey them during the time of elections and in turn during normal times they get help from the broker in dealing with the governmental work. As they take money to cast their votes, they also have to pay money during the normal time to get their things done through *dalal*.

Even if people are not conscious, they encounter state in the everyday life while going to work for the MGNREGA, during the time before elections, while enrolling their names to the electoral roll, and when they get subsidized ration from government-run control shops, and so on. State is experienced by people when they visit any government offices. It is also interesting to note that people do not consider Panchayats to be the part of the state. They often say that the education system should not be controlled by the Panchayats. It should be managed by the government. They also argue that the Panchayats should be controlled, managed and supervised by strict rules and regulations. It should be done through higher authorities of the government.

Often people complain of not getting the benefits of a BPL cardholder. Most of the time, people belonging to non-poor categories such as school teachers and other types of salaried people get benefits under BPL category. This happens because the survey of the Panchayat to identify the BPL households in the area itself is bogus. They opine that this kind of survey should not be done by the Panchayats. The latter is accused of favoritism and bias in their approach in deciding who should be a beneficiary rather than giving it to the genuinely needy person.

Often poor people negotiate with the state mechanisms while getting the welfare schemes. The poor have their own idea about the living conditions which is different from the state. They have a different world view about their existence and management in everyday life. But state understands and plans things differently from the people. That is why, most of the time there is a failure in the process of governance. Poor people feel the difference from non-poor in terms of sending their children to government schools. People who can afford send their children to private schools. The poor people also take the help of government health services when they are sick while those who can pay go to the private health services. Though people feel that government run schools and hospitals are not that bad, it is due to mismanagement and poor infrastructure that they are forced to go the private hospitals and clinics.

Further, people often see continuity between the society and the state. A person who is employed in the government office belongs to their community or locality. They feel more confident and comfortable while dealing with that office. In the case of other government offices, where they do not know anybody, it becomes very difficult for them to negotiate or enter into transaction.

VEC and VDC are required in village areas, according to the rules of PRIs. But in most of the villages it is dysfunctional. It is evident from the people's views that they generally do not consider Panchayat as part of state or government. They perceive government something that is not reachable, higher, superior, powerful and distant from them. But it seems contradictory to the state's agenda of bringing decentralised form of governance. State wants to penetrate more and to be felt on everyday basis in the imagination of the people. That is why, 29 subjects are delegated to the PRIs where poor can participate with more confidence and productivity. But it is seen from the field that people want superior government bodies to supervise, scrutinize and inspect the workings of the PRIs.

People feel that politicians should work honestly, as they consider politicians in power as the *sarkar*. The field data suggests that people feel humiliated when government officials do not attend to them or waste their time. That is when they feel a *dalal* is necessary. Although there are various difficulties in accessing the state's welfare provisions, people

Chapter 5

The Magic of Elections: Polls, Performance and Citizenship

The relation between good governance and democracy is inseparable. Regular elections ensure sustenance of both of them. This chapter focuses attention on the electoral processes in Assam, which have strong bearing on the main arguments of this thesis. The chapter is a product of ethnographic study of three elections in Sonitpur District. I have studied the national Parliamentary Lok Sabha Elections conducted in 2009, State Legislative Assembly Elections, 2011 and local Panchayati Raj elections in 2013. These election studies are conducted to understand the relationship of elections to the larger social processes and the governance system. These election studies have helped in generating data to discuss the participation level of various groups of people along with their main concerns and aspirations.

The chapter tries to link the dynamics of the electoral politics to the social structure of the area where there exists a sizeable number of migrant communities, with varied historical and ethnic background. In Assam, electioneering is crucial as in the charged environment of presence of so called 'illegal-immigrants' the electoral participation among the latter becomes a form of ratification of citizenship. This chapter further analyses the entire process of elections as a ritual and performance. It also explores the perceptions and predicaments of poor, marginalized people who are eager to maintain their social and political visibility at the time of elections.

In India and elsewhere, elections have usually been studied by political scientists, psephologists, journalists and pollsters. But, of late, sociologists and anthropologists have started taking interest in studying the process of elections. Election study in India has become a fascinating area of inquiry. But any endeavour to study and understand the politics, choice and the dynamics of electoral process in contemporary India is a challenging task. The regular elections to various Parliamentary, Assembly and Panchayati

Raj bodies have become part and parcel of the people's lives though they usually come only once in five years' time. They give us insight into different aspects of the political and social stances as well as consciousness of the voters about contemporary socio-economic issues. The study becomes more fascinating in multicultural and multiethnic scenarios such as northeastern India.

In a country of India's size, diversity is reflected in terms of ethnicity, religion, culture, caste and so forth. The political behaviour which is reflected in the electoral results undoubtedly affects the entire population and also highlights other political issues confronted by the contemporary society. Under such circumstances, the political activities *of the voters and of the political parties assume specific significance given the prevailing* complex nature of politics. These issues are particularly important in a state like Assam which is home to diverse ethnic communities. The question of the identity of different ethnic communities is linked with fear of submergence within dominant society. Many ethnic and linguistic-religious groups have diverse demands of autonomy, self-governance, and development, as also indulgence in secessionism. As immigration, encroachment and displacement are vibrant issues in Assam, the agendas of the political parties and behaviour of the voters reflect their attitudes towards such problems. Hence a close examination of the electoral processes helps examine the diverse political orientations of different communities.

Tezpur Parliamentary Constituency (TPC)

Tezpur is the head quarter of Sonitpur District in Assam. It has one Lok Sabha (Parliamentary) constituency and nine Assembly constituencies. The boundaries of Tezpur Parliamentary constituency and the Sonitpur district are coterminous. TPC consists of 9 Assembly constituencies. They are 1. Dhekiajuli 2. Barchalla 3. Tezpur 4. Rangapara 5. Sootea 6. Biswanath 7. Behali 8. Gohpur 9. Bihpuria.

The politics of Assam as mentioned above is somewhat unique compared to other parts of India because of the changing demographic situation due to in-migration of people from different parts of India and allegedly from countries like Bangladesh and Nepal. People belonging to several communities live side by side in this big constituency. Some of the

major communities inhabiting the area are the Assamese, Nepalis, Bengali Muslims and Bengali Hindus, tea garden community, Bodos and others. Inter-ethnic rivalry and ethno-nationalist emotions shape the mood of the electorates of Assam. What is seen is that immigrant communities have become dominant factors in the elections in the last two decades. Rise of religious temper and caste-based politics are part of charged scenario. This chapter attempts to understand this emerging socio-political scenario in the context of elections in Assam. The details of community-wise voters in the Tezpur Parliamentary Constituency are given in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1 - Approximate Community-wise break-up of voters in Tezpur Parliamentary Constituency

Serial Number	Community	No. of voters
1	Boro	1,90,000
2	Tea Community	2,36,000
3	Nepali	1,70,000
4	Minority(Muslim)	1,20,000
5	Bengali	1,20,000
6	Assamese & Others	3,69,518
Total No. of voters		12,05,518

The Parliamentary Elections

This fieldwork was conducted in the Tezpur Parliamentary constituency of Sonitpur District during the fifteenth general election to the Lok Sabha in 2009. The election was held in Assam in two phases. The first phase of the election was held on 16 April 2009 in three constituencies. The first was Diphu which covers the two autonomous hill districts of

central Assam. The other two constituencies are from the Barak valley of south Assam namely, Karimganj and Silchar. The second phase of the election was held on 23 April 2009 in the remaining eleven constituencies of the state.

Right after the declaration of the election date by the Election Commission of India, various political parties started making preparations for the election. They called upon their workers and started holding meetings and making strategies for the election. The village, Block and *mandal* level meetings were held. The sitting members of all the legislative Assembly Constituencies started detailed planning for the election. MLAs started holding meetings at various levels in their constituencies and tried to mobilize people to cast their valuable votes in favour of their party's candidate. With the declaration of the election date there were preparations for filing of nominations and till the last date of the nominations altogether fifteen persons filed their nominations as candidates for the ensuing election.

The candidate from All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) was the centre of attraction. The party projected Lakshmi Orang, who was a victim of the Beltola incident¹. It was a sentimental issue for the tea garden community members. In the violence, Ms. Orang was stripped in broad daylight which was highlighted by both the regional and national media. However, her nomination paper for the Lok Sabha election was cancelled due to the controversy about her age. The AIUDF leaders later projected her father, Deba Orang as their candidate. It is widely perceived that the AIUDF has been formed to protect the interests of the immigrant Muslim minorities. As the constituency is dominated by the tea garden community, the AIUDF projected a candidate from this population to accumulate more votes from the tea garden community. The party thought that with the votes of Muslims and the tea garden community, they would be able to win the seat. A similar tendency was visible in case of the AGP. Traditionally, Congress has been winning TPC seat for a maximum number of times. The influence of the Congress among the minorities, the tea garden community and also among others had helped them to win the seat. The

¹ On 24 November 2007, at Beltola area in the city of Guwahati, the people from the tea tribe community under the leadership of AASAA (All Adivasi Students Association of Assam) were on a mass rally in support of the demand for the Scheduled Tribe status to the tea tribe. There was a clash between the protesters and some local residents. In the violence that followed, Lakshmi Orang was stripped of her clothes. This incident was widely condemned and Lakshmi was shot into prominence.

sitting MP of the constituency also belonged to the Congress. The rest of the candidates did not have a significant grip in the constituency. Even the names of their parties or names of the candidates were not known to the voters.

Campaigning and Canvassing

It is widely agreed that one of the most fascinating periods in the unfolding of Indian democracy is the campaigning period. Since last one decade there have been many new restrictions on how to campaign. Murals and wall paintings used to be the main element of any election campaign. But it got reduced drastically after Election Commission put restrictions on it. Party workers and loyal supporters of particular political parties come out openly during the time of elections. Various promotional materials like stickers, posters, key rings, umbrella and caps are generally distributed carrying the party symbol and candidate's name.

In Assam, street plays and folk performances like Bhaona and Baul are performed before the day of polling to attract voters. I observed that the performers during their performance appeal the audience to vote for the party from whom they are sponsored to organize the play. Vehicles are decorated with life size cutouts of party leaders and contestants. There are popular political songs composed especially for elections by different parties. AIUDF had maximum number of prerecorded songs accusing Congress and BJP of misrule while Congress had songs on how it has address poor people's problem in India and particularly in Assam. Due to the mass use of mobile phones, political parties have found another innovative way to convince their voters. They send bulk text messages to appeal to voters to support them. But the best way of campaigning, feel party workers, is individual one to one contact with voters which has a positive impact and chances are that people would get convinced through this method. These are the few ways how different political parties publicize their candidates.

The campaigning for elections by different candidates started with a bang. Meetings, gatherings and rallies were organized by various political parties and candidates in different corners of the constituency. But the most important thing to note here is that people's participation in the election process was low as compared to earlier elections. When this

question regarding the nature of people's participation was asked they gave different answers. Many people argued that in the earlier elections many people took active part but the candidate after being elected did not work for the development of the people. The greatest beneficiary was the middleman (*Dalal*) but not the common people. Another reason that people cited was the festive season of Bihu which came in the same period. So due to these factors, people's participation was found to be low.

All the candidates and the leaders of the respective parties tried their level best to organize meetings at Panchayat and village levels but they miserably failed to attract general voters. In a Panchayat level meeting organized by the MP of the constituency at Batiamari under Batiamari Gaon Panchayat, it was observed that the total number of people in the convoy of the MP was much more than the audience present in the meeting. Other political parties faced similar problem in Behali constituency. The total number of participants in the village or Panchayat meetings was not more than 100-120 which proved clearly that enthusiasm among the general voters for the election was almost invisible. At the same time, the Election Commission had imposed restrictions on the use of wall painting, poster pasting and banners as a part of the election campaign. It became a matter of disappointment for some people involved in the campaigning process. Painters were dissatisfied as they were deprived of their work. Another section of people who were interested in such type of work were of the view that the prevailing environment does not indicate that elections are approaching. In earlier elections, promotional materials like party flag, umbrellas were distributed while this time such things were almost absent.

Another reason behind the lower level of participation of people in the election process in this area could be the fact that the incumbent MLA of the Behali Legislative Constituency is from the BJP but the BJP candidate was not contesting from this seat. So, workers of the BJP and their supporters showed negligible interest in these elections. Since last one decade people are not impressed with AGP which has partnered with BJP in Assam. People in this locality thought that the AGP could not do much work as it is not a national party. People seem to prefer national parties to regional parties here. They thought that the national parties could get support from the Centre and bring the welfare to the region.

The AGP and BJP, who entered into an electoral alliance, organized one big joint public meeting in Ketla, located under the Behali Legislative Constituency area on 18th April. In this meeting some senior leaders of both the parties, namely Rajnath Singh, Bijoya Chakrabarty and Chandra Mohan Patowary addressed a huge gathering and the President of the BJP, Rajnath Singh pledged to supply rice at two rupees per kilogram to people belonging to the BPL category. He said that due to *bhrastachar* (corruption) by the Congress government, prices of all essential commodities had increased while the value of the common people had declined. In this meeting about 4000-5000 people assembled not only from Behali but also from Sootea, Gohpur, Balipara and Jamuguri regions. The proportion of male and female attending the meeting was almost equal. Even Children below the age 18 joined the gathering to eat and make merry with the elders.

A large number of people from some interior villages came only to see the helicopters used by the leaders. As the party had provided vehicles, a section of people came there without having much interest in the meeting. Another section joined the meeting as the leaders of their locality forced them to join and pledged to provide drinking water facility, old age pension, transport facility etc. in return. On the other hand, some people came there to watch the 'real' scene of the meeting, that is, how the senior leaders of the party appealed to the gathering, whether they attacked the ruling government, and so on. However, rather than listening to the speeches of the high profile leaders people kept themselves busy in discussing about their own problems, family matters and were waiting eagerly for the closing ceremony of the meeting. It is very interesting to mention here that a large group of young boys collected money by performing *husari*² in their villages and used that for reserving a bus to join the meeting. Their purpose behind attending the meeting was that some leaders of the area had spread the news that Hema Malini, the famous Hindi film actress, will address the meeting. Such types of rumours were not new in the area. During the last legislative Assembly election the BJP leaders spread the same rumour to attract and convince a section of people to join the election meeting.

² The practice of performing Bihu dance and singing Bihu songs by visiting different households during the Rongali Bihu.

On the contrary, instead of organizing such big public meetings the CPI (ML) tried to mobilize their voters by organizing small and street corner meetings where attendance was very low. Besides local village and Panchayat level meetings an attempt was also made to watch the campaigning in the urban centres. Tezpur city was the locale chosen for this purpose. As elections approached, temporary election offices were set-up by various political parties. Inside Tezpur city, the number of election offices of the Congress was found to be much more than any other party. In these election offices people came in the evening and discussed about the happenings in and around during the whole day. During the daytime the offices remained vacant. Sometimes even the office-in-charge could not be found.

In Tezpur city the people were found to be busy with the Bihu festival but in the outskirts of the city some activities were found in connection with the election campaign. When the candidates came to hold meetings peoples participation was found to be very low. In four of the meetings of the Congress and the AGP-BJP which were held in the city that we attended, it was found that the number of people participating in these meetings was hardly 30 to 40. Sometimes, passersby would stop for some time and listen to the lectures for some time and leave. But in the outskirts of the city the people's participation was found to be more as compared to the city. In a meeting of the Congress which was held at Panchmile some eight km away from Tezpur, and close to the Napam Panchayat, it was found that around 200 people attended the meetings.

Since the Election Commissioner had put some restrictions on wall and poster campaigning, in this election campaigning there was not much use of posters and banners. Due to these restrictions, though the election was approaching, the atmosphere in various political parties was not found to be equal to previous elections.

There was no unanimity among the different political parties about the apathy of voters and the style of campaigning in these elections. The opinion varied about the response to the door to door campaign. The Congress party leaders and the leaders of the CPI (ML) were of the opinion that door-to-door campaign was not possible in Parliamentary election as it covers quite a huge area. On the day before polling, three political parties, namely, the Congress, the AGP-BJP combine, and the CPI (ML) had distributed letters in every

household requesting voter to cast their valuable votes in favour of respective parties. Unfortunately voters never go through the letters to know the content but use it to collect the serial number of the voters list.

Despite the ruling of moral code of conduct, political parties indulge in 'money for vote' drive in a surreptitious manner. It is a very common phenomenon. Here, it will be appropriate to cite one example to prove the point. In a village level public meeting of the Congress party, people of that village called Rangali demanded a sum of Rs. 4000 from M.K. Subba, the sitting Congress MP, for a cultural programme to be organized on the occasion of Rongali Bihu. Usually Subba does not refuse to donate cash to satisfy voters. Though the amount demanded by the people was not huge for Subba, he refused to donate perhaps because of the imposition of the strict rule by the Election Commission. People became very dissatisfied with his refusal and the MP faced an unexpected situation. A small group of people started throwing stones at him to take revenge. Not only the people of village Rangali but members of different Bihu Committees usually take the campaigning season of election as a golden opportunity to collect money from different political parties to organize cultural nights.

Out of the fifteen candidates, it was found that Moni Kumar Subba of the Congress, Joseph Toppo from the AGP-BJP alliance, Deba Orang from the AIUDF and Jiten Sundi from the CPI(M) were popular among the people. The Congress candidate M.K.Subba was the MP and Joseph Toppo was the MLA from Dhekiajuli. Toppo was also a Minister in the AGP government in the State and was known to the people as such. Deba Orang, the AIUDF candidate was famous among the people because of his daughter Lakshmi Orang who was involved in the incident of Beltola violence of November 2007. The CPI (M) candidate Jiten Sundi who is an advocate was popular among the Tea garden community due to his legal profession. But the rest of the candidates were not known among the people. Many people had heard their names for the first time in the course of the campaign.

Different people were interviewed on the basis of age and sex, but more than 95% of the people did not know how many candidates were contesting from the Tezpur constituency. When we told them that fifteen candidates were contesting for the Tezpur seat, they were surprised and were hearing most names for the first time. They had not heard the names of

different parties like Bharat Vikash Morcha, National People Party, Revolutionary Socialist Party, Jharkhand Mukti Morcha, etc. All admitted that Cong (I) and AGP are the dominating parties of Assam and in the Tezpur seat either Moni Kumar Subba or Joseph Toppo will win.

People generally do not want to disclose their political ideology or stand. All held that they did not support any political party. Candidate is more important than the party. In the meantime I found some young people who candidly expressed their political stand and also told whom they would vote for. One such youth held that Congress could give the best government. He mentioned different plans and programs taken up by the Congress government such as NREGA, Kalpataru, Indira Awas Yojna, etc., and said that he would therefore vote only for Congress. His words were heard by another youth. He said that as he was able to get a house under the Indira Awas Yojna, so he supports Congress (I). Party campaigning or mobilization is not important for them. If no party campaigned, they would still vote. A major section of the interviewed people was frustrated with the political scenario, political culture, etc. and the unexpected hike of essential commodities of daily use like rice, oil, vegetables, dal, etc.

Most of the respondents held that as a citizen of a democratic state it is their primary right, hence they had come for voting. Some claimed that election is like a festival that comes every five years. They have no choice but to select one. The role of the common population becomes important during the time of elections. Once elections are over, no one cares for them. The long experience of their life proves this as they have voted in different elections a number of times but no measurable change has taken place in any aspect of their life. People were not happy with the candidates from different political parties. Though workers from different political parties claimed that the candidate of the respective party is good and pro-people, responses of the common voters was different. They held that all candidates were the same. Their option was to choose not the best candidate among the good rather the least bad one from among the worst. On the other hand, most of the married women were instructed by their husbands and sons regarding whom to cast their vote for. But the educated unmarried women responded that they would cast their vote as per their own wish.

Most of the people interviewed did not participate in the rallies organized by different political parties except the party workers. Some people, however, attended the meetings held in their village but they did not take any interest in them. Most of the people left the meeting before it ended. Almost all voters, including the party workers, did not know clearly how many candidates were contesting in the election. Some of them knew that seven candidates were contesting but were not able to tell the names and their party affiliation. Common voters knew only the candidates of AGP, BJP and Congress while some knew about the Bodoland People's Front (BPF) candidate too.

Workers of different political parties approach every household requesting the entire family to cast their votes in favour of the respective candidate. People were called for meetings, rallies as well as individual letters were delivered to each household as mentioned earlier. The vision document, agenda, manifesto, etc of all the political parties were quite catchy. All of them talked about development, employment generation, and special programmes for the poor and so forth. Almost all voters felt that these agenda and manifesto are nothing but means to influence the voters. Some of them opined that in reality these will not be fulfilled. Once election is over they will forget everything and then come again after five years. The respondents felt that apart from the promises in pen and paper, special measures should be taken by the representatives for poor people like them as well as for the peasant society. At least rice should be available at cheaper rates. Free seeds, fertilizer should be provided to the farmers. For more production irrigation should be improved. The young generation however primarily talked about opening up of more job opportunities in the public sector. Moreover, almost all people were very much concerned about the price hike of daily essential commodities which gave the common population immense trouble in bearing the heavy expenditure. They felt that whoever wins or forms the government should tackle the issue of price hike.

On the Day of Polling

Parliamentary Election

Panchmile Higher Secondary School Booth

For the Panchmile area, the polling centre was in Panchmile Higher Secondary School. This polling centre is located 8 kms away from Tezpur city. The polling centre had two polling booths 1) Alisinga Uriumguri and 2) Alisinga (North). In both the polling centres the voters belonged mainly to the three communities, namely, Muslim Bengali (who use Mymensingia dialect), Hindu Bengalis and a small number of Nepalis. The most dominant among the three communities are the Muslim Bengalis who constitute almost 60 per cent of the total population in the area. Next come the Hindu Bengalis who constitute 34 percent, followed by the Nepalis who constitute 6 percent. On the day of the election in the Panchmile HS school Centre people came to cast their vote as early as 6 am in the morning. They stood in queue and waited till the polling started.

On the morning of the election Day, it was observed that people started coming in very early, whereas actual voting started only from 7 am. There were less number of voters at the polling centre in the morning, however, after 11 am people started coming in large numbers and there was a huge crowd at both the polling centres. People came with their documents and before going to the polling booths they took their serial numbers from the counters of different political parties which were put up just at the gate of the polling centre. It was observed that many people came alone and some of them came with their families to cast their votes. But the most interesting fact which was observed was that females from the Hindu Bengali families came along with their husbands and their family members while the females from the Muslim families came alone or with their female co-partners. Some Muslim women came even with their new born babies. It was also observed that the handicapped, sick and old persons of the Muslim community also came to cast their votes. The small number of Nepalis who came to cast their votes went away as soon as they were done with the exercise.

Apart from the observations mentioned above, there were also some other interesting observations to be made at the polling booth. Different workers from different political

parties were seen roaming in and around the polling centre trying to mobilize the people to cast their vote for their respective parties. They were seen standing in front of the gate of the polling centre and welcoming the people who came to cast their vote. These people were also seen helping common people to find out their serial numbers. It was also observed that the party workers took the voters to the tea stalls and provided them with refreshments. The party workers involved in these activities were mostly of the three major political parties namely the AGP-BJP alliance, the Congress and the AIUDF. However, though the people were mostly illiterate it was observed that they had a predetermined choice about voting in their mind.

Lastly, it was also observed that within the Congress, there was no satisfaction among the party workers regarding their work. The grassroots level workers were not satisfied with the work of the Panchayat President. It was said that the grassroots level workers came to the polling station by 6 o' clock in the morning while the senior level workers came to the polling centre very late.

Two incidents that occurred during the polling day seem noteworthy. Two persons, one old and physically challenged Md. Didar Ali and the other old and very sick person named Md. Hazarat Ali, came for casting their votes. When questions were asked why they came under in such a situation, they stated that if they do not cast their vote then they would lose their citizenship. But there was also another section of people who came to the polling centre just to see the people voting. But they would not cast their vote because they were fed up with the election process. This section of people basically belongs to the Hindu Bengali community. There were also a few people who were willing to cast their vote if they were paid some money.

On the question of distribution of money, many people said that there was distribution of money by the Congress party. Though there was distribution of money but they did not receive cash. On the issue of money, two students of class 11 from the Panchmile HS School, Md. Atikur Rahman Mazumdar and Md. Taffazzul Haque stated that money was distributed to the people of their village by the Congress party at the eleventh hour and their families also received the money. Since they were young they did not receive the money. People were sceptical about the use of EVMs. But to the surprise of polling officials and

observers, people were comfortable with the use of voting machine in the polling booth. They showed interest and opined that it is better than the use of paper ballot as the chances of votes getting rejected in paper ballot is more than with the machines.

A valid document issued by the government office or by any reputed/ authentic source is necessary for casting vote as per the directive of the Election Commission of India. But the indigenous population is hardly concerned about such documents. Though they have lots of valid documents starting from bank account, ration card, identity card but they do not want to bring such documents. Few angry men said that if they are not allowed to vote without the identification document they will not vote. Meanwhile, the *Gaonburha* (the headman of the village) identified the voters inside the polling booth who were then allowed to vote. The school field is the only social space available and it is situated in the middle of the village, hence people were seen more interested in gossiping rather than in voting. Different gossip groups were seen across different age and sex groups.

Behali Tea Estate Branch office Booth

Most of the voters of this polling booth are from the tea garden labour community. When I talked to a person while coming to the booth he said, 'we have no value, they try to purchase our votes by giving money like 10 to 50 rupees before the day of the elections but never try to solve our problems to make our miserable life better'. This time also they are casting vote in favour of someone but not in the hope of fulfillment of their need. They are doing it only to exercise the adult franchise.

Despite negligence by the leaders of different political parties, one section of people want to vote in favour of Congress party because they received cash from the party on the eve of election. Congress had gained their faith by promising to supply food products like rice, mustard oil at Rs. 3 per kilogram, Kerosene oil at Rs. 5 per liter, safe drinking water facility and so on. It has been observed that some active workers of the Congress party from the tea garden community were working sincerely in favour of the party for their own gain.

Most of the tea garden workers regard the day of election as a festival because excluding Sundays the gardens are closed only during some particular festivals. As the day of polling is a holiday and they also get wages for the day, workers were seen to be very happy. They

came to the booth in a very festive mood and in colourful attires. Some workers are busy selling biscuits, boiled eggs, pakora, papad, biscuits and chocolates in front of the polling station.

After pressing the blue button in favour of the candidate of their own choice everyone is busy in buying delicious items. In case of nuclear families, spouses are coming with their small kids. In case of joint families, male head accompanied by his wife came to the booth early in the morning, after exercising franchise they went quickly because they had to send their children and in-laws to vote. Some women came in a group to cast their vote and most of the voters brought the serial number of the ration card instead of the voter's list serial number, then they asked the help of the volunteers of different parties to find out the number.

On the other hand, for few voters voting is a burden. Most of the people did not bring any identity documents in the morning session and the officer in-charge of the polling booth did not allow such persons to vote. As a result, such voters were disappointed and started complaining against the Presiding Officer. They said 'we are the indigenous people of Assam; why should we need the voter identity card?' Some said that, 'we are not Bangladeshis'³. More interestingly one person told the Polling Officer with a satirical tone that he had kept his identity document in Bangladesh. In such a situation in the morning session those who could not cast their vote for want of identity cards did not return again with any valid document to vote. The larger section of the voters of the village came quite late to the booth. Moreover, different party offices were set-up to give the voters identity numbers so that they need not have to wait inside the booth to search for their names.

Outside the booth we saw different gossiping-groups discussing different topics. Groups were mainly constituted of young people. They discussed about the elections, Bihu, sports, etc. All agreed that the election had reduced the charm of Bihu, the most popular festival of Assam. Some of them were workers of different political parties but were talking to each other quite friendly. A major section of the younger generation was not happy with

³ People of speak Mymensingha in Assam are from erstwhile East Bengal. In popular discourse, the foreigner is a Bangladeshi who has come without legal documents. So when ever issue arises people refer to an illegal immigrant as Bangladeshi.

contemporary politics and did not have any faith in the present political system, parties and the representatives. They came to vote not in the hope of any revolutionary change but only because they have got the chance to vote and it was their right. They were gossiping since morning but did not cast their votes till around 10'clock. In some cases the party workers were seen cutting jokes and making humorous remarks against the young members and workers of other parties. But the relationship was on the whole cordial and good.

The Assembly Elections

The 14th Assam legislative Assembly elections were held in two phases on the 4th of April and 11th of April, 2011 to elect members from 126 constituencies in Assam. The result was announced on 13th may. The election process of Sonitpur District began with its announcement by the Election Commission. During the initial stage, the probable candidates and their respective parties started the election process by organizing meetings of their cadres, supporters and workers at block and Panchayat levels.

After the declaration of the election dates in the state, various political parties started contacting their local cadres to initiate the campaigning process. It looked like the beginning of a festive season. Strategy of the elections is formed in the meetings. Party workers were put on alert. Meetings were held at various levels such as Panchayat and block. Especially Panchayat members were asked to cover their respective areas and convince people to vote for their political parties and candidates.

Politics of Candidature before election

Tezpur Assembly Constituency

Rajen Borthakur of Congress was an AASU leader in his youth along with being a grass root member of AGP. His candidature through Congress in these elections has surprised a lot of people along with the Congress party workers themselves. Though almost every party worker we met vehemently denied any confusion or clash arising from Rajen Borthakur's candidature ignoring the old hand Bijit Saikia, one woman party worker Begum Hanifa admitted that they were facing some problems. She said- 'a lot of people do not know Rajen Borthakur... while Bijit da was so well known... now it is a decision coming from

upper level... nothing is in our hand'. However; it was clear that, Congress was a strong party.

Ritu Baran Sarmah of BJP, the youngest and most qualified of them all could have projected a dynamic, energetic fresh image to lure the voters. However, being a design engineer by profession and former member of RSS, he lacked the touch of familiarity with the sub-urban areas and not surprisingly he was a total stranger to most of the people of Tezpur. Price hike along with Bangladeshi immigration were the BJP's main agendas and like all the other party workers, they were also very vocal about the inactivity and corruption of other candidates. Sophistication, youth, vision and blessings of the party high command, were all there with Ritu Baran, except the common man's recognition. One party worker of Congress opined that elections are not about campaigning for one month and polling on one day. It is a preparation over 30 days, 12 months and one year. One needs the skill and ability to constantly remain in public consciousness. Ritu Baran does not know how to do that, neither does the BJP party core in Tezpur. Among the independent candidates, Sri Santanu Mahanta fought with the symbol of a gas cylinder. He was an offshoot of the AGP, a dissatisfied former AGP worker; he lacked both man power and financial back-up to fight squarely.

Ticket distribution among the contenders increased tension among the party workers and also among the common man. The two contenders for the ticket of Indian National Congress party were Bijit Saikia and Rajen Borthakur. When the Congress ticket was proposed in favour of Rajen Borthakur, Bijit Saikia decided to contest elections from the Trinamool Congress, a fairly new party, originated from West Bengal and with Mamta Bannerjee as its supreme leader. This divided the Congress followers into two groups. Although the probability of Bijit Saikia winning the election was diminished with half of Congress supporters and handful of Bengali Hindu shifted to Congress side, his objective was to create erosion of vote in the Congress vote bank in Tezpur. With this equation, the chances of Mr. Brindaban Goswami of AGP winning the elections got brighter as Mr. Saikia definitely took away a considerable number of voters from the Congress camp. Another twist in the tale was AIUDF, the new party for the uplift of the immigrant Muslim community with Badaruddin Ajmal as chief. AIUDF too played the card well with Mr.

Manik Gogoi as their contender in Tezpur Constituency. Even though the possibility of AIUDF winning the election was extremely bleak, still it was supposed to dig into the Congress vote bank considerably by taking away the votes of the immigrant Muslims. This also brightened the chance of Mr. Brindaban Goswami's win, even if marginal, in the election. At least, this was the prediction of the experts.

Massive cash flow from the candidates to the party workers and through them to the potential voters took place during the elections. Vote-buying was very common, along with other types of campaigning. Not only the poor but even the middle class take the campaigning season as a golden opportunity to collect money from different political parties, either for personal gains or to celebrate cultural functions. Progress is made synonymous with making a personal road or giving donations to the local Namghar⁴. All the contesting political parties opened temporary election offices in every ward for campaigning purposes. Since the beginning of the field work, it was observed that all party workers would be working seriously in their offices. These party workers were the crux of the entire election process. They provided the posters, flags, handbills and pamphlets used in the campaigning process. The serious attitude of the party workers clearly suggested that, the victory of their particular party would surely provide them with personal benefits. The youth were engaged in campaigning through bike rallies and cycle rallies to show their loyalty to their party as well as to earn some money, lunch, dinner and drinks provided by the party workers. Interestingly, the temporary election office of BJP at Tezpur town had three Muslim youth as party workers. When they were asked for a photograph, they hide their faces. When asked about supporting the BJP, they replied that BJP provided them with money to work for the party. Campaigning for BJP was therefore a temporary arrangement for them to earn some money. As far as voting was concerned, they did not reveal which party they would vote for. This showed that, these youths were only concerned with money, rather than party loyalty or loyalty for the candidate.

⁴ Namghar is a kind of prayer hall for neo-Vaishnavite. The followers of Sankardev offer prayer in a hall which is generally located in the central place of a village.

Behali Assembly Constituency

The above election scenario was also very common in Behali legislative constituency. The Congress, the BJP and the CPI (ML) organized meetings in this legislative Assembly segment. There was greater enthusiasm among the people compared to the Parliamentary elections. This became very clear from the participation of the people in the meetings organized by different political parties. Here, some probable candidates were even busy in discussing different ongoing problems of the area with the influential persons of the locality, perhaps to create a positive impression on the people. The total number of candidates for Behali legislative constituency was 5, one each from the Congress, BJP, CPI (ML) and AIUDF, besides these, the AGP leader, Biswajeet Goswami contested independently as he could not get a ticket from the party to fight the ally BJP. He formed his own independent party named Sanmilita Gana Morcha as a rebel candidate.

During the second phase of the election campaign, all the contesting candidates and their respective parties and party cadres left no stone unturned to organize meetings at the village and Panchayat levels. But at the same time, dissatisfaction among the leaders of different parties in general and Congress in particular was visible. This needs to be mentioned. Some senior leaders of the Congress party were not satisfied with the candidature of Pallab Lochan Das as he was very junior to most of them. These leaders did not take active part in the election campaign. Apart from them, the other leaders of almost all the parties had given their full effort to convince the people to cast their votes in favour of their respective party own candidate. The common people of the area also took an active part by attending public meetings of different political parties. There were discussions among the people about the elections at street corners, tea shops and in the market areas. The election fever could be seen among almost every strata of society. In comparison to Parliamentary elections, the greater participation of common people is really visible. Perhaps people are more conscious in this case as the Assembly elections are a more local affair than Parliamentary elections. Some common people of the area said, 'this time we will not cast our vote in favour of the BJP candidate as he has been an MLA for last 10 years and has become very rich. Why should we give this opportunity to the same person again?' From this, it can be inferred that people feel that becoming an MP or an MLA is a way to

generate wealth. At the same time, it should be mentioned that during the time of Parliamentary elections, the number of participants in the public meetings of different political party was less. But, this time, participation of people was appreciably more, especially in the case of public meetings organized by CPI(ML) and Congress. A group of youths felt that the development of the region suffered a lot during the tenure of the present MLA and it was very important to select a better representative.

In the Indian context, election campaigns are incomplete without the organization of huge gatherings, frequent visits of high profile senior leaders, their addressing of the gatherings, cycle rallies, bike rallies, poster pasting, etc. These are the best ways to draw the attention of the voters. In this constituency too, the above mentioned tactics were used very commonly. Almost all the well known parties, like the Congress and BJP organized such meets. Congress organized one big public meeting on 24 March 2011 in Behali Rangamancha where health minister Himanta Biswa Sarma came to address the gathering. As the minister was about to come on 24 March, local leaders were very busy arranging the meeting. Police personnel were busy in tightening security. As he was supposed to come by helicopter, there was excitement among the people especially among the children to witness the scene. Though he was about to come by 11 am, people gathered there from 9 am. Interestingly, the gathering at the helipad, near Behali police station, was greater than at the Behali Rangamancha, where the meeting had been organized. People from almost every section of society were present in the meeting, but the number of women exceeded that of men. Some came to see the helicopter; some people came to listen to the health minister's speech as he is considered to be an expert in delivering speech. Some aged persons also came to fulfill the demand of their grandchildren. As a health Minister, Sarma is very popular among the people for his different health policies like *majoni* and *mamoni*. As the Congress party had provided vehicles to bring people from different villages of the constituency, people came from various nearby places to attend the meeting.

In the meeting, Sarma requested the people to vote for Pallab Lochan Das and pointed out to the inefficiency of the present MLA. In his speech, he talked about several wrong deeds done by the BJP like attracting people to the meetings by inviting stars like Hema Malini, Smriti Irani, Satrugan Sinha, etc. Just after the declaration of the contesting candidates'

names, the local MLA (candidate of BJP), Ranjit Dutta, had arranged for lunch and dinner at his residence for all the people of his constituency. Everyone could attend the party. Even vehicles had been provided to go for dinner. This was perhaps one new technique to woo the poor voters. In the meeting, Himanta Biswa Sarma asked people to visit the MLA's place and have lunch and dinner because Dutta has invested public money in this arrangement. He appealed to the people to cast their vote in favour of the Congress candidate for the proper development of the region. Commenting with a satirical tone, he said, 'today I have realized that our Assamese girls are more beautiful than Hema Malini, they are not only beautiful but also experts at cooking and weaving. So it is unnecessary on the part of BJP to invite film stars. Instead, they should pay attention to solving the burning problems of the area.' He had appreciated girls perhaps to impress the large number of women present in the meeting and after listening to his speech I recalled one of his interviews in the news channel News Live, in which he had told that he delivers public speech according to the situation and context. He said, he prepares it on the spot, first he observes the gathering and tries to find out whether the number of men is more or that of women, whether people are educated or uneducated and accordingly delivers his speech.

Himanta Biswa Sarma, candidate of Congress and the party cadres finished their meeting within 45 minutes. Just after his departure, but before the dispersal of the crowd, a cycle rally reached the venue which was organized by the CPI (ML). The rally was quite long, approximately 2000 bicycles, and all the participants were men as it is not suitable for women to come for a bicycle rally. When the rally crossed the venue of the meeting and the Congress office, a group of young supporters of Congress started shouting slogans like 'CPI (ML) go back!' and 'Bibek Das murdabad!' After listening to Himanta Biswa Sarma's speech people became busy in counting the numbers of cycles in the rally. The whole scenario indicated that election campaigning was at its zenith and people were taking an active part in the process. Chief minister Tarun Gogoi also visited Behali constituency in order to campaign for his candidate. It was learnt from some elder persons that the Chief Minister's coming to campaign happened for the first time in the history of Behali. So one section of people were very happy, they thought that Ministers are giving importance to this place and have therefore supported the Congress party.

There was competition among the parties in conducting election campaign. Great importance was given to organizing cycle processions and motor bike processions. With these types of rallies, they tried to attract common voters as well as tried to show the common voters how strong they were. Leaders of almost all the parties were of the opinion that a large section of voters cast their vote to the party which seems to be stronger during the period of campaign. These leaders feel that mass participation of people in public meets, motorbike processions, cycle processions of any political party are a good sign and that party has more chances of winning the elections. Sometimes, the political parties are bound to follow different tactics to woo their voters. For example, CPI (ML) and BJP also organized a cycle rally on 1st April but unfortunately participation of people was very less and only 200 cycles gathered in front of their main office at Borgang. The candidate of the BJP i.e. the sitting MLA, Ranjit Dutta, got very offended as the local leaders could not meet the target of arranging near about 2000 cycles. So they again arranged one motorbike rally on 2 April with near about 103 motorbikes. Congress party also organized a motorbike rally on the same day with around 125 motorbikes. It was seen that a group of young boys who are members of the Behali Youth Club also joined the rally. It was reported by some people that these youths were very offended with some active Congress leaders until 31 March. They were offended because some well-known leaders of the Congress party refused to give them donation for organizing a cultural program on Rongali Bihu. Perhaps the leaders had managed to appease them by fulfilling their demand. Fortunately, every time the Election Commission declares elections during the festive season it helps Bihu committees to collect money from different candidates as well as from different political parties. On the 27th of March when the first village level meeting of CPI(ML) was going on, at that time also a group of youths came and were sitting in the 1st row. Most of the people in that meeting were common people so the presence of this group raised some questions. However they attended the whole meeting and when the candidate was about to leave the place, this group of youths encircled him. They handed over a money receipt to the candidate and collected money for organizing cultural program in Bihu.

It is well known that money for vote is a national phenomenon that spreads across rural and urban areas, among the rich and the poor. Most of the political parties try to win the electoral battle by distributing money. Is it possible to win the election by distributing

money and liquor? This question became very clear after declaration of election results. In the Behali legislative constituency, most people are dissatisfied with the present MLA as he remained very inactive during his tenure and had not utilized the resources of the MLA fund. People lamented that instead of bringing proper development schemes to the region, he enriched his own treasury. So, when the question was discussed with different sections of people regarding elections, they viewed that it is very important that the BJP must not win from Behali. Even the independent candidate Biswajit Goswami appealed to people saying, 'Please vote for me, if you want to end Ranjit Dutta's corruption and monopoly'. Cadres of other parties felt that 'we do not know about our chance and position but during our door to door campaign, it become very clear that people were totally dissatisfied with the activities of the former MLA. They were in favour of a change but were afraid that he might have some other way of pleasing the common people to win the election'. Despite all these, if he again won the election it would prove that the power of money could change the public's decision and people select their representatives based on money power.

On the other hand, it is very important to mention that the ethnic composition of the people play a very important role in electoral decisions. In this constituency, about 50 percent voters belong to the tea garden community and then come the population of Nepalis; the Assamese are on the third position according to the population size. The Congress party has therefore given its ticket to Pallab Lochan Das, former secretary of All Assam Tea Tribe Student Association (AATTSU). In one of the public meetings, Pallab Lochan Das said that 'I am sure that I will win the election because in this area 51000 thousand voters belong to the tea community, they will definitely cast their vote in my favour'. But his speech was against the sentiments of some other communities of the region. Large sections of the Nepali community were against the candidature of Pallab Lochan Das as Congress party had not given candidature to some eligible Congress leaders of their community. It can therefore be said that the support of the tea garden community to any candidate is a deciding factor in winning the elections. From the above fact, it becomes clear that community always plays an important role in elections in India. Like Rajni Kothari argues, to have a concrete support base for a political party is always a boon in the Indian context. Uttar Pradesh and Bihar make good examples of this. At the same time, it is a tricky situation for the political party to choose their candidates without disturbing the sentiment

of the other communities. But such a sentiment was not seen among the Assamese people, especially among the youths. They have supported the Congress candidate but not the Assamese candidate of CPI (ML). This may be because of several reasons. First, they have realized the need for a proper representative, irrespective of caste and creed. Second, as Congress is the ruling party, they assumed that their chance to win the election was strong. Third, as Congress was economically very strong and their budget for election campaigning was big they supported the Congress party perhaps expecting material benefits. They were well aware of the fact that if they joined hands with CPI (ML), they would not be able to get any material benefit.

Interestingly, the AIUDF candidate was Malay Das who belongs to the Assamese community but the people of the area named him Mohammad Malay Das in a jocular vein. It is perceived among the people that AIUDF is a party of the immigrant Muslim community. He was not bothered about conducting election campaign. Instead of spending his time in conducting campaign, he went to his own small tea garden with his security person. On his way to the garden he asks some people to cast their vote in his favour. One of the workers informed that one day he was joking with Malay and asked for some money to cast vote in favour of AIUDF. Then Malay Das replied 'I have doubt regarding my mother's vote and who are you, to ask money and cast vote for me?' Why did he contest then? Perhaps the leaders of AIUDF have offered him the ticket in order to make people aware of the existence of the party and he accordingly accepted it for getting some amount of money to conduct the campaign. On the other hand, Biswajit Goswami has contested because his party, i.e. AGP had not given him a ticket, for which he resigned from the party and contested individually. He opened an office at Borgang and invested some money in printing posters. A group of young boys had taken some vehicles and were making announcements to vote in favour of Goswami.

On 31st of March BJP organized a big public meet in *Ketla* field. They also provided vehicles to the people of each village of the constituency to join the meeting. People were also very excited to join the meeting as they had heard that the location of the helipad and the venue of the meeting were the same. Near about 7000 people gathered there, where most of the people were from the tea garden community; a large number of children also

gathered in the field. The popular BJP leader Arjun Munda was about to come at 1:30 pm but the common people were eagerly waiting for his arrival from 11am. As it was a rainy day some people of the nearby areas started selling some delicious items like omelets, boiled egg, pokora, potato chips, etc.

However, it was a misfortune for both the party and their candidate as because of the bad weather the landing of the helicopter became impossible. As a result, Arjun Munda could not arrive on time. Still the common people were waiting there and the party leaders rescheduled the meeting at 2pm. But heavy rain began because of which 80 percent of the people shifted to the nearby shops, and to the vehicles to protect themselves from heavy rain. At the same time, they also become very angry. It was quite natural; despite the bad weather, they had come to attend the meeting and spent the whole day but their hope of observing the helicopter could not be realized. Some people of the tea garden community were of the opinion that “*leader gela Hemamalini ale bollek nai aile, Satrugan Sinha aile bollek nai aile, aita k meeting? Nai dibo Ranjit Duttake vote*” (leaders said that Hema Malini and Satrugan Sinha will come to the meeting but they did not come. What kind of a meeting is this? We will not cast our vote for Ranjit Dutta).

But on the other hand, some other people were of the opinion that they had come to the meeting because the MLA has provided them IAY houses. It is their duty to come in his support. Some others said that the Panchayat president has sanctioned one house in their name but they had not yet received the cheque, if they did not attend the meeting the MLA might cut their names from the list. A very small section said that they had come to attend the meeting as they were supporter of the BJP. One retired school teacher said that instead of making the common people politically aware, political leaders are busy in attracting people by talking about heroes and heroines of Bollywood. It is very important on the part of the political parties and their leaders that instead of such acts they should try to make the common people knowledgeable about the party politics and democracy.

On 1st April CPI (ML) also organized a big public meeting in the Ketla field. Like other parties, they have also provided vehicles for people to join in the meeting. But the difference is that while other major parties provided bus, because of lack of resources CPI(ML) could only provide some mini trucks, wingers and Tata magic for transporting

people. As the weather was not good, some women refused to come in open trucks and accordingly they used the vans, Tata magic, winger, etc for women. All the people gathered in the new Ketla field and from there they organized a procession to the Ketla field. Dipankar Bhattacharya, the central leader of CPI (ML), some of their state level leaders and the candidate also joined the procession and walked from new Ketla field to Ketla field.

People were very happy and they were busy giving slogan, two groups also brought *dhols* (drum) with them and played them throughout the procession, some of them were dancing in the rally. People were very happy in taking part in such a huge rally of about 9000 people. Most of the people belonged to the tea garden community, men and women were almost equal in numbers. The number of non-voters was negligible perhaps because of the fact that the leaders of CPI (ML) had not used helicopter for the campaign which attracts the voters and more so the non-voters. The meeting began at 11am, first of all the District secretary of CPI(ML) addressed the gathering and criticized the BJP candidate, secondly he narrated the incident before the crowd about how their candidate had protested against the lockout of some tea gardens of the area and fought against the exploitation by the management. As the large number of voters belonged to the tea garden community, all the parties have given importance to convincing them in their favour. Lastly the District secretary has appealed to the unemployed youth that 'you please cast your vote for our candidate instead of Pallab Lochan Das, though he has promised in a meeting to provide you jobs it is not possible, he is a liar, and the tea garden community people should not support him as he has done nothing for the people of the tea garden community as a secretary of ATTSSA'. Some leaders of CPI (ML) delivered their speeches in the vernacular language that is Sadri⁵. Dipankar Bhattacharya, a central leader said that '*election koi khel' nehi hei, ye chunav hei, isko seriously lekar proper MLA chunna janata ke liye jaruri hei*'. (Election is not a play. It is important that one takes it seriously and elects a proper MLA). The candidate of CPI (ML) was the last speaker of the meeting. He requested the gathering to cast their vote for him and did not criticize the other candidates.

⁵ Sadri is spoken in Chot Nagpur Plateau and many tea gardens in Assam. Tea garden community members have developed a different version than the original one. Various communities from different parts interact with each other. So language has also been changing.

One of the speakers also composed a song in Sadri. While he was singing it in the meeting, two three people of their community were happily dancing in the field. The song was about the life of the tribal people, especially from the Chotanagpur Plateau, from where the tea garden community came to Assam. It also described how development plans have deteriorated their living conditions, displaced them from their homes, and how food and fire wood became inaccessible for them. The last two lines carried the meaning that 'we will fight for our resources and we will not leave our tea gardens'. The meeting finished at 4pm. and the leaders again became very busy in sending the people to their homes by the vehicles. In this meeting, some people were also selling tea, beetle nuts, sweets, etc. in the field. It was observed that at public meetings people found those speeches interesting which carried criticisms against someone. Common people kept themselves ready for clapping when a speaker criticizes political parties and their leaders. At most of the meetings, it was observed that a section of people remained busy in talking about some other issues, and women got worried about whether they would reach their homes before evening or not. The Election Commission had imposed a strict rule regarding the participation of government servants in elections. Despite this, one section of government service holders came to the meeting just before it ended. It becomes impossible on one's part to stay away from the election process, when one was a strong supporter of a party or candidate. This is what makes elections interesting in India.

In these elections almost all the parties conducted door to door campaigns. CPI (ML) had engaged some women and a group of young girls in this work. The young girls were very excited and they gave their full effort in convincing the people. They asserted that most of the people of the area were against the BJP candidate. While sharing their experience of the campaign, they highlighted the cross section of views held by women and men. In one household, a woman replied that she felt like vomiting when she heard of elections. A group of small children in a van were campaigning in favour of BJP, they were announcing on the microphone, 'vote diyok, vote diyok, Ranjit Duttak vote diyak'. (Vote for Ranjit Dutta). During elections even children could be found playing with posters used by poll parties and giving slogans in favour of different parties. Various political parties opened temporary party offices before the elections at different places for campaigning and mobilizing their workers. However, like during the Parliamentary elections, most of the

offices were laying vacant. Sometimes the office in-charge sat there with his friends and gossiped, and sometimes children of the area could be seen using it as play house. Temporary party office of the Congress party at Borgang arranged tea and pan for almost all visitors to the party office.

The distribution of letters by political parties in every household requesting the voters to cast valuable vote in favour of their own party just before the day of the election was very common and people used it for collecting the serial numbers of the voters list. But this time no one did this. Some government officials had distributed the serial number of voter's lists long before the polling day.

Issues in the Assembly elections were different from those in the Parliamentary elections. The approach of the candidates and party workers towards the voters as well as the response of the voters was also different. As the constituency is much smaller in an Assembly election than in Parliamentary elections, the political parties and their workers tried to touch all individual voters rather than addressing a cluster or a village as a whole. Apart from the particular party agendas, local level problems got much emphasis. One respondent said that people were concerned about their individual and family interest. The issues and interests of the village came after that. Some poor people claimed Indira Awas Yojna houses, BPL ration cards, and government jobs for their children. Apart from the personal demands, people asked for the development of village roads and good school buildings.

Meanwhile, the contesting candidates in the Assembly elections were very much familiar to the voters. Some candidates were personally known to them. As such, their social background, social image, relation with the grass roots, character, and so on also played an important role in the decision making of the voters. Some people claimed a particular candidate to be the prospective suitable representative for their constituency, but they expressed their grief about the associates who were campaigning for him. According to them, his associates, who belonged to their locality do not have a good impression among the people, though they are very rich. They felt that if that particular candidate wins his associates will rule and common people will not benefit.

On the Day of Polling

Behali legislative Constituency

In Assam, tea garden community members have always been a deciding factor in the elections. This is the reason why all most all political parties try to convince them to vote for their party. Behali tea estate branch office is one of the polling stations of the Behali legislative constituency where most of the voters belong to the tea garden community except some officers. The voters include both permanent as well as temporary workers of the tea garden. One woman opined that '*aji utsav lekhia lagse*' (today it feels is like a festival). A few of them responded that the election would not bring any change to their life, being labourers, they were bound to work. The company was providing everything to them like rice, flour, drinking water etc, so the elections were not important to them. When I asked them about the names and numbers of the contesting candidates, then one woman replied 'we do not know because during the day time we work in the garden because of which even attending public meetings becomes impossible for us. How can we know all these things?' At this polling station, most of the voters had casted their votes in favour of the Congress party perhaps because of their community sentiment. Some of the voters were of the opinion that as Pallab Lochan Das belonged to their community, they would definitely cast their vote in his favour and they were very hopeful about the fulfilment of their needs if he got elected.

Though the people looked innocent, they never disclosed secrets like the distribution of money and liquor by political parties. But one of the voters at the polling station informed me about the distribution of jaggery among some people by the BJP leaders for the preparation of liquor. It has already been mentioned that the tea garden workers take the polling day as a festival as they are free from their duty on that day. They came in their best clothes in a festive mood. As photographs were being clicked they became very happy and one group of women asked for more photographs. Some voters were also inquisitive to know whether these photographs were for any newspaper.

After casting their vote, they became very busy in talking and eating some or the other food items from the temporary shops which had been opened by some nearby people basically

from the tea garden community. This time some small children were also engaged in this business. The opening of shops on the day of election in front of the polling station in the tea garden was a very common phenomenon. But this time, the shops were more numerous than earlier. Besides stalls of delicious snacks, one could also find a beetle nut stall in front of most of the polling stations. In Behali tea estate branch office polling station, voters came from early in the morning, 70 percent of the voters cast their vote before 12 am. The polling officers could seal the machine on time.

Party workers are generally engaged at the polling station as polling agents. They are selected from the local area to cross check whether bogus voters have come to cast votes and whether free and fair polling is happening or not. In the polling booth under discussion, around 3 pm, a few young girls came to cast vote in others' names. It seems they were brought by the Congress supporters. It was objected from the AGP polling agents and when they were barred from casting their vote they became furious and but left the booth subsequently. They were also afraid when the polling officer told them that he would inform the police.

The Panchayat Elections

As scheduled by the Congress government in Assam, Panchayat elections were held on January 30, February 6 and February 12, 2013. Polling was conducted for representatives for the Panchayat, Zila Parishad and Anchalik Panchayat Samiti as part of the regular Panchayati Raj elections to the three tiers, that is, the Zila parishad (at the District level), the Anchalik Panchayat Samiti (at the block level) and the Gram Panchayat (at the village level).

The Napam Panchayat comes under Balipara Development Block. Its office is located at Ghoramari. One of the major landmarks of Napam Panchayat is that the Tezpur University (Central) is located in the area of this Panchayat. It is therefore quite well known in the District as well as across Assam. Napam Panchayat consists of fifteen villages, which constitute 10 administrative wards with a total voter population of 19800. In Assam, under the Rural Panchayat Act 1948, two tiers of Panchayats – Primary Panchayats at the village level and Rural Panchayats at the Mouza level were created. After that, under the Assam

Panchayati Raj Act 1959, a three-tier system was introduced such as Gaon Panchayat, Anchalik Panchayat and Mahkuma Parishad. But the new three-tier system was introduced under the Assam Panchayat Act 1994 with the Zila Parishad added along with the existing Gaon Panchayat and Anchalik Panchayat.

The Panchayati Raj System in Assam operates through Gaon Panchayats with a President, directly elected by the people and a Vice-President, elected from among the ward members of the Gaon Panchayat and ten ward members directly elected by the people. The members of Zila Parishad and the councilors of Anchalik Panchayat are directly elected by the people. The Presidents of these two bodies are elected from among the members of the Parishad and Council respectively. In an election, therefore, one person has to cast four votes for a ZP member, a AP councilor, a GP president and a GP ward member.

In Sonitpur District, polling occurred on February 6, 2013. People in this area often complain that Napam Panchayat is the largest Panchayat in Assam. Voters are more than 18000 in number, whereas in many other Panchayats there are less than 10,000 voters. A major challenge therefore is that whatever schemes come for the poor, it is difficult to satisfy the people. So in many wards, the Presidents get changed due to anti-incumbency factors.

Pre-Election times

Supporters of a particular party, besides factors like religion, also take into account the past benefits that they receive from the party or the government. Some Nepali people supported the Congress party as they received different benefits from the government such as BPL cards, housing facilities, and fair price ration provisions. However, some other people of the same community did not receive any benefits from the Congress party. They said that although the government provided certain schemes, they could only get access to these schemes by paying money to the middle man or to the elected leaders. Most of the time, they complained about corruption. According to them, those who were already more well-off received the benefits as they had the money to pay the middle man.

Party workers gave full energy and effort to make meetings a success. Congress party leader and Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma was considered to be the star campaigner for his

party while Badruddin Ajmal was leading from the front for AIUDF. Mostly perceived as a party of the Muslim community, AIUDF tried every possible means to convince people across caste, class and religious community to come and listen to Ajmal in many of their public announcements. The huge gathering at the meeting ground stands testimony to the fact that the party workers succeeded in bringing people to the ground in the name of Ajmal.

In almost all the immigrant Muslim areas of Assam, including Napam, people perceived Badruddin Ajmal as a spiritual healer. He has been accorded an almost godly status by the people here. Once die hard supporters of Congress were seen shifting their camps to AIUDF and thereby the party gained enormous popularity. The reasons for this shift could be attributed to people's disappointment towards the ruling Congress party, religious factors and community sentiments. People regarded Ajmal to be the child of 'Allah' who would work for their welfare and development.

However among the Muslims, the educated and relatively well-off supported the Congress party. According to them, this party introduced development in terms of health and medical facilities such as ASHA, 108 ambulance service, *Majoni and Mamoni schemes*, etc. which has also generated employment. Apart from this, development in the field of education like establishing new schools and classrooms with proper teachers, introduction of mid-day meals is credited to the Congress. These developments were not taken into account by the poor sections as for them development entails a different meaning, i.e, access to basic needs. Thus, it can be seen that development here was not universal; rather it was benefitting only one section of society.

The most important reason for the majority of Muslims going against the Congress was the violence in Bodoland, an autonomous region created for the Bodos under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. Many AAMSU (All Assam Minority Student Union) members were taken into custody by the police in the aftermath of the violence. The Bodoland People's Front (BPF), the ruling party in the Bodoland area was an ally of the Congress. This was the time when AIUDF took the opportunity to motivate the people to support their party by saying that the Congress does not protect minorities. People also argued that Congress leaders had betrayed them. They only worked for themselves and

neglected the people and their needs. They have only widened the gap between the rich and the poor and pushed the poor into an ocean of poverty, hunger and grief. It is the middle class who secured all benefits from the Congress because whatever welfare schemes were available were not freely distributed among people and benefited only the class of people who had money and necessary networks. People blamed party workers and members of the Panchayats for the poor condition of the people as the former were corrupt and did not implement government policies and schemes efficiently. So people were gradually losing trust in the party as it became a party for the well off people. But the poor were not benefited by the welfare schemes, even the flood affected were not compensated. They would often talk about *dalals*, the middlemen, who ruined them by not letting them have access to resources meant for them. They were indeed very disappointed because the government turned a deaf ear towards them.

Panchayat Elections

On the day of the election people came to the place in festive a mood. They thought that it was their duty to cast their vote. Therefore, they took a day off from their routine work. People said that even if it meant the loss of a day's wage, if they miss this chance they would not get it again for another 5 years. It was their day. Many said that they would make up their loss in the afternoon session or on the next day. Women voters were more excited to cast their vote. As they must do their household work regularly, therefore they came in the morning session to cast their vote as their work load was not as heavy in the morning time. The women who were not able to come in the morning session, opined that voting and household work both were important. Therefore they came and joined the queue to cast their vote after finishing their household work.

Despite the instructions given by party workers, people made mistakes during the time of polling. During Parliamentary and Assembly elections, Electronic Voting Machines (EVM) were used whereas in the Panchayat elections ballot papers were used. Most of the old people believed that Congress (symbol of hand) was a better party. One old woman said that she had cast her vote for the Congress last time and this time also she would cast her vote for Congress. But last time she did not get anything from the government. But she hoped that this time the government would fulfill her requirement. When she was asked

why she would cast vote for Congress even though she had not benefited by it she said that the government was not the ultimate ruler; there was another ruler which is God. If God would favour her she would automatically get her subsistence to live.

The voting session started at 7 am. The presiding officers and other members in-charge including the police man came one day before and made the necessary arrangement. Men, women, the young and old all came in large numbers early in the morning to stand in the queue and cast their votes. There were separate queues for both men and women. Women with their veils drawn were properly maintaining the line waiting patiently for their turn. Some of the women who were engaged as cooks, cleaner, etc in various households took leave from their work for the election. The male, however, were making themselves comfortable by squatting on the ground, having tobacco and talking with their fellow mates.

There were factions among people regarding their support to a particular party and the importance of Panchayat elections. Different factors like community feeling, class division, education, etc played a significant role in shaping the views of the people. The poorer Muslim people supported the AIUDF as they believed that the party would work for the welfare of the people. They were against the Congress party as the earlier Congress President had not helped them, they argued that a majority of the people did not have BPL cards because of which they lacked access to other facilities like fees for their children's education, free cycles, etc. They said that to get the BPL card one needed to pay a certain amount of money to some middle man. Apart from access to BPL card, they also had to pay the middle man to get free housing and electricity connection etc. The middleman here could therefore be seen as acting as an obstacle in the way of their development.

On the day of polling, many temporary food stalls, tea shops, fruit shop were established for the day in the hope of some good business. These food stalls were established by petty shopkeepers and some of them were sponsored by political parties. Party workers and supporters gathered there to have tea and pan. This is a common phenomenon in many rural areas of Assam during election times. It happens both during the campaign and in a big way on the day of polling. It gives the event the colour of a festival. On many occasions

therefore, elections in India is said to be a festival of democracy. It has both a symbolic and a concrete meaning.

On the day of polling, while one party was serving khichdi⁶ as lunch, another party was serving rice and dal. The whole day was spent in a festive mood. The children were playing around in the field. That day the schools were closed, so they did enjoy a lot. All categories of peoples had come to vote. Some men said that this time the public turn-out was less than the previous years. But as the election this time was for the Gaon Panchayat, Anchalik council and Zila Parishad, the role of the villager was very important. But they do not understand the importance of the election. Elections are becoming useless to many people because they think of it as a tedious process to come and cast their vote.

While standing in the queue, I interacted with some women. Their husbands were signaling to them to not interact with me. They thought I might influence them to vote for somebody else other than their own candidate. Some of them also said that they preferred to vote for the people of their own community, otherwise they would not be benefited. One woman from the Nepali community said the same thing. She said that it was not worth voting for a person from a different community because they only work for their own people.

There were also a few people who said that the religion of the candidate does not matter, but his qualities to work efficiently for the area is important. An old Nepali woman also said that she had been voting for Congress for a long time and she and her family still support it. Thus sometimes choosing a party also becomes a tradition in the family. Some people give preference to the party and some to the candidates.

One of the interesting things that I noticed was that there were some people who were trying to peep inside the polling room to get some idea about the situation inside. In fact, these were employed by the middle men to find what shape the polling was taking.

⁶ It is a popular dish and health food widely prepared in South Asia and mostly in India. It is prepared from rice and lentils with occasionally few seasonal vegetables mixed in it.

The study showed that local level politics was more significant for the people than Parliamentary and Assembly elections. The functioning of this local politics directly affects local people. Pre-election time is very crucial as it brings even the dominant people in the party to the common people. This is also a platform for the local people to bring up grievances and voice the demands that they have. Young people also earn some money as during this time they are engaged in work like campaigning, distribution of posters and also some paper work. Thus local level election is an important time for the people of the villages. Those who cannot read names cast their vote according to the symbol.

Someone said that when election would get over, the festive mood would vanish. Before few days in advance of these elections, they had been enjoying campaigning for the party and their daily subsistence had been taken care of by the political parties. Many women felt that the polling day was a rare occasion for them to dress well and come for voting. It is generally seen that women and young girl dress well, wear make-up, and come to the polling station as if they are going to some festival. There was hardly any shop opened in the regular market area as people were busy in the polling stations. Only two or three permanent stalls were open and the transport facility was very bad. But in spite of this, people came to cast their vote by faring different means of transport such as tempo, rickshaw, etc. There is a locality where tea garden labourers reside. It was about one kilometer away from the polling station. One party had taken the initiative to take people from that village to the voting centre by tempo and the fare was paid by the party member. It was believed that those people would cast their vote only for that particular party.

The women in the village had less knowledge about the elections than their male counterparts. However, there were some who showed their concern for having good roads and equal access to goods and services provided by the government. They are also aware about the government schemes in the village and the source of the problems created in the functioning of the programmes. They said that unless and until they raise their voices against it, problems would not be solved. According to them, these elections are crucial for there was high a chance of a change in the ruling party. This concern was seen among the women who at least had some level of education.

Women who hardly find time to come out and talk to people on normal days because of domestic work were seen enjoying outside their homes on the day of polling. They were talking, laughing and interacting with each other. Their conversations were mostly related to their children, their family, and their husbands. It is seen that after reservation policy for women, they also are becoming politically conscious. Political issues have now found a place in their discussion. However, their interpretation is different from men. They understand politics only at the local level, know the names of only local leaders, and do not know much about the all India or the state scenario. When asked about whom they would vote for, they replied that they heard the male members in their families discussing about the candidates and the parties. It was on the basis of the decisions of the male members that they voted or chose a particular candidate. They were usually not very open to talking about election related issues. They were hesitant to discuss these issues in public. However, their response varied on the basis of communities they belonged. For example, a Muslim woman was more shy and hesitant than a Nepali or Bihari woman. Further, the way of responding also varied according to classes, as economically better off women were discussing issues more openly than poor women and their exposure to education and the outside world also determined their level of political awareness.

The contestants came to visit the polling booths and the common feature about them was that they would all go and greet the people in the queues. They would show them their respective symbols so that even the illiterates will be able to easily recognize their names on the ballot paper by looking at the symbols. Thus the symbols became their identity. They would also request people to pray for them, to bless them so that they emerge victorious. They also gave their last try by requesting people to vote in favour of them by making innumerable promises. Party workers also were bargaining with voters till the last moment. It is a common phenomenon during the time of elections.

Coming to the kids, the polling day was a fun time for them. No school, no classes, no studies, no scolding, they were freely enjoying their time, running here and there, playing games with friends etc. Thus different section of the people spent the day in their own way. Though people were disappointed with the government for not taking care of them, not fulfilling their needs, not keeping their promises, not living up to their expectations, and

denying them a descent living, they would still vote. The reasons cited by them reflected that even if they were not very enthusiastic to vote, majority of them especially women voted out of the fear that if they did not vote, their names might next time come in the list of D-voter. It becomes a big trouble to get their names out of that list as it also requires some money. Again they feared that they might lose their citizenship if they did not vote, they might be deported out from their country.

Are Panchayat Elections More Important?

Panchayat elections play a significant role for the people. The people said that during Panchayat elections they are well aware of the candidates as the candidates are from the same village or community which is generally not the case in parliament or Assembly elections. They further said that in terms of some crisis the people could seek the help of the Panchayat where they could get help within a short span of time. These things make Panchayat elections so significant in the lives of the people.

For most of the rural people, Panchayat elections are the most important. They have different reasons for this. Firstly, Panchayats are more easily accessible to them and they can easily approach the Panchayat member for any of their problems, which is not the case with the MPs or MLAs. Further, all rural development schemes are implemented through the Panchayats so their requirements are fulfilled by the Panchayats and thus it is a very important institution for them. Again, some Panchayat members are from their own village, so the community sentiment is there. Mostly Panchayat elections are a local affair and therefore people are more enthusiastic about it. They are also familiar with most of the members, know how they are, who they are and this makes Panchayat elections interesting for them.

Regarding the difference between Panchayat elections and Assembly elections, one of the respondents said that the Panchayat elections are smaller than Assembly elections. Another one said that both are the same. Some respondents said that Assembly elections were more important because ministers were elected in those elections. In Panchayat elections only local people are elected. Some respondents said that Panchayat elections were more powerful in terms of influencing people so it was more important for them. When one

woman was asked whether she would vote or not, she directly replied ‘vote dile ki hobo, mor eku labh nai, heikarone najau’ (What will happen if I vote, I won’t get any benefit, that is why I will not vote). One man from the tea garden community said that if someone would pay me, only then I would cast my vote, otherwise not.

While responding to the questions, some women from the tea garden community got aggressive and opined that corruption was everywhere. She argued that the members of the political parties only came during elections to seek vote, they always ran after the people to get support. But once they captured power, the people have to run after them. One woman from that group said that it was very unfortunate that ticket was always given to the rich people. Nobody from their community was given the ticket. Therefore, they always remained backward and deprived.

One old woman sarcastically put forward her views. She said that the Panchayat members often maintained, ‘there are no poor people in our village’. That meant we all are rich, so we are not given any facilities which are provided by the government. But there existed a very pathetic condition in their village. That is why, this time around, they decided not to go for polling. She lamented that earlier members of the Gaon Panchayat won because they voted and helped them. After winning they had no time for the people. They were only busy in making their own profit. She said that one can observe that the houses of the members of the Panchayat were kutcha before elections, but after that it became a concrete building. Their kin and relatives got all the schemes instead of the poor. She said that Panchayat elections were totally dependent on them. In a real sense, they believed that Panchayat was their government. They have no rights or control in Parliament or in the affairs of the Assembly. But at the local level, they had right and chance to make a good Panchayat committee, which can help the poor and work for the betterment of the villages.

Why Vote?

There are various reasons because of which people vote. It is evident from the field work that one of the most important factors why they vote is to prove and retain their Indian citizenship. We know from chapter 3 that postcolonial Assam has witnessed much internal as well as international migration. Polling percentage in most of the places in Sonitpur

District is near about 90%. This is not imaginable in other parts of the country. It is largely because there is a political propaganda by brokers that if one does not vote, for one or two specific parties, then she/he will lose their citizenship status; fearing this, people vote in large numbers in this region.

Mukulika Banerjee in her study on elections tried to explore why people vote. She found out that there are various reasons why people vote. These are: resignation, instrumentality, loyalty, affectivity, peer pressure, voting for citizenship, voting for recognition, voting as a duty and right (Banerjee 2014). But Banerjee did not address the issue of what are the factors involved and why people vote for a particular party or a particular candidate. In the concluding chapter of this study, it has been discussed on the basis of the findings of the field work.

Election as People's Power

It is seen from the study that mostly marginalized people who are not comfortable in dealing with the government officials come out openly during the time of elections. They form various small groups for getting a kind of bargaining power to interact with the middlemen or political broker. The idea of political clientelism has been discussed in chapter 3.

One old man was asked about the importance of elections for him was, as he was not very active in the political process. He replied that election time is the only time when they felt privileged and powerful. All along they had to beg political leaders and brokers to have access to scarce resources and welfare schemes. But during elections political leaders came to our houses to ask for our support and vote. So they felt proud and privileged during the time of elections and participated in it with enthusiasm. It can be inferred that the pre-election time was a phase which give poor and marginalized people a power to bargain and uncover themselves.

People's demand and expectations from their Leader

Regarding the development of their region people have certain expectations from the newly elected MLA. As Napam and Panchmile regions are affected by flood caused by the Jiya

Bhoroli river, majority of the people are flood victims. So, their main demand is proper embankment on the river. According to the villagers, all kinds of socio-economic problems are exacerbated due to the flood. They, therefore, demanded rehabilitation of the flood victims. They felt that the Gaon Panchayat was corrupt and it should be checked. Otherwise, the poor people have to suffer a lot.

According to many people from the Muslim community, they belong to the minority community. That is why, there was always a fear that if they did not cast their vote they would be branded as D voters and that they would have to prove their Indian citizenship. One old man from the Muslim community sarcastically told, 'if you wear a white cap, wear a lungi and speak Bangla (Mymensinghia) then you must be a Bangladeshi, who has come to India illegally. People do not know that we are settled here from generations. The masjid (mosque) here in Panchmile is 100 years old'. When people were asked about the integrity and honesty of the leader of their choice, one replied with an Assamese proverb '*Ji Lankaloi Jai Siyei Ravan Hoi*' (Whoever goes to Lanka, becomes a Ravana). They argued that all these manifestos, agendas, promises made by the political parties were only meant for their political gain and not meant for the welfare of common citizens. After getting elected they forget the common people and work for their own benefit.

The campaigning period has different meanings for different people. Some people look forward to free meals and free alcoholic drinks. Some of them are interested in money. One middle aged man from the Nepali community said that this was the time when they get bribes from the political broker and leaders; otherwise it is the other way round. We have to pay them to get our things done. The meaning of political campaign for different people is primarily in terms of free alcoholic drinks and free food.

Many women feel that during elections time, they take a day off from their mundane everyday life. They receive special attention from political leaders and vote seekers. It is a testing time for the broker as he has to show his power and strength to the candidate and party leader for whom he or she is working.

Elections as Magic and Performance

Yaahan murdo ke liye zameen hi zammen hai lekin Zinda logo ke liye sar tak dhakne ki zaga nehi hai (Here you have enough land for the dead, but for the living one no space to even hide their heads). Once I heard it from a co-passenger on a city bus while traveling by Raj Ghat area (This is a place in New Delhi where Mahatma Gandhi was cremated and where a couple of eminent politicians have their memorials). What is crucial here-is the power of the dead as a symbol. People get elevated from their regular position to a higher position after death. This might depend on the social position of the dead. There are cases like Baba Mandir in Sikkim. (This is a temple erected after a soldier named Harbhajan Singh who died in a war while fighting with Chinese soldiers). Taking various cases from different sites in Latin America social anthropologist Michael Taussig discusses how magical powers enable things to be more powerful.

Oxford English dictionary defines 'magic' as the power of apparently influencing events by using mysterious or supernatural forces/mysterious tricks/a quality of being beautiful and delightful in a way that seems remote from daily life. Further, OED explains magic as an informal exceptional skill or talent/having or apparently having supernatural powers/very effective in producing the desired results.

Taussig quotes Nietzsche and writes that Nietzsche made the point that metaphor constitutes the human world by being forgotten. Absorbed in cultural reality, it takes the form of a literal truth. Taussig writes, "(T)ruths are illusions of which one has forgotten that they are illusions: worn-out metaphors which have become powerless to affect the senses: coins which have their obverse effaced and now are no longer of account as coins, but merely as metal"(Taussig 1997, 35).

In this mundane world, many abstract ideas and symbols attain very powerful positions in a human being's life. It starts from various totems and cultural symbols. One of the most common and apt examples of an abstract idea or symbol having magical powers is money. It is symbolic but it mediates into the concrete world. Money is both measure and medium of all commodities. A piece of metal becomes a coin or paper becomes currency and gets magical powers to operate at a different level. In the same way, during elections an

ordinary man gets power, indeed magical power to elevate him/her self so that he can get a pure place. Money has to be in circulation. Then only it creates more magical value. All that is solid melts into air. What I mean to share here is how dead people have a kind of power over those who are living.

Magic, myth and elections are significant in the lives of many people. Under modern democratic rule, governance is one of the key elements. The state tries to implement policies in a scientific manner. The modern scientific practices of the state and its failure at implementation are often critiqued in sociology and anthropology. Even though magic is defined a pseudo-science by many, its performance in various ways is empowering many people as Taussig has argued. In India, elections are most fascinating and it is no less in Assam. It is interesting to note how political parties and leaders can exercise magic and myth to bind the voters. Power is felt at various levels, starting from the bureaucrats to the ordinary citizens. Elections occupy a special space in people's imagination and in their everyday life especially during elections. Malinowski (1992) writes that magic serves the primitive to bridge over the dangerous gaps in every important pursuit or critical situation, which holds right in some contexts even now, as in the places where the study has been conducted.

Ajmal, Taj Mahal and Elections

Ajmal Ali was a farmer in Alinagar in the Nagaon District of Assam. He started a perfume business by extracting agar in his area. Later, he became a wealthy businessman and started many charitable work. His son Badruddin Ajmal was born in 1950 and inherited his business. He runs Ajmal foundation and various charity organisations such as hospitals and orphanages. Badruddin Ajmal established a political party named Assam United Democratic Front (AUDF) in 2005, later it became AIUDF and registered as a national party.

In the 2006 Assembly election in Assam, AIUDF won 10 seats. In the 2011 Assembly election in Assam, the AIUDF won 18 seats to become the second largest party in terms of strength next only to the Congress. Even established parties like AGP won fewer seats than AIUDF. Over the period, Ajmal has reached the status of a messiah among large sections of

the Muslim poor. He is also considered a son of Allah for the poor. People believe he has some divine power through which he can ameliorate many problems that they have. That is why wherever he goes people in large numbers attend his meetings or gatherings. He even gives magical medicine to people and they take it very seriously.

The event which I am going to recount here occurred on the occasion of a public rally for the Panchayat elections. The event where Ajmal was expected to address the public rally was no less than a magic event. On 2 February 2013 in Panchmile locality, a large number of people gathered to witness a historical event. People were even brought from the nearby places in mini bus and small vehicle. People in large numbers came to attend the meeting from distant places. Free transport service was provided by the party from different places, which helped the people to come and attend the meeting. This was also a means for mobilizing people in order to get mass support. The older people were most benefited from this service. This free service therefore attracted a large number of crowds. People regarded Ajmal to be the child of 'Allah' who will work for their welfare and development. Ajmal was indeed the reason for many of the people to come to the meeting, as they believed that if they can get the sight of Ajmal all their sins would go away. People considered him so divine that they came early in the morning covering long distance just to hear his words. It was a festive scenario where large crowds were present, there were different food stalls, people were singing together expressing their love for Ajmal, children were playing together, women were colourfully dressed up and enjoying their day free from their regular household works. It was also observed that even elderly people were so excited to see Ajmal that they were carrying flags of the party chanting Ajmal's name.

There was so much enthusiasm among people that though the meeting was to begin at 2 pm, they started coming to the ground from 8 am. Women dressed as beautifully as they could. Children had a great time full of fun and frolic. Many of them never had the opportunity to see helicopters from such a close proximity and this also tempted them to wait patiently for long hours to have a glance of the helicopter. Thus, there was great excitement, enthusiasm among the people. On the pretext of the meeting, the people found the opportunity to come out, all the family members could come out together to communicate, interact with others. Therefore, they had a good time, which otherwise they

hardly get because of their hard, busy work schedules to meet two square meals a day. Thus, there were several factors, which motivated them to gather in the ground leaving aside all their other daily work.

While talking with the women it was found that they did not have much knowledge about the elections, they were only aware about the fact that Ajmal was coming to the meeting. Some people also came to see the helicopter knowing that Ajmal would come in a helicopter. It was interesting to see that among the supporters of AIUDF there were also supporters of other parties like the Congress. These people were monitoring the situation, analysing the amount of support they were receiving and the chances of their party winning. They were playing a silent role where they were not showing their support to a particular party but were taking into account the views of different people.

There were thousands of people in their colourful dresses gathered in the meeting. It was like a *mela*. Both Hindu and Muslim people were gathered. However, Muslims were in majority. The Muslims considered him as an agent of God. He was not only a political leader but also a spiritual leader for the Muslims. They considered him as their problem healer. It was a sight which shows that for the Muslims, Azmal was seen as a mediator between them and God, who would help them to solve their problems. People were entertained with songs praising Azmal, which was also a way of attracting people to come to the meeting. Song's lyrics described Azmal as the leader of the poor and Allah's messenger to rescue the poor from the clutches of the Congress government which is sucking the poor people's blood.

An old man was holding a flag of AIUDF and was roaming around the field. He said that he wanted to meet Azmal personally and ask his help to improve his conditions. He was very hopeful regarding this party. Even the women, were seen to be very enthusiastic. They were happy that they would see Azmal. The meeting in a way was also a source of relief from the daily chores for the women. Women said that it was indeed their luck to see and listen to their spiritual leader Azmal in person.

This charismatic figure attracted thousands of people with lots of hopes in their heart. They wanted to change their destitute condition. People were also carried to the venue by party

sponsored vehicles from far off places. Vehicles were running one after another to carry people to the meeting. This shows the importance of the presence of more and more people for the credibility of the party. Even people showed no complaints for traveling miles to come to the meeting. This is a sign of their grievances against the party in power and their growing concern to have a just party.

Party workers gave full energy and effort to make the meeting a success; they kept on announcing from many days before about Ajmal's arrival, facilitated people to come to the ground by providing them free transport facilities, etc. They tried every possible way to convince people across caste, class, religion, and community to come and listen to Ajmal. The huge gathering on the meeting ground stands as a testimony to the fact that the party workers tried and succeeded in bringing people to the ground. In this area, especially poor people consider Badruddin Ajmal as a spiritual healer. He has been accorded almost godly status by the people here. The people, who were once diehard supporters of Congress, were seen shifting their loyalties to AIUDF, and thereby the party gained enormous popularity. The reasons for this shift can be mainly attributed to people's disappointment, religious factors and other community sentiments.

Another important reason behind rising popularity of AIUDF was undeniably the religious sentiment. As large chunk of population were followers of Islam and Ajmal too belonged from the same community, he had an added advantage as religious sentiment also strongly lured people to the AIUDF camp. They could connect or relate to him as they followed the same religion. For them he was a religious leader, an agent of God who would take away all their pains and heal their wounds. They were so devoted to him that they felt if they were fortunate to at least have a glance of him; their sins will be washed off. They would sing '*Ajmal amar jaan*' meaning 'Ajmal is our life'. Further the 'lungi, the long-white beard and the white cap on the head' image that he carries has imprinted itself on the minds of the people a sense of brotherhood and belongingness, because they can easily relate themselves with that image and the feeling that Ajmal belonged to them and that they belonged to the same fraternity. This sentiment went in favour of AIUDF.

Different people had different views and interpretations about how Ajmal was coming. Someone said that after performing Namaaz, Ajmal would come by airplane directly from

Macca/Arab, another said that he would come by train from Guwahati. Someone said that at the earlier meeting at Napam organized by the Congress party there were not so many people. It was then concluded that it was an indication that interesting elections at the Panchayat level could be seen for the first time at Napam. They contended that many people, not only Muslims, had split from the Congress and joined AIUDF or other parties. This was so, because they believed that some Congress leaders had beaten and scolded some Muslim men during the conflict between the Bodos and the Muslims of immigrant origin in the Udalguri area of BTAD during October 2008. Someone said that Ajmal was like a God for them, that he knew everything, that every Friday he used to go to Arab (where Macca, the most sacred place for the Muslims, is located) for praying. Someone from the crowd prompted '*Ajmal is like the Tajmahal*'. These people saw him as one next to God, there were countless stories that were doing the round. These people believed that Ajmal sahab was there for fighting for their rights.

The meeting also allowed lots of people to earn some money. Many shops selling sweets, food items, chocolates, etc were installed and this was a source of additional income for the shopkeepers. Further, the delay in the meeting was also a boon for them as it resulted in people getting hungry and therefore more sale and profit. Further, a group of young boys was given money to convince and bring people to the ground. Again, the local taxis also had additional earning as they were paid more than usual by the party members for bringing people to the ground. In this way, election meetings become a boon, a source of extra income for some people.

When the time got close to approximately 3 pm, people's eagerness increased. They were waiting and waiting. Some people were looking and pointing towards the sky. They were looking for the helicopter in which Ajmal was supposed to come. After waiting for such a long time, we saw a sign of some flying object. It was the helicopter which many people were waiting to see. It was coming from the clouds creating a hazy environment. People were looking towards the sky as if an angel was coming from the sky. In a moment, the helicopter landed on the ground. The whole area was echoing with 'Hazoor Saab Hazoor Saab' chanting. But the next moment, it was not Hazoor Saab but his son who came out of the helicopter. People got stunned but next moment they changed their mind from Hazoor

Saab to his son. People were fighting to touch his beard. It is believed that for a good Muslim, his beard is a holy symbol. When I asked whether they are disappointed by Hazoor not coming, one person replied that his son had even greater divine powers than Ajmal Sahab. If he wishes, he can bring on rain in moment or stop rain if it is raining.

Various lores were told about Hazoor Saab. There was a booth for publicity by Congress party erected outside the Tezpur University gate. While addressing a gathering of around 200 people, one worker from the Congress party mimicked Ajmal with his effigy. The next day, I met supporters of AIUDF and Ajmal. One of them narrated two stories to me. Once during the last Assembly election, one person soiled a poster of Ajmal. After two days, blood came out of his body from various parts and he died. Once dacoits went to loot Ajmal's house, on gun point they asked Ajmal and he gave them keys to open his locker. When they went they found nothing, Ajmal was asked where the money was, he said it was there in the locker. They did not believe him and asked him to come with them. When it was opened, they saw millions of rupees kept in the locker. Dacoits bowed before him, touched his feet and they fled away. You see something must happen with this Congress worker who insulted Ajmal. You will come to know very soon.

On the next day, I met the supporter of Ajmal. He instantly told me with anxiety when he met me, '*Janab, kaam to hoi goi se*' (sir, the work is done). I asked what happened, he told the person who mimicked Ajmal Saab met with an accident and even doctors from a big hospital in Guwahati are telling that it would be very difficult to save him. Now do you know Hazoor's power? Such kind of lore elevated Badrudin Ajmal to a godly status. As magic is defined as a quality of being beautiful and delightful in a way that seems remote from daily life, similarly, poor people try to connect themselves to the magical power of Ajmal to experiences that which is not usual in everyday life. This kind of magical power gave the poor a kind of confidence which otherwise might not be possible.

Ritual, Performance and the Polls

In a big country like India, there are huge logistics involved in conducting elections and polls. This task is even harder in the so-called socially and politically unstable and disturbed areas. Once the dates are announced for the elections, distinctive administrative

officials start preparing for the polls. The DC sends a letter to many government employees in the district including university teaching and non-teaching staff. In the case of Sonitpur District, they conducted a training programme in the District library hall, Tezpur. On the specified date, those who had been asked to do the elections duty went to attend the meeting.

Clifford Geertz suggested a terminology called 'Theatre State' with reference to 19th century Negara in Bali. Though his work faced criticisms of being ahistorical, it suggests an interesting sociological analysis, which can be applied to the modern state. This term is used in a sense where the state is more interested in continuing and performing dramas and rituals through various symbolic practices rather than emphasizing on the welfare of the subjects. The state often legitimizes itself through large-scale ceremonies and public rituals like the elections. In this work, Geertz's idea of the theatrical state is relevant in the background of the election process in a country like India (Geertz 1980).

Before one day of elections, all government vehicles and hired vehicles gathered in the open field in front of a college to collect the ballot papers and ballot boxes. Then using these vehicles, polling officers along with security personnel reached the destination where they were deputed to conduct the elections. These vehicles are demarcated from other vehicles with a big sticker or banner on it writing 'on election duty'. All vehicles carried a poster bearing the code name of the booth and its number. The officials recognized the booth by its number.

What happened a day before the polling at the place where voting was going to take place? What changed the whole environment into a magical arena through certain rituals reinforcing the presence of the state? It has been argued that the state manifest itself through concrete and abstract symbols as well as practices. How the idea of the state is perceived in everyday lives of the people, description of this voting event would give us a different kind of understanding of the process.

In the 'Introduction' chapter it has already been discussed how the idea of the state is very much present in people's everyday affairs. Foster, through his ethnographic account of voting in the Tanga Islands, Namatanai Electorate, New Ireland Province of Papua New

Guinea, shows the concrete act of casting a vote in the national election assumes the form of a secular ritual in the structure and symbolism of its performance. He writes, “the act of voting performatively demonstrates membership in a community of voters (the nation) whose relationship to each other is mediated, expressed, and guaranteed by the state. At the same time, the act of voting constitutes 'the state' as an experiential reality however temporary, for people who otherwise rarely encounter state's agents or agencies (military, legal, or administrative) as a salient aspect of their everyday lives” (Foster 1996, 146).

Generally, in India government schools are used as polling stations. Schools are also symbols of the modern secular practice of the state. The condition of government run schools in most parts of India is pathetic. This is the only time when the broken buildings of schools are put in a relatively fair shape. One evening before the day of polling, vehicles and election personnel take position at the school. All of a sudden the area looks different. With a red ribbon or marker demarcating the outer area from the voting area with various signs, wood and bamboos are used to make different queues to facilitate the polling process where men and women would line up.

The next day morning, it gives rise to an unusual scene. The place where children used to play and go to their classes is forbidden for them. They can only play outside the demarcated area for the day. Outside the polling booth, party workers would stand and sit with a table with a list of voters. Before entering the field their name would be checked in the list and they would be given a number, which is against their name, which they need to show to the election officers in the time of voting.

This checking procedure of names in the voter list gives identity of two kinds. One is where individuals reinforce their citizenship status through the act of voting and the other is that how they distinguish themselves from the non-voters who struggle to be part of the nation state's legitimate member. The ink mark on the nail gives a different symbolic value to this process of voting. Foster mentions, “more tangibly, the indelible ink stripe drawn on one's finger signifies membership in the community of active voters. By the end of the day, the adult population would be classified into two categories: voters and non-voters, the former recognizable by their marked fingers” (Foster 1996, 163). This means people belonging to the marginalized sections, who are looked upon as a doubtful category of citizens, feel

relieved after voting. In the larger framework, it is also related to the issue of the patron-client relationship: whom to vote and why? From the ethnographic detail of the elections as discussed above, it emerges that people, especially the poor marginalized section in the backward rural areas, does not always vote on the issue of good governance. Political protection, patronage and material benefit become the most important consideration for voting a particular party or candidate. In this, candidates and parties with whom they can easily identify in terms of issues of interest and collective identities (religion, language, etc) get a preference in the voter's choice. The voter believes that such parties or candidates would be more accessible to them for addressing their needs and concerns.

Chapter 6

Corporatization of the State in the Neoliberal Era

In recent times, the idea of neoliberalism occupies a special space in both academic and activist circles with its advocates and detractors. This chapter examines the idea of neoliberalism and the changing nature of the state in the context of neoliberalism. This chapter also discusses the concept of neoliberal governmentality developed by various thinkers. Thus, with the help of local practices, it shows how the state has gradually withdrawn itself from various critical sectors of social welfare like health and education.

Neoliberalism is one of the main ideas that this study is engaged with. Social scientists have used it frequently after the 1980s. It is very difficult to define the term; however, at the same time, it is imperative to conceptualize the term. This chapter is divided into four sections. The first part discusses the theoretical understanding of neoliberalism. The second part explores the relation between neoliberalism and governmentality. The third section examines the unfolding of neoliberal governmentality in India. The final section deals with the practice and manifestation of neoliberal policies in the context of the field study.

A. Neoliberal Governmentality: Blurred distinction between state and market

Scholars like Harland Prechel, Wendy Brown, Raymond Plant and David Harvey have discussed the idea of neoliberalism in a comprehensive way. If one looks at the idea, it can be traced to Adam Smith. The idea of neoliberalism is considered to have first sprouted in Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* (2003), where it was argued that if there were no restrictions on economic transactions, i.e. laissez-faire model, the wealth of nations would increase. Classical economists like Smith considered markets efficient means for producing and distributing goods. In contrast, neoliberals consider markets morally good in themselves. Liberalism recognises individuals' freedom, whereas neoliberalism prefers markets and individuals who choose freely (Prechel 2007). Neoliberalism is not simply a set of economic policies; it is not only about facilitating free trade; maximizing corporate

profits, and welfare mechanisms. Neoliberalism rather carries a social analysis that when deployed as a form of governmentality percolates down from the soul of citizen subject to education policy to practices of empire. Neoliberalism does not simply assume that all aspects of social, cultural and political life can be reduced to the calculus of utility, satisfaction and benefit as against micro economic grid of scarcity, supply and demand and value neutrality. Rather it envisions policies and rewards to naturalize the calculus. Neoliberalism produces rational actors and imposes a market rationale in decision making for all spheres (Brown 2005).

Neoliberal policies, which are guided by limiting government intervention and imposing market regulation on everything that can be commodified, include several interrelated tenets. Deregulation frees businesses from costly rules, privatization sells off public assets to more efficient private entrepreneurs, tax cuts on capital free up money for investment and capital formation, and social programs are dismantled to cut government spending and make individuals more personally responsible. Neoliberal ideology justifies fewer government programs that advance the public good in order to facilitate growth in the economic sphere.

This new federalist deregulatory social structure of accumulation which provides a framework to ensure economic stability and growth, created a complex disguise for increased corporate power and restoration of the power of economic elites. Neoliberalism is best understood as an ideology that affects the political process, not as a theory that explains empirical events. Neoliberal ideology is a worldview that legitimates policy initiatives in the political sphere to support the capital accumulation agenda of the dominant power bloc (Prechel 2007). Bevir writes, "(T)he neoliberal concept of governance as a minimal state conveys a preference for less government. According to many social scientists, the neoliberal reforms fragmented service delivery and weakened central control without establishing proper markets. In their view, the reforms have led to a proliferation of policy networks in both the formulation of public policy and the delivery of public services" (Bevir 2010, 31).

Raymond Plant (2010) understands neoliberalism as a political, legal and economic doctrine. Plant gives detailed analysis of the neoliberal understanding of freedom, justice

and bureaucracy. In neoliberal thought everything (freedom, justice) has to be understood in relation to the rule of law but neo liberalism makes its ideals the rule of law and everything has to be understood in that term. Therefore, neoliberals view social democracy and socialism as outside rule of law. According to neoliberals, there is no such thing as substantive common good which should be pursued by the state. It sees the political pursuit like social justice or a greater sense of solidarity and community outside the rule of law. Therefore, freedom has to be understood as absence of coercion and coercion has to be understood in relation to rule of law. Thus, a neoliberal state is largely a nomocratic state. Nomocracy can be generally understood as a rule devoted to the attainments of private ends with no interest in common ends.

According to Plant, neoliberals understand that the welfare state set up in the interests of social justice will in fact spawn large scale bureaucracies which will embody undesirable features. The first is that welfare bureaucrats as rational utility maximizers have an incentive to grow the size of their bureau and one way of doing this is to expand the scope of the particular aspect of welfare that they are charged with delivering. If this view is allied to the point about the porous nature of welfare needs, such as security, health, and education and the equally porous nature of the goods which satisfy those needs, then it can be seen that bureaucrats have a strong incentive to 'bid up' the area of welfare need with which they are concerned. So both types of welfare states are likely to expand since bureaucratic delivery is central to both. If both sorts of welfare state can expand under these pressures without any clear stopping point, then it is clear that there will be endemic distributive questions about the sharing of scarce resources to meet expanding needs. If distributive politics stand outside the rule of law, as neo-liberals maintain, then both types of welfare state – the residual and the social democratic one will equally fall outside the rule of law. The argument here is that the welfare state means entrenching discretionary bureaucratic power at the heart of government just because it is not possible to write rules of law that secure to individuals in a way that is compatible with the abstract and universal nature of law a bundle of goods to meet welfare needs. Any view of the positive duties of government against the background of scarce resources is going to have a large place for discretionary power, which is contrary to the rule of law.

In neoliberal view, the objectivity of basic needs is deceptive because the needs are not objective and cannot be privatized. The neoliberals argue that health, education or any other service that falls within the realms of welfare has no objective line as in where it has to end, so the neoliberals cannot set the limit and privatize it. Neoliberalism advocates that a planned society means imposition of a particular service of certain values in society and this has severe implication for personal liberty. In similar line a planned economy would be coercive because it prevents individuals from doing what they would otherwise do to carry on with their plan. In a similar sense neoliberals have a negative attitude towards the interest groups. And all the argument against planned economy is an argument in favour of free market. Neo-liberals have deployed many arguments against historically important shift in the understanding of the nature of freedom¹.

Thus the neoliberal argument of freedom, justice, bureaucracy all talk in negative terms about planned economy which has welfare motive because a planned economy is in principle against only private production and capital accumulation. Therefore the chief argument of neoliberals is institutionalization of private capital accumulation, production and consumption.

Harvey, echoing this, argues that the neoliberal state favours strong individual property and free functioning of the market. Private enterprise and entrepreneurial initiatives are seen as keys to wealth creation and it is only through free market and free trade that there could be elimination of poverty. But while personal and individual freedom in market place is guaranteed, each individual is held responsible and accountable for his or her own actions and wellbeing. And this principle extends to realms of welfare like education's welfare (Harvey 2005). Neoliberalism is therefore basically a private capital accumulation mechanism and not an agenda of economic prosperity for public interest. Neoliberalism, thus, dismantles welfare states and privatizes public services. It makes wreckage of efforts at democratic sovereignty or economic self-direction in the south and intensifies economic disparities everywhere. Thus, while neoliberal political rationality is based on a certain conception of market, its organisation of governance and the social is not merely the result

¹ For a more detailed discussion on this issue, please refer to Plant 2010.

of leakage from the economic to other spheres. Rather the explicit imposition of a particular form of market rationality on these spheres.

In contemporary writings on anti-capitalism, anti-globalisation or anti-imperialism, the word neoliberalism appears frequently. It is taken as if it is understood equally by all without explaining the word or without defining it. But this word creates much ambiguity if not analysed in proper context. The proponent of this idea hardly calls them neoliberals, as it is taken as a pejorative term. Mostly this word is used in the sense of an economic ideology. However, this word has generated a lot of controversy debates. Those who oppose capitalism have been most critical of this idea. Pierre Bourdieu, for example, argues strongly against neoliberalism. In the book *The Act of Resistance: The New Myth of Our Times*, he demonstrates how the idea and action of neoliberalism takes the space of the state, and how it can damage the marginalized sections of the population if it is not countered through international collaboration and social movement. He is even critical of the intellectuals' position on neoliberalism. As he writes, "one would need to analyse the work of the 'new intellectuals', which has created a climate favourable to the withdrawal of the state and, more broadly, to submission to the values of the economy. I am thinking of what has been called 'return of individualism', a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy which tends to destroy the philosophical foundations of the welfare state and in particular the notion of collective responsibility which has been a fundamental achievement of social (and sociological) thought" (Bourdieu 1998, 7). Bourdieu points out that the discourse of neoliberalism is very strong unlike other discourses. It is strong and hard to fight because other powers of a world of power relations help it. He calls neoliberalism "a programme of methodical destruction of collectives" (Ibid, 95). He goes on to say that "the neoliberal programme tends overall to favour the separation between the economy and social realities and so to construct, in reality, an economic system corresponding to the theoretical description, in other words a kind of logical machine, which presents itself as a chain of constraints impelling the economic agents" (Ibid, 96). Neoliberal ideology creates circumstances conducive to the state's withdrawal from its duty towards the citizen. Instead of performing its duty, the state surrenders to market forces and gives more value to the economy, which is not concerned about societal conditions. Then the idea of neoliberalism

is embedded in the soul of the state. He affirms “neoliberal utopia [is] embodied in the reality” (Ibid, 100).

Harman points to the ambiguity in the term ‘neoliberal’; he asserts that the question about neoliberalism is not easy to answer; and defines it as an ideology that is a new form of liberalism. In its continental European sense, it means “free market economics”. State intervention is seen as distorting the economy and has to be restricted to defending private property, national defence and, in the monetarist version of neoliberalism, overseeing the money supply. Harman argues that contracting out, privatisation and encouraging private pensions are mechanisms to depoliticize the process of social provision, so making it easier to refuse it to those deemed not to deserve it on the one hand, and to clamp down on the workers in the welfare sector on the other (Harman 2007).

Harvey (2005) says that the crisis of capital accumulation of the 1970s affected everyone through rising unemployment and accelerating inflation. Besides that, there were widespread labour and urban social movements which pose threat to the economic elites and ruling classes everywhere. But one condition of post war settlement was that the economic power of the upper class would be restrained. And this is the main reason of the spread of neoliberalism. However its growth and success largely depended on the various local variations.

B. Neoliberal Governmentality

Neoliberalism, thus, is not simply a set of economic policies, facilitating free trade, maximizing corporate profits and challenging welfarism. Rather, neoliberalism carries a social analysis that when deployed as a form of social governmentality reaches from the soul of the citizen subject to education policy to practice of empire. Hence it becomes important to understand the meaning of governmentality. According to the Oxford Dictionary of Sociology (2009), governmentality refers to the complex set of processes through which human behavior is systematically controlled in ever wider areas of social and personal life. The concept of governmentality was introduced by Mitchell Foucault as a more refined way of understanding his earlier idea of power/knowledge. The significant characteristic of governmentality stressed by Foucault is the prominence of disciplinary

power over other kinds of social power that we can call government. He calls this governmentalisation of the state (Dean 2010).

The term governmentality refers not simply to the ministers of the state and the political means through which it works but to a complex set of processes through which human behaviour is systematically controlled in the wider areas of social life. It is a form of authoritarian control which combines the two forms of power: the sovereign powers of command and productive, the disciplinary powers. The sovereign power is the repressive power which is the coercive structure of exclusion, repression and punishment. Modern states are concerned with ensuring their sovereignty and it is done with sovereignty over a territory and management of its population which Foucault calls bio politics. Bio politics is a form of governmentality that is premised on the active consent and subjugation of the subjects where the social, cultural, economic and political dimensions as well as the physical biomass of the society become the primary object of intervention. Thus neoliberal governments are an active intruder in the personal and the social life of the subjects. It constantly keeps a panoptican gaze over its population. Thus governmentality is a constant control over security, territory and population (Burchell et al 1991).

Brown (2005) argues the concern of neoliberal rationality is not only market, but also it seeks to extend its influence over various social institutions and tries to influence the social action. Neoliberalism through a powerful discourse tries to inflict its market rationale in all the social spheres of life. Therefore, such behaviour based on economic rationale is naturalized. Brown goes on to say that the state caters to the needs of the market by formulating policies in favour of the market. Therefore, the market is not controlled by the state rather it is the other way round and the state is controlled by the market.

A similar argument is also put forward by James Ferguson and Akhil Gupta. They term it as 'naturalization of the legitimacy of the state' or 'rolling back' of the state (Ferguson and Gupta 2002). The logic of the market has been extended to the operation of state functions, so that even the traditionally core institutions of government, such as post offices, schools, and police are if not actually privatized at least run according to an 'enterprise model' (Burchell 1991). Meanwhile, the social and regulatory operations of the state are

increasingly 'de-statized', and taken over by a proliferation of 'quasi-autonomous non-governmental organizations'. But this is not a matter of less government, as the usual ideological formulations would find it to be. Rather, it indicates a new modality of government, which works by creating mechanisms that work "all by themselves" to bring about governmental results through the devolution of risk onto the "enterprise" or the individual (now construed as the entrepreneur of his or her own "firm") and the "responsibilization" of subjects who are increasingly "empowered" to discipline themselves (Ferguson and Gupta 2002).

Social scientists have observed a growing nexus between the state and the market. Ferguson and Gupta study Anganwadi centre and show how higher officials feel the presence of the state at the time of inspections and visits. The point I want to make here is that not only the presence of the state felt by the sudden visits but the way welfare measures like education, health are twisted and turned. For example, Baru and Nundy (2008) argue that the partnership between the private and public has broken the traditional boundaries between the state and the market leading to emergence of multiple roles and multiple actors. Thus, this has led to governance and control of welfare services. Therefore, neoliberalism and governmentality feed on each other and thus producing and reproducing each other.

In a similar context Clarke (2003) questions the role of the nation states, national governments and their public spending programs including social welfare because, first, there seems to be a clear corporate capital accumulation where the corporate have articulated a clear business environment with low tax, low regulation low cost, low risk, labour and, second, such concerns have installed "global economic wisdom" by supra-national organizations and agencies like International Monetary Fund, World Bank and World Trade Organization. Their policies have tended to reinforce a vision of minimalist or laissez-faire government centred on reducing levels of taxation and public spending. Therefore, this kind of behavior of the state may be called the corporatization of the state.

In its usual sense, corporatization refers to the transformation of state resources or agencies into corporations to introduce corporate management techniques to their administration, but I use 'corporatization' to describe the process through which the state acquires the

characteristics and essence of corporations. In this neoliberal era in India, we can see changes in the non-corporate establishments like universities and hospitals become acquiring structures, features and behaviors like corporations. As the state comes up with various developmental projects under the influence of corporations, MNCs and TNCs, it tries to manufacture the consent of a large section of the people as part of the nation-building process.

However, it mainly ignores the indigenous people who inhabit those areas where the developmental projects are being executed. Indigenous communities are often denied access to the media and the political or decision-making process and mostly remain unheard. The neoliberal agenda and corporatization have a close link. These two lead to the privatisation of the state's various welfare services. As Bevir argues, "(T)he neoliberal reforms had two main strands: marketization and NPM. The most extreme form of marketization is privatization, the transfer of assets from the state to the private sector. Hereafter, the state takes little or no responsibility for providing the relevant goods or services to citizens" (Bevir 2010, 10).

To paraphrase Hiroyuki Tosa (2009), neoliberal governmentality promotes the politics of inclusion, implemented by governing at a distance with its hegemonic powers. The global governmentality also promotes a politics of exclusion, and it is done by establishing targeted governance aimed at different groups at the periphery of global politics. Therefore, neoliberal governmentality works as a double edged sword, which cuts both, as form of gaze and control in the lives of the different heterogeneous groups from a very global level and also by, very decisively keeping certain groups at the periphery. This kind of exception existing at the marginalized periphery becomes normal of the neoliberal global governmentality. In this way, neoliberal governmentality promotes securitization of supposedly risky groups on the periphery. Thus Tosa calls neoliberal governmentality as anarchical governmentality.

Tosa further maintains, "(I)t is not only states that play an important role in sustaining neoliberal global governance, but also other kinds of transnational actors, such as NGOs, IGOs, and MNCs. As part of this deterritorialization process, networked power begins to

form a global “power/knowledge” nexus, based upon the logic of neoliberalism (Tosa 2009, 415-416). The next section deals in neoliberal governmentality in the Indian context with special reference to health and education sectors in the Napam Panchayat of Assam.

C. Neoliberal Governmentality in the Context of India

In this section, I intend to see the co relation between development, neoliberal ideology and governmentality in Indian context with special reference to welfare parameters like health and education in Napam Panchayat of Assam. Development ideology, neoliberal thoughts and governance of the state are all interrelated processes. The process of development in India has to be mentioned if one aims to understand the way in which the Indian state has changed from post-independence period to post liberalism period. It becomes all the more important and interesting in the Indian context because of the nature of the Indian society. Indian society is a non-homogenous and highly stratified society. Thus, definitely the impacts of development are differently felt by different sections of the society. This differential impact is accentuated by the introduction of neoliberal ideology. It is seen that the neoliberal ideology favours only a certain sections of the society as neoliberal ideology is known for private capital accumulation rather than working as a private welfare mechanism. Thus when the neoliberal ideology works to implement development strategy for developing the conditions of the underdeveloped with the funding of the international monetary organizations like the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, Asian Development bank, etc it creates a kind of governance and gaze in the lives of mainly the poorer section of the society. A format of control and surveillance develops basically in relation to the welfare schemes like health care, education, women empowerment, etc. The mechanism within which the welfare schemes function creates its own form of governance with two combined aspects: welfare and surveillance.

In the Name of Good Governance

In the first two chapters, I have discussed about the idea of good governance devised by the multilateral organizations like WB and IMF. The politics of good governance is very deceptive. One has to look very cautiously not to miss the nuances of the matter. In the name of good governance, it is seen that various development agencies are trying to

penetrate into the grassroots level development activities. At times, they are trying to either replace state's responsibilities or influence it by suggesting that CSOs and NGOs are more efficient than the state agencies.

In last few years in India, one can see the rise of a strong anti-corruption movement. Even large numbers of people from middle class are joining the movement. If one looks at the issue carefully, it reveals less and it hides more. Most of the movements are not durable as they do not come from strong class association in terms of fighting for a cause. Again, in general, people think that big monetary irregularities are the only form of corruption. Arundhati Roy argues that there are major problems with this kind of anti-corruption movement. If one looks at the kind of movement initiated in the name of civil society in India, it will be very clear as to how people who lead the anti-corruption movement somehow are related to various NGOs. Many of these NGOs receive funds from Ford foundation, Rockefeller Foundation and WB.

Roy says anticorruption movement led by Anna Hazare on behalf of India Against Corruption (IAC) and his team is basically an NGO-driven movement². She suggests that if one has to find real understanding of issues than one has to look at the history of different movements in India and at global level. History is immanent in any kind of social processes. Ignoring history, one cannot get into the core of the issue. The culture of a nation and symbols used in mobilizing people can reveal the motives behind any movement or mobilization.

Careful reading of the IAC movement and people involved in it will give the reader an interesting trajectory. The idea of good governance and decentralised planning are in a subtle way product of the neoliberal agenda. It aims to depoliticize the local level politics in the name of good governance so that international finance capital and vested interest can enter into the field. As Roy argues, WB report talks about 600 anticorruption programmes in Sub Saharan Africa region. The moot question is why World Bank is interested in anti-corruption programmes in the developing world. Roy emphasizes broadly on five points.

² <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d7cWirJNsSY>> accessed 16th August 2012 interviewed on 30th August 2011 on CNN-IBN.

These are: increasing political accountability, strengthening civil society participation, creating competitive private sector, instituting restraints on power and improving public sector management. WB is trying to facilitate the penetration of international capital. One, therefore, has to interrogate the whole idea of corruption. The perception of corruption also varies in different communities and classes (Roy 2011).

For example, the living space and livelihood of a huge number of people in India are outside the legal framework. Corruption at different levels (police, municipality officials, etc) helps them eke out a hand to mouth living. The anti-corruption law is bound to the legal framework. The millions of slum dwellers, petty roadside sellers, street vendors, etc will not come under the purview of this law. She raises a question as to why this law is allowed to leave out corporate houses, NGOs and Media houses of its purview while any law should address the inequalities in society. In one context, she talks of Anna Hazare going to a private hospital after his fast. A private hospital symbolizes the withdrawal of health care facility by the state. NGOs and corporations are taking over traditional functions of the state.

There is a huge influence of corporates over the contemporary state, as can be seen from many scams in recent times. Due to the unholy nexus between corporation and state, the government is losing lot of revenue and public fund. Partial structure of the state is becoming like corporations. State tries to mold itself like corporations. Person like Chandra Babu Naidu, ex-chief minister of Andhra Pradesh was portrayed as CEO of Andhra Pradesh. State has not withdrawn itself totally from the activities of welfare governance. Sometimes it implements certain employment generation schemes like MGNREGA and NRHM to gain legitimacy among the people. But the state is also active in repressing people's movement in many tribal areas of India wherein the big corporate are looking to exploit the rich natural resources against the wishes of the tribal people.

I shall try to demonstrate in the following how the developmental ideology has worked in India in relation to private corporations with ethnographic evidence from the field. Influenced by Nehruvian ideology, development has been the magical formula of post-independence India. It has always been seen as the answer to all the socio-economic

challenges that India was facing since Independence. This development is, however, a double edged sword: as few have gained from development at the cost of masses. This has occurred mainly as these developmental projects were generated and executed in a top down approach without taking into consideration the local specificities. As a result, the poor, marginal people lose their living habitats and traditional sources of livelihood like land, water and forest. Thus, while under current trend of development, poor are becoming poorer, farmers are becoming landless, tribal are losing their forest rights and common property resources and, above all, when people are not left with any alternative source of livelihood, then question of doubt obviously arises about the present development model and its promise to bring about a better society.

Such development projects are being implemented in various tribal areas of India. One may cite the examples of the Lanjigarh bauxite mining in Orissa and Lower Subansiri Hydroelectric Power Project in Arunachal Pradesh. Both the cases are special as indigenous endangered tribal groups inhabit these places. Tribal people in Lanjigarh region worship the mountain as *Niyam Raja*, i.e. King of Law. They worship the forests and the mountain. For them, it was their religion. They claim that even if they die, they will not leave the place. There are very few Dongria Kondhs left; if mining comes, their identity may disappear from this world forever (Das 2014).

Various international financial organisations in most cases have funded such 'developmental projects'. The main motive of such projects appears to be control of land and resources and this control is a form of neoliberal governance. As the control of land or the surveillance over the life of the people is without their knowledge, it may be referred to as a kind of 'biopolitics', as explained by Foucault (Burchell 1991). Thus, the underlying politics of 'developmental projects' and neoliberal policies is a form of neoliberal governance. This governance is created due to neoliberal policies that enable a certain section of society to accumulate capital. Neoliberal hegemony is working at the global level as well as in India. It is producing class-based economic growth at the national scale. It shows how the coercive power of global governance institutions has worked in tandem with the interest of the local elite to produce neoliberal changes in India (Ahmed 2009).

As this public-private partnership got stronger in the 1990s, the WB, UNDP, and UNICEF became more dominant and active. The global endorsements by the WHO and other multinational organizations of public private partnerships had its influence on the local and national levels of planning and implementations of health policies in India. It strengthened and supported the free market that advocated a reduced role of the governments in the economy. It also reduced the roll of state in providing the services in the social sectors by breaking down the traditional boundaries of the state and the market.

Initially, health care was taken care of by the government with support from NGOs. But after the 1990s, the collaboration shifted from government and NGOs to government and for-profit organizations (Baru and Nundy 2008). From an empirical study of public private partnered tuberculosis programme, Baru and Nundy have found that the detection and treatment was supposed to be done by the private partners, whereas cases of referrals have to be done by government agencies. The authors argue that the division of role and responsibility between the state and market leads to fragmentation of the programme, which is bound to have a negative impact on the effectiveness of the programme. For example, in the Janani scheme in Bihar, the poorest groups were not taken into account as it only includes the lower and the middle-income groups who could pay a part of the expenses/prices of private sector (Ibid 2008).

On a slightly different note, quoting Shiva and Bandopadhyay, Ashok Swain (2010) quoting Shiva and Bandopadhyay argue that protest movements in different parts of the country has been the result of the threat that indigenous and traditional inhabitants have felt on account of loss of their survival base under the onslaught of the new development projects, whether led by the state or the corporate sector. Their protests against the latter are also part of the demand for the conservation of forest and river. The empirical experience of the impact of the various developmental projects gives the general view that the indigenous people have not benefited much and that the profit has been differentially shared. Case studies show a diversity of supra-state and non-state actors at work in varying alliances with one another at the local, national and supra-national levels.

But these projects also demonstrate that the state is not merely a victim of neoliberal economic globalization, since it remains an active agent in transposing it nationally and locally. The monopoly of the state over the production of law is certainly being challenged both by international institutions and by civil society actors, subnational as well as supranational (Randeria 2003). However, in contrast to the widespread diagnosis of the consequent decline of the state and the dismantling of its sovereignty, Randeria argues that the state does not become weak rather it becomes a cunning state, which capitalizes on its perceived weakness in order to render itself unaccountable both to its citizen and to international institutions (Ibid). This is how neoliberalism becomes crucial as it penetrates into the social sphere and creates new *mentalite* about state and society. Therefore, transforming a welfare state into a corporate state. This argument gives the base of the fact Migdal (1994) discusses about the state changing society and society changing state. Here it becomes important to understand as to how these various institutions like NGO, civil society, state along with the international financial institutions have changed their role in producing a state which is not weak, rather a state which has diversified and institutionalized various forms of governance in all spheres of life.

D. Manifestation of Neoliberal Policies in the Local Context

In the present context of state-society relation as discussed above, where state is gradually withdrawing from critical social sectors paving the way for private intervention, I am trying to look at how health and education, two important parameters of social welfare, are dealt with by the Indian state and what implication it has among the poor people at the rural grassroots on the basis of the responses of the latter to the policies of the state with empirical evidences from Napam Panchayat in Assam. For this, I interviewed a number of persons from the two villages of Napam and Amolapam across community, economic status³ and gender to elicit their views on the health and education facilities provided by the government. The following presents some representative cases.

³ Most of the people are economically weak. But there are villagers who have enough land for subsistence; villagers who are engaged in petty business and those who are in teaching and clerical professions. These villagers have relatively better economic status.

Education

P. Saikia, aged 23, hails from the Assamese community. He is a private security guard by profession from the Napam village. He narrated that his family preferred to educate girls as they felt girls need to be empowered. Both he and his sisters have been sent to government schools as they provide education without much expenditure. He felt that government education system could be better if necessary facilities are provided and teachers are sufficient. Private schools have done better as they have competent teachers and all kinds of facilities in place. But because of this, the fees in private schools become too high and most people cannot afford to send their wards to private institutions. He also informed that in government institutions some financial help is also given to good students which help them to complete their education. Respondent said that he would prefer to send his children or relatives to government institutions at the primary level but for higher education, if need be, private institutions could be an option. Even if money were not a cause of concern he and his family would still prefer government schools for primary education. He was aware of policies like Sarba Shikshya Abhiyaan and Mid-day meal schemes. He has heard that some corruptions are taking place in the implementation of these schemes.

Abhishek Thakur, aged 40, hails from Bihari community from Napam village. Engaged in a clerical post under the Central government, Thakur stated that he preferred to send his children to private schools for education up to higher secondary level. Depending on the subject of study, he would not mind sending them to government institutions as well. Though he himself completed his education from government institutions, he had put his children in private schools. He said that in this modern age it would be foolish to differentiate between boy and girl and opined that irrespective of gender both ought to get equal opportunity to study. He has two sons. He had not seen any discrimination between boys and girls in his family. According to him, private schools fared better, for government schools are plagued by corruption and lackluster attitude of the authorities. On the other hand, private institutes have a good work culture and a better infrastructure, etc. So, they have a comparative edge over government schools. He made a significant point that government schools in Assam followed state board syllabus. But many prefer to send their children to CBSE and ICSE curriculum based schools which help them to do better in

various all-India competitive exams later on. But those who are financially not well off have little option but to send their children to government schools. He, however, felt that at the level of higher education, government institutions have done better and is a boon for all. The respondent was skeptical about the government schemes like Sarba Shikshya Abhiyaan and Mid-day meal for he has come across many reports of the lapses in the implementation of these schemes which is a cause of concern. After all, it is a matter related to children.

Salema Begum is from Amolapam. Aged 28 and a mother of three, she stated that education is very important and in whatever way it comes she is happy. She noted that her children go to government school and there is no question of differentiating between her son and daughter. In fact, she wanted her daughter to pursue higher education. Furthermore, she opined that it was a matter of pride for her and her husband that they managed to send all their children to government school and that they did not care about private schools. On being probed about her view about government schools, she said, fewer students went there as the schools were truly in bad shape. But people who do not have the resources have no option to send their wards to private schools. She felt that education in private schools was better as they had good amenities. The students speak English well and are confident and apparently have an edge over others. If money were not a cause of concern then she would send her children to private schools, for like all parents she too wanted her children to be the best. She assumed that private schools and other institutions are better than government schools. She opined that the Sarba Shikshya Abhiyan was a good scheme but was not aware whether it was implemented well. Mid-day meal scheme, according to her, also was a good scheme for it helped families who could not provide good food to their children.

Maloti Das, a teacher in a kindergarten school, stated that people from lower income groups were mainly forced to send their wards to government schools. However, as far as the higher education is concerned, students preferred government colleges as fees were much less and institutes were well known. In the lower level, the government education system was in bad shape and needed an overhaul. She also passed out from a government school and during their time there was hardly any option of the private schools. Though she did not have any children yet, among her relatives all the children went to private schools. She

mentioned that Kendriya Vidyalayas⁴ who were doing well, but admission to these schools was restricted to a selected few. Government education system, according to her, should have been better, but sadly the case is not so as the foundation of primary education system is in ramshackle state allowing the private education system to gain an upper hand. The growing demand for CBSE and ISCE curriculum also placed government schools in a tight spot for they still followed state board syllabus, which she felt was another problem area. The respondent did not express her confidence on either Sarba Shikshya Abhiyaan or Mid-day meal scheme, for she questioned the reliability of the officials who implemented these plans, and cited example of Maharashtra where many children fell ill by consuming adulterated food offered as a part of Mid-day meal scheme.

The case of 14 year old respondent Jahangir Alam is an interesting one. He dropped out of school after class 7. Jahangir ran a small shop, and informed that his brother and sisters were continuing their schooling from a government school. Though he had dropped out of school, he felt that private schools were much better for facilities there were good and their uniform too fascinated him. The young respondent expressed his desire to join a private school for higher secondary if he passed class 10 with good percentage. When probed as to how he intended to complete his education till class 10, very hesitantly he informed that his father admitted him to Dirajaan Madrasa, where along with religious studies they could also complete general school education. He narrated that like him many other boys too went to such madrasas. Some of them had joined it voluntarily even if they were not school dropouts. He had a hard-core believe that private education is better but at the same time he mentioned that if facilities like Tezpur university were provided then even government run institutions could be good. He knew Mid-day meal scheme and felt it was a good initiative as children get wholesome meal under it. His younger sister was a beneficiary of the scheme.

Indramamul Haq is a 17-year-old enthusiastic boy, preparing for his School final examinations. He informed that in his house all the children were sent to school and that in terms of education his sisters did not face any discrimination. Just like his brothers, they too

⁴ Also known as Central Schools which are part of an Indian school system under Government of India.

were sent to government schools. On being questioned about his opinion regarding government education school, he said, fewer students went there as the schools are in bad shape. He narrated that the school his siblings went did not have electricity and hence no question of a fan. During summers they somehow managed classes and most students stayed away from school. He opined that education in private school and colleges are better for they have good facilities, the student's converse well in English and also look smart. But he also pointed out that everyone could not afford to send their children there. Fascinatingly, the respondent himself went to a private school, and informed that he was better in academics compared to his siblings and hence his father decided to send him to a private school hoping he will do even better, by availing the facilities. On the question as to whether his father would send his sister to a private school if sister too did well in studies, he answered that at the moment his family could afford the expenses of his schooling only.

A small time businessman by profession, 31 year old, Abdul Rafiq, clearly stated that he did not differentiate between girl or boy and choosing whether to send his children to government or private school solely depended on his income. Sending children to private school was an expensive affair which he could not afford. He opined that government schools had good facilities. In an interesting comment he stated that private jobs are not secure and the working condition is also very oppressive. He hoped that education of his children in government school would help them get government jobs eventually. He believes that education was a must these days so that no one could demean anyone and also prayed that his children could graduate from the university. If money were not a concern, he would still prefer to weigh which education system was better between the government and the private and then take a decision as to where he would send his children. He felt that government education system was better. He very clearly was not aware of any government education policies but did know that in Anganwadi schools and lower primary schools children were given lunch. He informed that in the area he lived educational facility was becoming better for they also had a junior college along with high school. Further, Tezpur university's presence in the vicinity also gave impetus to the overall educational scenario of the area for people also newly realised the importance of education.

Shiv Prasad, a 19 year old student of the junior college in Panchmile, proudly said that both he and his brother have been pursuing their studies well despite financial difficulties. He did not have a sister of his own but thought that his parents would not discriminate between them in case he had a sister. When asked about his view regarding government schools, he said, that fewer students went there as the schools were in bad shape. He narrated that he too faced many difficulties as a small child when in school. They did not even have proper drinking water, and without any fan sitting in class in peak summers became a serious problem. Therefore many a times they stayed away from school during those times. He felt education in private schools and colleges are better for they have better infrastructure and opportunities are many. He hoped that even government schools could come at par with private ones so that children from poorer families also get similar opportunities. He did not have much idea about Sarba Shikshya Abhiyaan or Mid-day meal scheme, but had heard that small children who went to the Anganwadi Schools did get good food.

Leela Chetry, a 45 year old housewife and mother of two, said that her priority was to provide good education to her children and since they could afford to send their children to private school they did. She herself could complete her schooling and hence by all means wanted her children to be educated. According to her, government should invest more money for development of education although corruption had spoilt everything in this country and education system was not left untouched. She stated that the private educational institutions had strict norms and so things were in-order. Therefore, in the current times, private education system was better than that of the government's. She opined that at present people are aware about the importance of education and, by and large, do not differentiate between boys and girls. She had two daughters and whole heartedly wanted them to do better than boys. If both government and private educational institutions were at par, then she would send her children to government schools. After all, these services were meant for the public and if they did not use them, then who would. The respondent was aware of both the schemes- Sarba Shikshya Abhiyaan and Mid-day meal and felt these were viable plans, but constant reports about children falling ill after consuming poor quality food made her shudder.

An undergraduate student, Sangeeta Rana, strongly believed that any government plan such as the Sarba Shikshya Abhiyan or Mid-day meal scheme or any other scheme for that matter cannot be trustworthy as they are afflicted with corruption. She felt that people do discriminate between girls and boys in terms of sending them to school, though she never faced any such problem and passed out from a government school. Private education system was better than government for they are focused on giving quality and holistic education to the students whereas government schools do not even have teachers. Education has become so important in the present times that people have no option but to send their children to government schools even if the condition of the schools is bad. Given a scenario where government and private educational institutions are at par, then government schools would be a better option. After all many government institutions in the field of higher education have done very well.

It is evident from the people's opinion that if the welfare schemes related to school education such as Sarba Shikshya Abhiyan and Mid-day meal scheme work properly, people would prefer government schools. But the government has failed to improve the education at the primary level. There has not been enough interest and investment to develop the government schools. People are apprehensive about the government establishments and show lack of trust in government run educational institutions. Income has a direct influence on the choice of schools for the children as well. Generally, it is seen that people would prefer private education to government one if their income is not a constraint. This is due to the neglected state of educational infrastructure and quality. The case of 14-year-old respondent Jahangir Alam is noteworthy who perceives that private education is better than government education. Such examples substantiate that the state has failed to provide the necessary welfare support to strengthen the basic education system. Interestingly, the villagers advocated the case for improving government education which is more accessible to them. They also feel that government education at higher level is better. It may therefore be inferred that people's opinion and choice for private education services stems more out of compulsion arising out of the ramshackle state of public education.

Health Services

Durga Devi aged 35 of the Nepali community stated that the most common diseases in her household were common cold, stomach ailments, fever, etc. On being questioned about her understanding of health care the respondent did not seem to have any concrete idea. Then she informed that due to meager income for any kind of medical assistance they preferred to visit government health centres, the nearest one being Panchmile health Centre. Additionally she was not aware of any government funded health schemes nor did any representative from Gram Panchayat or government official visited them to inform them of such schemes. But she did know about ASHA and was quick to add that it was of no use to her as her children were grown up now. She opined that health care services offered by the government was satisfactory and that given a choice to select between government and private health services she would prefer to pick government services as it affordable to her. However, she also stated that private health care service was better than the government's which is not accessible to her. Furthermore, on being questioned if any of her family members visited the doctor for general check-up the answer was in the negative. They would visit the doctor only when they were stricken by some illness.

A gardener by profession, Bengali speaking Sukumar Pandit, aged 40, informed that common cold, stomach ailments, fever, cough frequently affect his family, and that they do nothing extra in the name of health care, except maintaining the general cleanliness of the house and consuming boiled water. For prenatal and postnatal health care he took his wife and child to government centres for there he had to pay the cost of medicine only. Similarly, for child care too, they relied on government facilities for vaccination, etc. On being questioned what kind of diseases can be treated under government health care schemes, he said that he had only taken the child to the government hospital and when it comes to the elders he prefers availing private health care facilities, for he does not think public healthcare is reliable. He opined that government health care is both good and bad. For the women of his house, only government help he took was that of ASHA. Otherwise, he went to private health care, as treatment was much better and behaviour of the staff was good and that it was much more trustworthy. He did not care about the ongoing government health care schemes for he felt more secure availing private health care. In

affirmation to his believe he narrated about an incident that had taken place in their village few years back wherein many children fell ill after consuming medicines that was given by the government, he believed the medicines were back dated and said money was not more important than the life of a human.

45 year old Uday Singh, belonging to the Bihari community, said that the common illness he and his family members suffered from were cold, stomach ailments, fever and cough. He also informed that the male members of the house went for daily morning walks as a part of their effort to stay healthy alongside drinking boiled water. Generally they procure water from the well which may not be always safe to drink. For all kinds of health issues they preferred to avail government health care services that include pre-natal and post-natal care. Even for child care they opt for government health care. They get information about the government health care from the local ASHA. Remarkably the respondent noted that to get better attention of doctors in government hospitals, he pays them some amount of money. He opined that even though government health care services are improving steadily, the private health care service is much better. On the reverse side, he said that if both government and private health care services come at par, he would prefer to avail government facilities because they can afford it. Like all other respondents, he and his family members are largely ignorant about the government health care schemes and do not visit any doctor unless they are extremely ill.

Durga Kashyap aged 43, a Nepali woman, narrated that most common diseases in her household are stomach ailments, common cold, fever, etc. On being asked about her thought on health care she was quick to say that on a daily basis she and her family members practice Yoga in a bid to maintain their general health. Moreover, for all kinds of medical assistance, they preferred to visit private health centres as she doesn't like the ill treatment meted out to them by government hospital staff. But she did have knowledge about ASHA, but was swift to say that it was of no use to her as she had grown up children and during the time she was pregnant such facilities was absent. She opined that health care service offered by the government was satisfactory and complicated ailments were good to be treated in government centres. But the callous attitude of the government hospital staff makes matters risky and therefore she does not have confidence in them. Additionally, on

being questioned, if she or her family members visited the doctor for general check-up she replied that both female and male members visited the doctor only when they were suffering from some sickness. Remarkably, she also stated that women of the household did avail government health care facilities, but the male members of the family visited private practitioners. Given a choice to select between government and public health services she would prefer to pick government services, only if the staff were more attentive and trustworthy. She was the only respondent who claimed to own a Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (National Health Insurance Scheme), but had not taken received any benefits out of it till now. She said her family found out about such scheme from the neighbours. But interestingly no other respondent spoke about owning such card or even being aware about such government schemes.

A young housewife, Hindi speaking Sushila Devi, aged 30, and mother of two daughters, informed that stomach ailments, common cold, fever, cough frequently affected her family. For ensuring the good health of her family members, on a regular basis she ensures that all her family members drink plenty of water in the morning along with chavanprash (a popular Ayurvedic product taken for good health) and seasonal fruits to her children. For both prenatal and postnatal health care, she took the assistance of private health care facilities. However, for child care like vaccination, etc she relied on government facilities. On being asked about what kind of diseases can be treated under government health care schemes she replied that all kinds of complicated ailments could be treated in government hospitals provided the staff in these hospitals gave attention to patients and behaved well, for she felt that though facilities were available in the government hospitals, lack of care was the biggest drawback. The women members of the house along with male members availed government health care, as she still believed government health service was better despite herself availing private medical service during pregnancy. The only ongoing government health care scheme she was aware of is ASHA about which she found out from her friends in the neighbourhood. Free medicine or any other kind of aid from government is always beneficial given their financial condition. But she is afraid of availing such aid, for there have been many incidents where children were taken ill by consuming medicines supplied by the government.

Thirty-year-old Babita Ram, belonging to the Bihari community, is a mother of three children. She informed that the common illness she and her family members suffered from were cold, stomach ailments, fever and cough. She also informed in a bid to stay healthy she gives her family boiled water. For all kinds of health issues they preferred to avail government health care services that include pre-natal and post-natal care for they could not afford to pay the fees at private health centres. Even for child care they opt for government health care, nearest one being Panchmile Health Centre, information of which they get from the local ASHA. She informed that despite her elder son suffering from persistent ailment like dysentery she would purchase medicine from the local pharmacy and visited the PHC only if he was seriously ill. She could not afford to take her son to the government civil hospital in Tezpur town and preferred to use the cost of transport to purchase medicines from the pharmacy. She also informed that she believed that government help did not reach the down trodden like her and therefore many a times private medical service becomes compulsory. But she couldn't afford that. Only her youngest child was born in a government hospital; her elder children were born at home, which reduced their expenditure on child birth. Vaccination for the children had been administered in the government hospitals. She had no information about any government health care scheme except ASHA. She believed that if free medical aid was offered that would be a boon for families like hers. While in conversation, she expressed her fears that she would have to invest a good sum on her son's treatment which would be difficult to gather and hoped for government assistance.

Bengali speaking Rashmi Karmakar, 25 year old and mother of three, presented a rather different picture from all other respondents. She was ignorant of the idea of anything called health care and said she fed her family usual dal rice, the bare minimum that they could afford. She informed that she gave birth to all her three children at home with the help of a midwife who came from Solmara. She said since her first delivery was successful at home she felt no need of doctor's aid or hospitalization and the story remained the same during all the pregnancies. She was not aware of ASHA but on hearing from her neighbours she took her children for vaccination to government hospitals. On being questioned about her preference between the government and the private health care, she replied that her days are

spent thinking about the survival of her family each day, doctor and health schemes are the last thing on her mind. If any aid came her way, she would gladly accept it.

Safiqur Rahman, aged 38, narrated that his family members commonly suffered from headache, influenza, common cold and stomach trouble. On being questioned about his idea of health care he was quick to add that on a daily basis he or his family members did nothing extraordinary to maintain the general health, but did pay attention to general cleanliness, drinking boiled water and visiting doctor when any one fell ill. Likewise, for all kind of medical aid they favoured visiting a private clinic as he could afford to pay for the expenses there and would not like to be the recipient of any bad behaviour of the government hospital staff which many of his kin have been recipient of. Though he was aware about ASHA and the government aid, he took his wife to private clinic for the delivery of all his four children. Similarly, for child care like vaccination, etc he relied on private assistance. He opined that health care services offered by the government was satisfactory but those who can afford did prefer to opt for private services. The insensitive attitude of the government hospital employees in treatment makes matters risky and he did not have confidence in them. He informed that he or his family members did not visit doctors for any health check-up unless they fell ill, and it applied to both female and male members of the household. Given an option to pick between government and public health services he would favour government services, provided it is reliable, if the staff behaved well and became trustworthy. He emphasized that a person's life is not more important than money and he would like to spend the money if it ensured good treatment for the ailing family member.

45 year old Rajeshwar Das of the Assamese community, in a very straightforward manner narrated that health matter seldom concerns them for day to day to survival is their main concern. His family of five members had not visited the doctor in the last two years. He said that whenever some form of medication was required they would resort to home remedies or at most purchase medicine from the local pharmacy. He stated that at a time when his first two children were born they did have the know-how of institutional delivery, and as desired by his family, the children were delivered at home. Only during the birth of his youngest daughter did he take his wife to government civil hospital at Tezpur. He did

not remember if all his children were vaccinated but recalled taking them for polio vaccination. Since the services are provided by the government he believed that the government health care services are better than private and would prefer availing the services of the former. He said his wife ensured they drank boiled water, and basic cleanliness was maintained in the house and he believed that was enough for good health. Furthermore, the respondent iterated that people are born with some immunity which is enough to live. He then jokingly said that if more complicated disease grips a person then government and private hospitals do not matter, everything had to be left to god. He had no qualms about government health centres and did not know much about private practitioners and refrained from taking any side or showing preference for either.

Jayesh Singh, a young adult, aged 28, working in a retail outlet in Guwahati city as a sales person, said that he and his family members most recurrently suffered from stomach ailment which is also accompanied by fever. He and his father went on morning walks regularly while the women of the household did not follow any specific fitness regime. Another common practice they all followed was drinking plenty of water which he felt helped them to stay fit. On being asked about his preference between government health services and private services he said they availed both, depending on what the requirement was. He explained that for simpler, common ailments they went to the Public health centre in Panchmile, Napam, or Civil hospital, Tezpur. But for more complex ailments they preferred private doctors. For instance, his father was suffering from heart ailments and had undergone a surgery, for which the entire treatment was carried out in a private hospital in Guwahati. He opined that if finance permitted they would never visit a government hospital for the surrounding is dirty and behaviour of doctors uncalled for. He and his family were aware about the ASHA and Janani Suraksha Yojna (Mother's Safety Scheme) but so far they did not have any occasion to avail the benefits of such schemes. He also opined that it was necessary for government health services to become better because majority of the people cannot afford expensive treatment of private hospitals.

From the above cases, it appears that the poor rural people are at the receiving end of the government's policy of withdrawal from the health sector. They are poor and uneducated and not conscious of health issues. They are vulnerable to most common diseases.

However, they are often compelled to take the help of private medical services because the public health services are either inadequate or they have no confidence in it. Even if they go for private health service out of some compulsion, they would prefer public health service if the facilities are good because private health service is beyond their affordability. It is also important that the lone public health care facility available to these from where the respondents were chosen is the Primary Health Centre at Panchmile area which is located from 3 to 4 kilometers from these villages. This government facility also caters to the need of twenty seven more villages. This is a huge burden on the health centre which does not have the required number of doctors and other paramedic. Besides, as pointed out in Chapter 4, the health centre is always short of medicine and other facilities for regular medical tests for which the people invariably have to depend on the private sector hospitals and facilities at the Tezpur Town. The government civil hospital at Tezpur is also inadequate in terms of its infrastructure and staff. Important medical instruments are either not there or they often remain non-functional compelling people to go to the private health care centres spending huge sum of money. All these have generated skepticism about the government health facilities and a newly emerging faith in private facilities among the villagers. Interestingly, however, they would often emphasize the necessity of a good public health system which is accessible to the rural poor.

Thus, neoliberal policies and reduction in the social welfare measures have facilitated the commercialization of critical social sectors like health and education. It has thus helped the private corporations to make enormous increase in their wealth leading to polarization between rich and poor both within individual countries as well as among the countries of the world. However, this has cast a devastating effect on the poor and marginal people in terms of their accessibility to the basic necessities of life like health and education. Despite this, the fact the even the poor people are now losing faith in the government services and are posing new faith in the private services is but an impact of neoliberal governmentality.

Neoliberalism upholds the production of certain of subjects and behaviour through market incentives and deterrents. It produces citizens on the basis of the bipolarity between entrepreneurs and consumers and subjects them to extensive governance. Neo-governmentality achieves what Foucault's biopower and discipline together accomplish and

which in turn creates statism. As neoliberalism identifies the state with entrepreneurial and managerial functions and remakes the state on the model of the firm, it facilitates and legitimizes the power of the state (Brown 2006).

One can raise the question that whether the term 'neoliberal' which is often used to describe social and economic policies in developed countries can be applied to the Indian context. Neoliberal policies are part of the global capitalist system. Therefore, these policies can be implemented and are being implemented even by the governments of those countries (of Asia and Africa) where capitalist system may not have developed to the fullest extent as in the case of the advanced countries. This often happens through the global financial penetration facilitated by multilateral financial institutions. However, the public welfare provisions in the advanced countries have a long history and they are well-entrenched. It is not that the gradual withdrawal of the government from these provisions has not created a crisis in these countries. But in a developing country like India, with one of the most backward Human Development Index in the world, the government's withdrawal from these welfare provisions can lead to catastrophic consequences.

Coming to the context of Assam, in recent times, approach towards privatisation in the state has manifested quite strongly. Assam's minister of Education and Health Himanta Biswa Sarma declared in late 2013 that the state government has decided to hand over the one hundred model high schools, being set up in the state, to private institutions like Don Bosco and Sankardev Sishu Niketan to look after their academic aspects⁵. He pointed out that the bill on Assam Model School Act will be tabled very soon in the State Assembly. Appointment of teachers to these model schools will be done by the State government and the infrastructure will be provided by the Rashtriya Madhyamik Siksha Abhiyan, a government of India mission to promote high school education in India. He emphasised that the private institutions will extend academic support to these schools to have better academic performance which is lacking in government run schools. According to the

⁵ < <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=nov3013/at09>> November 30, 2013

Education Minister, students enrolled in these model schools would have the option to choose either English or Assamese as the medium of instruction.

This step clearly shows how government is also interested in taking up the help of private organisations. Many social scientists and critics argue that this is a step to further privatisation of the education sector. This kind of strategy is often adopted by the state in the name of public-private partnership and efficiency. The corporate sector and the government today together are engaged in trying to create a belief in the public mind that private sector symbolises efficiency. Thus, neoliberalism and governmentality are two sides of the same coin and one feeds on the other to produce and reproduce each other. Neoliberal ideology has thus turned the welfare states to corporate states with the state behaving as market. The state is not dismantled but is reproduced in a sense where it behaves like a market which favours capital accumulation of a certain section of the society at the cost of the masses. As part of neoliberal policy, the process of corporatization of the state continues despite that the poor masses cannot access them as demonstrated by the empirical evidence of the impact of the neoliberal policies on education and health sectors of the government of Assam.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

This thesis argues that notwithstanding the overarching nature of the state and its programmes and policies, a host of local specificities mediates and conditions the system of governance. It argues that a system of governance has two facets, formal and informal, and that both are important in the day-to-day functioning of the state. While the state uses the structure of formal governance as a legitimate means of reaching out to the people, informal governance structures facilitate people's negotiation with the state for access to different limited resources. The thesis explicates this with the example of the class of intermediaries, who play a very critical role in the state's transactions with communities. It shows how the state's functioning creates space for the emergence of these informal agents. On the one hand, intermediaries bridge the gap between the state and the community, thereby apparently adding to the state's legitimacy and presence among the latter. On the other hand, intermediaries also erode the state's formal legal authority by underscoring its own indispensability for the community.

There is no doubt that it is difficult for a state to fulfill or match all the expectations of its people. But a state needs strong social protection schemes to protect people, especially the marginalized, from falling into destitution or crisis. Even if particular state policies have good objectives, various factors undermine implementation, which often becomes the undoing of the state. Political sociologists Malpas and Wickham (1995) articulate that failure is not governable; it happens because of the incompleteness of governing practices. They emphasize that even if it wants, governance cannot control objects and subjects. That means people can be neither totally controlled nor regulated. Therefore, failure is inevitable, and one has to acknowledge this.

The meaning and notion of governance has changed over time. Law and order is one of the important elements of any governance system. In earlier days, law and order used to be controlled by kings, where it could not be challenged. But due to democratization and

modernization of the governance system, it can be challenged and reviewed. Technically, today, everybody can access the law. Justice is also dispensed through modern legal institutions, whereas earlier it was the jurisdiction of the king's court. Welfare spending has gone up. The election is one of the most important features and prerequisites of the modern governance system.

Like many scholars on governance, political scientist Mark Bevir emphasizes collaborative governance, which he thinks provides an alternative in which modernist expertise gives way to participation and dialogue. He sees the possibilities of improvisation of governance by the democratic participation of all members. Local organizations can adopt experiments in which members solve their collective problems and manage collective affairs not in accord with ideal types of modernist social science but collaboratively, by engaging with each other. According to Bevir, democracy can create the knowledge necessary to improve governance (Bevir 2012, 119).

In Napam, one of the most common phrase one hears is *Sarkare amak eko dia nai* (government has not given us anything). Poor people often say this when they are asked about any government-related scheme or about the status of governance. The relationship between the postcolonial Indian state and society has become interesting, especially after the advent of PRIs and devolution of power to local bodies. People have their own expectations from the state, which they see as provider and problem solver; the state also expects its citizens to conform to a particular mode of behaviour. When there is a mismatch, the relationship between the state and society is ruptured.

While all citizens depend on the modern welfare state for social welfare measures, the degree of dependence of the poor and marginalized is most obvious. That is why the poor and marginalized are affected worst when the state withdraws from its social welfare schemes or fails to implement them effectively. Few government welfare schemes work properly at the grassroots, where specific circumstances impair their implementation. Although the factors that contribute to this failure are known broadly, the specific factors need to be inquired into, given the particular local context.

India is considered a successful democracy, but fares worse than many developing countries (such as Bangladesh) on various human development index or social development parameters, as pointed out by Amartya Sen and Jean Dreze. Despite fair economic growth over the past 15 years, India has failed miserably in investing in human development, basic health care, or primary education (Sen and Dreze 2013). With the advent of neoliberal economic policies, the Indian state has gradually been withdrawing from crucial social sectors like health, education, agriculture, etc., which has created serious survival questions for millions of its poor citizens. This issue is discussed in detail in Chapter 6.

To placate the public outcry during the past decade or so over its withdrawal from critical social sectors, the Indian state has undertaken several flagship programmes to improve the life and livelihood of its poor, but these have performed poorly. Allegations of misappropriation of funds, discrimination in distribution of benefits at the local level, and malpractice by state agencies have been widespread, and there is a serious communication gap between grassroots communities and the state. Henri Bang (2003) defines governance as a form of social and political communication, and says those well versed in the language of governance can exploit its various programmes while the ignorant must fend for themselves. My fieldwork demonstrates that the communication gap between grassroots communities and the state is a reason that governance has failed at the grassroots.

This study sets out to examine people's perception on various developmental schemes and their approach towards government institutions and its officials. It studies how elections have an important place in marginalized peoples' life, and analyses the process of privatization and the state's apathy towards welfare programmes.

Chapter 1 examines the possibility of studying the issue of governance through the lens of sociology. It discusses briefly the problems in studying the state. Society and the state share a thin line; their relationship is porous. Therefore, drawing on various previous works, the chapter paves the background for the arguments of the dissertation, and depicts the methodology and field of study.

Chapter 2 surveys various works on the sociology of governance, and outlines the possibility of using sociological methods to study governance. It uses the concept of embeddedness in analysing governance in a vernacular society. The chapter emphasizes the importance of both formal and informal governance. Further, taking its cue from James Scott's idea of failure, the chapter highlights the significance of failure in governance, which policymakers and bureaucrats often tend to ignore. The chapter then discusses local governance and how poor people perceive the governance mechanism and development schemes.

Chapter 3 provides an account of the multi-ethnic social setting of Assam. It discusses the formation and evolution of PRIs in India, and in the light of that discusses the PRIs in the context of Assam. It examines the working of various welfare schemes and policies for developing rural areas through various state agencies. It argues that with the coming of the PRIs and the political parties, the nature of the community's engagement with politics has been undergoing change. While earlier a community was collectively mobilized, mainly in terms of caste, religion, ethnicity, etc., it is now also mobilized in terms of loyalty to various political parties. While inquiring into people's perception about government ('sarkar'), this chapter finds, interestingly, that they often equate the latter with the political party in power.

Chapter 4 focuses on people's opinion on various development and welfare programmes in Assam in general and in the Napam panchayat in particular. Due to clientelistic politics and the importance of brokers/intermediaries ('*dalal*') between the state machinery and society, the needy always find it difficult to access these welfare services. Interviews, surveys and focus group discussions undertaken by this study find much discrepancy in the distribution of welfare schemes. This chapter also argues that the notion of trust in informal governance and economic transactions plays a significant role in the everyday life of the rural poor. They are afraid of official paperwork and find nationalized banks difficult to access, which make them depend on private bankers.

This chapter also argues that the human body is also a site of politics. It discusses how people without legal documents are described as D voters, which emphasizes how

documents have acquired magical power in modern bureaucratic practice. Non-citizens can acquire documents through extra-legal means to prove their citizenship whereas actual citizens can be labeled illegal if they do not have the requisite documents. This chapter argues that the state must not ignore the idea of embeddedness of social and cultural linkages in governance. However, it must remain careful not to allow informal ways of governance based on community networks of local institutions overplay themselves, which might destabilize democratic governance and deprive marginalized and smaller groups. In fact, the study finds that much apprehension and mistrust remain between communities and local panchayat functionaries and other political leaders if they belong to different communities.

Chapter 5 examines how various democratic practices manifest during the elections. Regular elections—parliamentary, assembly and panchayat—hold a very important place in marginalized peoples' life. This chapter inquires into the reasons of peoples' participation and voting. Elections are important for people sidelined in everyday life. During elections, they are visible and assert their presence. They seek to affirm their existence so that they can also compete for the benefit of the government welfare schemes. The chapter is based on an ethnographic study of the day-to-day canvassing and campaigning, motives, and actions that govern the people during elections. One significant finding of this thesis is that most migrant communities in Assam vote in significant numbers, but not the native Assamese population. For example, polling turnouts in most of the tea gardens are always high, because workers get a day off and treat it as a festival or carnival. They come with their family, buy sweets, and drink. They get free drinks and food from the political parties who have money. Secondly, traditional parties like the Congress regard them as vote banks. The tea garden community is also part of political clientelism; they think the party they will vote for will help them in achieving their social and economic goals.

This study finds that marginalized communities, especially Muslim immigrants, whose identity and legal status is contested, come in large numbers to prove their citizenship. They also vote for a political leader who can support them in need. A poor fish seller, whose 10-year-old son had a heart ailment that could be treated only at Narayana Hrudayalaya,

Bangalore, would not have been able to afford the treatment but for Himanta Biswa Sarma, a Congress leader popular among Bengali Muslims. He, therefore, feels obliged to vote for the Congress. Thus, the vote and clientelistic politics hold much importance for poor people.

Political parties, brokers and leaders say that the action of casting one's vote is proof of one's citizenship, which will be scrapped if one does not vote. Settled immigrant communities in Assam take this falsehood seriously, and vote to prove their citizenship but also to strengthen their tie with the leader who, when elected, will make them a full citizen of the state.

The chapter argues that elections in post-independent India have been like the theatre. Powerful leaders are projected as demigods in terms of spiritual and political power. They raise a ray of hope among the marginalized poor and draw their support from their magical power. This chapter examines why people vote for a particular candidate, which becomes a very crucial question during elections. Every candidate campaigns as much as possible, and tries every bit to turn people in his or her favour, yet only one emerges as a winner. People consider several factors in voting—caste, class, age, religion, gender—and the considerations differ within and between communities. Generally, Hindu voters believe that Muslim candidates will serve Muslim interests only in accessing government schemes, plans and programmes. But, if the vote is being cast out of loyalty to a party, the candidate's community and religion stops being a factor. People said that they may vote for a Congress candidate, because it is the ruling party in the state, and they would benefit only if a Congressman wins. A contestant from an established party will have more resources to spend on elections and buy votes than an independent candidate who might lose because he/she lacks resources. People see no point in electing an independent candidate who has no backing of any party because such a candidate would not be able to help them. A party's image or position also determines the contestant's fate. People's trust or distrust of a party plays a major role in determining the contestant's future. Thus, a candidate's party affiliation plays a major role in his success or failure in the elections.

Local Factors Influencing People's Choice in Elections

The study finds many factors influence people's decision to vote for a particular candidate in local elections. There is no doubt that there are broader level general factors too playing their own role in elections. However, the study attempts to inquire into the major factors influencing voter choice at the local level.

Community Sentiment

People choose to vote for a particular candidate because they belong to the same community, religious, caste, or region. Community sentiment therefore plays a significant role. When the contestant is from the same community, voters feel that he/she will understand their needs and help them, he/she will be easily approachable, and would give their need a priority. Further, they relate community prestige to the candidate's victory. Thus, the 'we feeling' becomes very strong and they vote for the candidate belonging to their community.

Village Sentiment

Just like religious or other kind of sentiment, village sentiment is also an important deciding factor. If a contestant is from the same village, people easily relate to him. He becomes the pride of the village. In the Amolapaam village, a lady while talking about a contestant from their village in a panchayat election said, "She is like my sister. We have grown up together and if she wins, it will be a victory of all the people in our village. We can then proudly say to others that she is from our village. Moreover, we will get the benefits of government-run schemes. She is our neighbour and she is going to help us."

Gender

The gender of a candidate also shapes voting behaviour. Interviews in the field revealed that if the contestant is a woman, other women may vote for her on the grounds of gender. They see her as a role model, and find a women candidate more understanding, approachable, responsible and less corrupt. They feel that women candidates will be of more use than a male candidate. On the other hand, menfolk were seen to be a little

apprehensive about women. Though they did not directly oppose women candidates, they did not much support the idea of women contesting elections. They had a patriarchal mindset and felt that elections and politics are not for women; it is not safe for them. The brother of Hasina Begum, a contestant for the post of the gram panchayat president, said that they were not in favour of their sister contesting elections. He argued that politics is dirty and it hurts one's prestige especially if she is a woman. Various rumours spread about the candidates and this harms the women candidates more. Further, it may also lead to disintegration of her family life. But in the above case, the seat was reserved for women, and finding the girl qualified, the local MLA persuaded her family members to let her contest elections and they agreed. Many men feel that women are weak, emotional, and not clever, and so will not be efficient if elected, although a few men feel that women may excel if given a chance.

Class

In Napam, voters' class also influenced voting behaviour. Because of their purchasing power, the middle class voters could avail the benefits of government schemes, and were therefore in favour of the Congress, the ruling party in the state. The poor, who are not benefited by government schemes, favoured other opposition parties (like the AIUDF) in the hope that things may improve if the ruling party changes. Thus, their class position, their access to resources and governmental schemes also influenced their voting behaviour.

Qualities of the Contestants

While talking about the qualities of a candidate they would like to support, people make mention of qualities such as helpfulness, sincerity, honesty and contacts with influential people. Thus, a contestant's personal image, activities, and friends determine his suitability. One's family is an important source of identity and, therefore, family background is also a criterion for evaluating a contestant. A voter said that Hasina Begum (a contestant for the post of president) might lose votes since her brothers are corrupt and have a bad reputation in the village.

The interviewees even said that age can also become a factor, even if not a major one. Some believe that young people can be better leaders because they are more educated and exposed while some others feel that they are too restless, not very mature, and aggressive and, therefore, middle-aged contestants are more suitable.

Role of Media

Most respondents in the study were following TV and newspapers. People agreed that though media production is not free from the political bias, it does influence their decision to some extent. They could learn of candidates' positive and negative aspects only from the media. Most of the newspapers were publishing news against the Congress (I) party candidate Moni Kumar Subba in 2009 general elections, which he lost. This is not to say that he lost the election only because of the role played by the media. Rather, what is emphasized here is that media's participation in the electoral process and its influence cannot be ignored in today's context.

The chapter also addresses the perception of the right leader and leadership at the grassroots. Jan Kooiman (2003) rightly suggests that leadership is an important concept in governance. In this study, we find that community leaders play a very crucial role in community affairs. People follow a particular leader because of trust and rationality, i.e. the calculation of gain and loss in expressing their allegiance to that leader. Again, people repose a trust on the party leader from the neighbourhood. If the party leader belongs to the same community, his/her bond with the people becomes stronger. The amount of trust and respect the member from the same community commands is not generally found in party leaders from outside one's own community.

The study finds that the election process involves many interesting social factors and in-depth research into election dynamics helps us understand these factors better. The study has underscored the importance of elections in the life of poor people. Through the process of election, the poor and marginalized confront the symbolic state and reinforce them into the state machinery as a legitimate member and legal citizen.

The voters cast their votes not for any revolutionary change; they know it is just a political right and want to establish it. Campaigning in the form of public meetings, rallies, door-to-door contacts, etc. positively influence the decision of the voters to vote. The study also finds that the tendency to vote varies from community to community. For example, people belonging to some indigenous tribal communities are not much interested in voting. On the other hand, immigrants, especially the Bengali speaking section and who are usually addressed as illegal migrants, are very particular about voting. They think that their name in the voters' list is a sign of being a citizen of India and may lose citizenship if they do not vote.

The study observes that common people are not much aware of policies and programmes of different political parties despite all the campaigning and publicity. Campaigning unofficially continues even at polling booths. The general tendency among the common people is not to disclose their political stand as to whom to vote for because they are afraid of backlash from the opposing groups.

The panchayat elections in Assam in general and in Napam panchayat in particular shows that while people are fed up with the working of the panchayat system—where the really needy often do not get the benefits of various welfare schemes—voting in elections is a ritual. This is so because for them panchayats are the only local governance institutions they can access and interact with. The rural population in India feel that the panchayat elections are the most significant and relevant to them of the three levels of elections. Both sides put various strategies, game plans and manipulations into play to get and give votes. The everyday language they use for the winning and the losing candidates is likened to having passed and failed in an examination.

Chapter 6 examines the nature of the contemporary state through its engagement with the grassroots with the help of the data generated from the field study. This chapter argues that the contemporary Indian state is changing its character with the advent of neoliberal policy in the early 1990s, which has led to its gradual corporatization which, in turn, implies that its critical spheres of action are gradually being handed over to the private sector. Simultaneously, the state is relegating its welfare responsibilities to various NGOs and civil

society organizations. However, the chapter argues that in order to maintain its legitimacy, the state initiates few employment generation schemes like MGNREGA and health schemes like NRHM and so on.

Education and health services are also being usurped by private players, leaving many of the poor hapless. The government even wants to consult private players to improve the standard of public health and education. There is a popular discourse that private education and health services are better than the government ones, so people tend to believe this and those who can afford it are adopting it. Further, this chapter examines the contemporary discourse on 'good governance' by locating it within the agenda of neoliberalism, and explicates the state's changing nature under the impact of neoliberal policies and the manifestation of this change in the implementation and withdrawal of various welfare measures along with its implication on everyday local politics.

From different cases and arguments, it is apparent that the state's nature has changed recently; to understand it, we need more micro-level insight into its functioning. Multilateral organizations such as IMF, World Bank, ADB, etc have been arguing for good governance. Governance has emerged as the new avatar of development. In the post-Cold War era, multilateral organizations and first world countries used development as a panacea for the so-called underdeveloped countries. The failure of development is widely acknowledged now, and its new avatar is governance. Through empirical evidence, various studies have shown that programmes of new or good governance are as much a failure as development. In fact, scholars have already underlined the deceiving nature of development as it depoliticizes the whole grassroots political mobilization.

John Harriss (2001), for example, argues that there has been an attempt at segregating development from politics. He demonstrates how in the name of developmental programmes people's rights at the grassroots are being seriously undermined. This process paves the way for civil bodies and NGOs to work as the bridge between people and the state. The corporate media, big corporations, World Bank, ADB all create narratives of malnourished and underdeveloped regions like Ethiopia and Kalahandi to justify the need of investment, reform and aids, which eventually ruin the age-old traditional self-

sufficiency of the different communities based on indigenous knowledge and resources. Arundhati Roy (2004) terms it as 'depoliticizing the resistance', and argues against the NGO-isation of resistance. She says one has to look into this NGO phenomenon in a broader political context. As the thesis argues, NGO-isation started when neoliberal policies came to be implemented in India. It worked very well when the welfare state started withdrawing from the welfare provisions like public transport, free education, public health, etc investing very little through the NGOs. The SAP worked according to plan with all these NGO-isation and economic reforms cutting state expenditure.

Local practices of governance and politics seem to be highly influenced by the dominant neoliberal agenda of the state. The state-society relation is also influenced by neoliberal operations at the micro-level. In this situation both state and community negotiate with each other for a win-win type situation. In his idea of political society, Partha Chatterjee (2004) explains the politics of the governed in developing countries. His concept of political society might hold relevance in many parts of India, but this concept may not be applicable in Nampam. Chatterjee differentiates between the concepts of 'citizen' and 'population'. He writes that 'citizen' inhabit the domain of theory which carries an ethical connotation of participation in the sovereignty of the state. On the other hand, population inhabits the domain of policy. It is a concept based on descriptive exercise and empirical evidence. The category of population is identifiable, classifiable, and describable by empirical statistical techniques such as censuses and sample surveys. Chatterjee further states that "population makes available to government functionaries a set of rationally manipulable instruments for reaching large section of the inhabitants of a country as the targets of their "policies" – economic policy, administrative policy, law and even political mobilization" (Chatterjee 2004, 34). Chatterjee defines two sets of conceptual connections: "one is the line connecting civil society to the nation-state founded on popular sovereignty and granting equal rights to citizens. The other is the line connecting populations to governmental agencies pursuing multiple policies of security and welfare" (Ibid, 37). He distinguishes the latter from the classic associational forms of civil society, which he calls political society (Ibid, 38).

Political society takes up means that are not available in the domain of civil society. Chatterjee describes political society as a site of negotiation and contestation opened up by the activities of government agencies aimed at various population groups. He states that many of these groups, organized into associations resort to illegal means to sustain their lives and livelihood. While the authorities cannot treat them on the same footing as other civic associations following more legitimate social pursuits, they cannot be ignored either. The state agencies and NGOs “therefore deal with these associations not as bodies of citizens but as convenient instruments for the administration of welfare to marginal and underprivileged population groups” (Chatterjee 2004, 40).

From his fieldwork in Orissa, Akio Tanabe shows how moral society (and not civil or political society) often comes to play its role in the governance in vernacular democracies. He argues that while Chatterjee's concept of political society captures the actual field of mediation between the people and the state in which various groups, factions and communities are the main players, it does not capture the other side of the imaginative power of the community. This is an aspect of the community which Chatterjee himself has paid attention to in a different context as the site of ‘ethical life’ where he highlights the condition of human beings who are born as members of society in which “subjective rights must be negotiated with the ‘ascribed’ field of the ethical life of the community” (Chatterjee 1993, 232 quoted in Tanabe 2002, 41).

Tanabe defines this site of ethical life of community, in which “rightness and goodness rather than individual rights or political gains are at issue, the space of ‘moral society’” (Tanabe 2002: 42). He distinguishes his concept of moral society from ‘civil society’ and ‘political society’. He argues that while the ideas of equality and human rights pertaining to ‘civil society’ have “profound influence upon the idea of rightness and justice, they have not replaced the morality of the community by individualist ethics”. Moreover, he maintains, the concerns of ‘moral society’ cannot be reduced to the strategy of survival and political gains as in the case of ‘political society’. The concerns of ‘moral society’ are about what kind of practices should be considered right and good. However, Tanabe emphasizes that the “moral society is not a mere residue of the traditional community norms that stand

against modern ideas and institutions. It is rather a site where continuing conceptions of what is right and good are connected and mediated to the contemporary context. Here the symbols and rhetoric of morality may be used for affirmation, resistance and/or transformation of the existing socio-political order” (Tanabe 2002, 42).

Like political society, the concept of moral society is also pertinent to many societies in India. The chances of the prevalence of a political society, as defined by Partha Chatterjee, are more when a group more or less belongs to particular class. In such situations, it will have more power to confront or negotiate with the state. However, the possibility of a moral society will be more in a place where population is socially more or less secure and stable. However, in societies where population is neither socially secure nor socio-economically homogenous are not in a position to indulge in a politics informed by an assertion or negotiation for fulfillment of their demands. Such a population is also not animated by the concerns of a moral society as discussed above.

In many pockets of Assam including the field chosen for ethnographic study, we always find a relationship between community and governance that defies the processes identified by Chatterjee and Tanabe. In Napam, for instance, we find a community-governance relationship that is dependent on negotiation and remain open to adjustments if necessary. In this case, the requirements of political society or moral society are differently viewed. For example, a mixed or fluid population in terms of its composition does not allow the kind of stable identity that facilitates political and moral society. Here we find people’s negotiation with the process of governance from a perspective that can be broadly described as clientelism. A seminal feature of clientelism is that neither governor nor governed remain fixated in their positions or self-imagining. Each tries to fashion itself and the other according to the changing political or strategic requirement. An implication of this phenomenon is that people are willing to modify the basic rules of government and change their expectations from government or governance according to the condition or need demanded by circumstances.

In places like Napam where the population settlement is not settled, communities are heterogeneous and most of the time they have fear of rejection from the state. The

demography in Napam has changed rapidly with increase in population. Poor people compete for limited government welfare resources. Even school teachers and the non-poor have BPL cards. Respondents complain that rich and salaried people benefit from the IAY but not the needy. Here the issue of material existence takes priority over morality. In Napam, poor people from the Bengali Muslim, Bengali Hindu and Nepali communities are often considered illegal immigrants. Due to their marginal status in society and fear of state action, these people tend not to form a political society and depend instead on political clientelism. Therefore, moral ethics is sidelined where existence is at stake, and moral or political society becomes not very relevant.

Thus, I would like to suggest that political clientelism is more relevant as a conceptual tool to understand the relationship between the people and the governance in such societies than political society or moral society. We may also call the political process in such societies as 'politics of negotiation'. Here the communities negotiate with the local agencies of the state on various issues of governance and their benefits most of the time.

There is a need to understand the relation between democracy and governance. It is generally held that good governance will lead to more voting in elections, reflecting the continued interest and trust of people in democratic processes, and bad governance would alienate the people from democratic processes and their participation in electoral processes would be limited. However, this thesis of relationship between the nature of governance and level of electoral participation need to be contextualized.

The study throws light into the relation between the governance and electoral processes. Napam, as is the case in various other parts of Assam, is inhabited by different ethnic communities. The ecology and economy of the region encouraged immigrations in various ways which is discussed in Chapter 3. Continuous immigration to the state, both from the neighbouring countries as well as from other parts of India, also adds to the fluidity of the society in Napam and such other parts of Assam. This long process of immigration over the period gave birth to a society where there is a diversity of caste, tribe, class and religion and so on. However, massive immigration also created its own pressure on the available resources in the state and this issue came to be raised strongly by the local people. There

have been agitations by various groups to identify and expel the illegal immigrants. There has been also anger against immigrants from other parts of India. Violence involving these groups is a fact of everyday life. This has created a political space where the issue of one's existence became the most crucial political issue. The insider-outsider debate has today become the 'dominant ideology' around which other elements of the socio-political life function.

The different groups of people looked forward to the state and other political agencies for their intervention in the insider-outsider debate. This has brought a different meaning to the democracy for different stakeholders. Each group of the stakeholders has tried to influence the state and polity to their advantage. As state itself is defined by the way it relates to different social groups, the state here becomes more like a mediator and peacekeeper. For certain sections of populations who become the potential target of being designated as outsider and are not sure about their social and political identity, the only way left to prove their identity as a citizen is their relationship with the state.

But state itself is divided between the conflicting demands of different groups. While the suspected illegal immigrants do everything to prove their citizenship, the insiders try out various possibilities to counter the effort of the outsiders. The legal existence of the suspected illegal immigrants as citizens is dependent upon the documents they possess and their involvement with various functions and rituals of the state. In that context, voting in elections becomes probably the most important action to prove one's citizenship. This voting exercise becomes a fiercely debated issue since it has the potential to legitimize and delegitimize the citizenship of certain social groups. This condition is exploited by politicians and political parties by seeking votes from these immigrants by promising them political protection. This has brought a new type of player into the political system who mediates between the state and its 'citizens'. As discussed in the thesis, they are often termed as *dalal* (intermediaries or political broker). For instance, many people are not well aware about the way state functions and they fall back on these intermediaries for their needs. These intermediaries become a layer which fulfill various functions that otherwise

come under that domain of the state. Hence democracy and voting take the form of a religion for these social groups.

Under the neoliberal political economy of contemporary times, the state is withdrawing from various social sectors and leaving the space for the market. The services provided by markets and private sectors are not only costly and beyond the reach of the large number of people, but also often sub standard. Though the state has taken various welfare measures these measures are intended to get the votes of the people and are more political in nature. Even local level political institutions become sites for the generation of votes and creations of political support base. Just maintaining law and order and certifying who is insider and outsider has become the most important function of the state. This type of politics suits the political class which is incapable of delivering on welfare fronts. The result is that people feel that the state is not doing enough on welfare front and are very much critical of it. Yet rather than discarding the governments and demanding better facilities they stick to the state and politicians. The issue of physical existence takes precedent over issues of welfare and governance. Thus the thesis claims that there is no direct correlation between the issue of good governance and people's attitude towards the democratic polity in a society where features of political society are mostly absent.

This study tries to understand people's perception of the state, its governance, and of the various schemes and policies the state has implemented. It analyses various schemes implemented by government bodies and shows the gap between delivery and implementation, and how embedded governance makes it difficult to create functional assets at the grassroots. During the delivery of the mechanism, the state and society both have various other considerations that come into play. This ethnography of everyday practices and the state's mechanism only offers an example from a vernacular society. This study shows how the neoliberal agenda has influenced the state and society relationship to a considerable extent. It also finds that rather than sharing a dichotomous relationship, state and society are embedded in each other. And it is only from this perspective that one can make a more meaningful analysis of the political and societal practices.

This thesis argues that the political and ethnic affiliations of a community in a multi-ethnic society affect its access to the state machinery and various welfare schemes. While this may be true even at a broader level, it argues that such affiliations play out among the poor, marginal, rural communities at the local level in distinctive ways. The manner in which the state negotiates and renegotiates with the multiple interests of these local communities and yet sustains its paramountcy makes the study of its functioning in a multi-ethnic context interesting. Neoliberal forms of governance are new and need to be understood at the micro-level. Marginalized and vulnerable populations are capable of governing themselves as evident from the informal governance. This is seen in their engagements with these new forms of governance. It was found from the study that poor people often complain about the mismanagement of fund in PRIs. They complain about the nepotism and mis-governance. Even then they come out in a large number to cast their vote. Generally, in other parts of India, people do not vote when they are disillusioned with the political parties or leader. But in the multi-ethnic societies under the present study the case is different. Marginalised people get legitimacy from the state and their patrons through voting. So, it is one of the most important political activities for the marginal groups in the Napam area.

The common people look up to the state for fulfilling their needs and are driven by a belief that the state would cater to their needs. On the other hand, the state is changing its character and getting corporatized. It seems there is a gap between people's expectation and state's delivery of social welfare measures. As such, the only panacea which can solve the problem seems to be either good governance or development. As a senior bureaucrat in the Sonitpur Zila Parishad puts it, "development is the motto of the whole world. All countries are developing by adapting to modern technology and economic activities. Even countries in Africa are developing. Then why should India leave behind? India should not miss the development bus. One cannot imagine the power of development. There is no limit to development and the real development only can be achieved through efficient and good governance". However, from the study it becomes clear that the meanings and functions of development and governance cannot be conceived in black and white terms. They are complex and nuanced concepts and susceptible to the social processes of those societies where they are practiced.

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Annexure - I

Various Reports of Committee and Amendment for Improvement of PRIs

National Development Council in January 1957 set up Balvantrai Mehta Committee to enquire into the question of economy and efficiency of Community Development Programme and National Extension Service and to suggest measures for its reorganization. The committee suggested in its report to create a representative democratic institution which will take care of the local interests (*Kurushetra* 1989, 33). The principal thrust of the Balvantrai Mehta Committee report was the decentralization of the democratic institutions in an effort to shift decision making centres closer to the people which will ensure their participation in the process.

Ashok Mehta Committee (Committee on Panchayati Raj Institution) was appointed by the central government on December 1977, to suggest measures to strengthen the Panchayati Raj Institutions. There was a feeling that Balvantrai Mehta Committee failed to continue grassroots democratic momentum. Ashok Mehta Committee made recommendations for functional necessity for decentralization of administration and open participation of the political parties in Panchayati Raj affairs. It recommended for the creation of the certain monitoring forums to safeguard and promote interest of the vital social and economic groups in the villages. But the main drawback of the Ashok Mehta Committee was its failure to look into the importance of Gram Sabha.

64th Amendment Bill

In July –August 1989, the Congress (I) government under Rajiv Gandhi introduced the 64th Constitutional Amendment Bill with a view to revitalize and rejuvenate the Panchayati raj Institutions. However, the bill was defeated in the Rajya Sabha. The main reason for its defeat in Rajya Sabha was that many leaders felt that amendment will only add exploitative powers and the capability of the local level. Further it was supposed to further accentuate the regional disparity in development. Further many flaws were seen in the bill and need was felt to have flexibility in terms of the provisions to dealt with the various specificity of various regions.

Even though it was not passed in Rajya Sabha, it paved the way for the introduction of a constitutional amendment to give legal status to the Panchayat. The importance of the Bill

was that it was introduced in the parliament with an aim of constituting Panchayats in every state. Besides, the bill also gave a proposal for giving the power and authority to the Panchayats by the state legislature so that it can work as institution of local self government. But for that, there need to have some constitutional provision to ensure regular Panchayat elections, smooth dissolution of power and function. In this context, the 73rd Amendment to the Constitution took place.

73rd Constitutional Amendment

The groundwork for the introduction of a constitutional amendment to strengthen the Panchayat and to give it a legal status was created with the various developments related to decentralised governance in the post-independence period and the recommendations of the various expert committees.

Such an amendment was enacted in 1992 as 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act. The act was brought into force by union government notification on 24th April, 1993. The act envisaged a new system of government rooted in the Panchayati raj system for the transformation of the rural India. This act advocated for Gram Sabha, three tier PRIs, establishment of five years term for Panchayat with regular democratic elections (Singh 1994, 824). Some other important provisions were made like reservation of seats for scheduled castes and scheduled tribe in PRIs (Basu 2005). It has also provision for the reservation for women. Not less than one third of the total seats to be filled by direct election in every Panchayat shall be reserved for women. Now the seats reserved for the women have been increased to 50 percent. These provisions helped to make the Panchayati Raj Institutions more representatives by giving more scope for the vulnerable sections of the society. Beside above provisions, special attention was made to decentralize powers, authority and responsibilities to Panchayats so that they can function as an institution of local self government. Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA) came into force on 24th December, 1996 with an intension to enable the tribal societies to enable them to control their own future and conserve their traditional rights over the natural resources. Important features of the PESA were the scope for Gram Sabha in every village that will be competent to safeguard and preserve the traditions and customs of the village. Besides the power to approve the plans, programmes and projects for the social and economic development, the Gram Sabhas are also responsible for identification of the beneficiaries for the various poverty alleviation schemes.

Annexure - II

Resolution of 1881

Government of India prepared reforms in 1881 to de-provincialise some functions to give more power to the local boards. But such reforms of the local boards were opposed by the government of Assam arguing that Assam as a backward province do not possess requisite education, resource, intelligence or influential gentlemen who can undertake the works of the local boards. Government of Assam had to de-provincialise certain services and had to increase the powers and functions of the district committee as the Government of India was not convinced by the argument given by the former.

Ripon's Reforms of 1882

There was a severe crisis in post famine period in India. Famine commission report in the year 1880 showed the need of local bodies in taking care of the people during the time of crisis. Lord Ripon resolution 18th May 1882 brought significant changes in the local level governance. Because of his initiatives, he is considered as the father of local self-government. 'Ripon suggested reforms for installing life into the local bodies. He advocated the establishment of a network of local self-governing institutions, financial decentralization, the adoption of elections as a means of constituting local bodies' (Arora and Goyal 2005, 260). Thus, Ripon's reforms formed the foremost base for modern local self-government institutions in India. His reforms showed a shift from the idea of mere local taxes for local purposes to the idea of local self-government.

Resolution of the Government of Assam 1882

A resolution was issued by the Government of Assam on 17th November 1882 delimit the administrative areas of the local boards to subdivisions. This resolution fixed the strength of the local boards between 8 and 24. There was also the provision for the inclusion of the tea planters in the local boards as non official members in some specific districts i.e. Cachar, Lakhimpur, Sivasagar, Darrag, Nagong. Besides, the resolution had some interesting provisions such as non-official Chairman, non-inclusion of the D.C. in the board and the provision for the local funds. The local boards were also entrusted with the function of the execution of the public works and the management of the public bodies. It is interesting to note that there was no legal basis for the local boards as they were constituted with the executive orders and it worked as impediment for its working.

Assam Local Self Government Act 1915

Assam Local Self-Government Act of 1915 was formulated to give legal basis to the local boards on the basis of the guidance of the Royal Decentralisation Commission. The Act led to the formation of village authority in the villages with the involvement of the village people under the guidance of the local boards. It also had some government nominated members. Village authority had work on the works given by the local boards with the help of the funds allocated to them.

The criticism rose against the Assam Local self-Government Act of 1915 is that it could not materialize the aim of decentralisation of the administrative powers to the village levels as the government had control over both the local boards and the village authority. Another criticism raised against the Act is that the Act could resolve small offences in the village itself as there was no such provision in the Act to resolve the offences in the village.

Local Self Government Act, 1926

The Assam Legislative Council appointed a council in 1924 to suggest amendment to Assam local self government Act, 1915. The council paved the way for the introduction of the Local Self Government Act, 1926 as most amendments suggested by the council were embodied in the Act. Some of its main provisions were village authorities in all villages of all district of the plains of Assam should be according to the wishes of the people. 3 years of term for the village authority. Except some works of the government such as the making of the roads, all the public works of the village such as the public health, maintenance of the public institutions, provide drinking water etc.

Assam Rural Panchayat Act, 1948

The government of Assam under the leadership of Lokapriya Gopinath Bordoloi passed Assam Rural Panchayat Act 1948 to bring overall development in the villages. The basic aim of the Act was to create 'Primary Panchayat' at the village level as a unit of rural Self-Government. The Act led to the creation of two tier Panchayati Raj Institutions. Primary Panchayat at the village level and rural Panchayat covering the whole area of the Mauza¹.

¹ A Mouza refers to a locality in an administrative district or a region. In Assam, generally several villages form a single Mouza. In colonial period, the head of the Mouza used to be known as a Mouzadar.

On the recommendation of the Panchayati Enquiry Committee in July, 1953 and Balvantrai Mehta committee report, Assam Panchayat Act was passed in 1959. Significant features of this Act were the establishment of three tier organization of the Panchayati Raj System, i.e. Gaon Panchayat at the village level, Anchalik Panchayat at the block level and the Mahkuma Parishad at the sub-divisional level. Due to non-satisfactory working of the Panchayat Act, 1959, the Assam Panchayati Raj Act, 1972, was brought out. This was also a failure to bring out any radical change in the structure of the Panchayat at the practical level. All powers were vested in the Mahkuma Parishad and Gaon Panchayat were not involved in the rural development activities directly. Absence of the middle tier i.e. the Anchalik Panchayat in this act was considered to be another drawback.

To bring about the decentralization of the power for the development in the rural areas, the Panchayati Raj Act of 1986 was introduced. It again brings three tier organization of the Panchayati Raj System consisting of the Mahkuma Parishad, Anchalik Panchahyat and the Gaon Panchayat. Although these acts after independence provided the scope for the people's participation in the local affairs but poverty and the illiteracy of the rural people greatly restricted them from the participation in the local administration and the traditional elites were still influential (Das 2003, 61-68).

Annexure – III

29 Subjects as per Eleventh Schedule (Article 243G)

1. Agriculture including agricultural extension.
2. Land improvement, implementation of land reforms, land consolidation and soil conservation
3. Minor irrigation, water management and watershed development
4. Animal Husbandry, dairying and poultry
5. Fisheries
6. Social forestry and farm forestry
7. Minor Forest Produce
8. Small Scale industries including food-processing industries
9. Khadi, village and cottage industries
10. Rural Housing
11. Drinking Water
12. Fuel and Fodder
13. Roads, culverts, bridges, ferries, waterways and other means of communication
14. Rural electrification including distribution of electricity
15. Non-conventional energy sources
16. Poverty alleviation programmes
17. Education including primary and secondary schools
18. Technical training and vocational education
19. Adult and non-formal education
20. Libraries
21. Cultural activities
22. Markets and fairs
23. Health and Sanitation including hospitals, primary health centres and dispensaries
24. Family Welfare
25. Women and Child Development
26. Social Welfare including welfare of the handicapped and mentally retarded
27. Welfare of the weaker sections and in particular of the SCs and STs
28. Public Distribution System
29. Maintenance of community assets.

Annexure-IV

Source: <http://online.assam.gov.in/web/homepol/white-paper>

2.6 'D' VOTERS

2.6.1. In pursuance of instructions of Election Commission of India dated January 5, 1998 during intensive revision of electoral roll in Assam in 1997, the letter 'D' was marked against the names of those electors who could not prove their Indian citizenship status at the time of verification through officers, especially appointed for the purpose. 'D' meant that the citizenship status of the elector was doubtful / disputed. Verification was done through local verification officers (LVOs). Based upon the report of the Local Verification Officers (LVOs), the Electoral Registration Officers took a decision on whether a reference to the concerned Tribunal was necessary to ascertain the Indian citizenship status of such elector. Once the Electoral Registration Officers confirmed in the affirmative, such cases were forwarded to the competent authority (SP of the concerned district) for reference to the concerned Tribunal. Such electors marked with 'D' were neither permitted to cast their votes nor contest in Elections. In issuing such instructions, the Commission took into consideration various orders of the Gauhati High Court, Supreme Court and provisions of Article 326 of the constitution read conjointly with section 16 of the Representation of People's Act, 1950 and section 62 of the Representation of the People's Act, 1951. The cases of such 'D' voters were forwarded by the Electoral Registration Officers concerned to the competent authority (Police Department) for further reference to the relevant Tribunals for determination of their citizenship. Based on the judgment /orders of the Tribunals, the letter 'D' was either removed from against the names of those electors whose Indian citizenship status was confirmed or the name of the elector deleted from the Electoral Rolls in the case of those whose citizenship status as Indian could not be established in Court. A total of 2,31,657 'D' references were made to the competent authorities.

2.6.2. Following table summarizes the disposal of D voter's cases by the Tribunals since 1998.

'D' VOTERS (1998-July, 2012)

Cases referred	Cases disposed	Cases pending	Persons declared as foreigners	Persons declared as Indian	Cases where no opinion could be expressed
231657	88192	143465	6590	44220	37382

2.7. Intensive Revision of Electoral Rolls

2.7.1. A detailed note on the intensive revision of electoral rolls undertaken in Assam from 1985 to 1997 is presented below:

2.7.2. In Assam, because of the agitation over the Foreigners issue, no intensive revision of rolls was undertaken between 1979 and 1985.

2.7.3. **1985:** E/Rolls in Assam were intensively revised in 1985 with 1/1/85 as the qualifying date with the date of final publication being 7/11/85. The Election Commission of India (ECI) decided to undertake this intensive revision in fulfillment of an assurance given before the Supreme Court in September 1984 in the context of the hearing of the Writ Petition challenging the validity of the 1983 General Elections in Assam. Polling Station wise lists of persons enumerated during house-to-house enumeration were subjected to thorough scrutiny with reference to the **1971 Electoral Rolls**. Those whose linkages could not be established with the 1971 E/Rolls or could not prove their Indian Citizenship were deleted from the E/Rolls during the revision process. General Elections in 1985 were held on the basis of these rolls.

2.7.4. **1989:** In 1987, the state government objected to the Election Commission's proposal for a summary revision of E/Rolls with the 1985 E/Rolls as the reference roll and demanded that an intensive revision of rolls be undertaken with 1/1/87 as the

qualifying date, where, instead of the 1971 E/Rolls, the 1966 E/Rolls should be considered as the basic document for linkage reference. At the end of wide ranging consultation, intensive revision of E/Rolls was taken up in Assam with reference to 1/1/89 as the qualifying date and the **1966 Rolls** as the basic reference document. Two lists were directed by the Commission to be prepared after enumeration- **List I** containing the names of persons enumerated about whom the Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) does not consider it necessary to make an enquiry and **List II** containing names of persons in respect of whom, ERO has doubts about eligibility, including, but not restricted to citizenship.

In preparing List II, EROs consulted the following smaller lists:

1. Electors in 1985 E/Roll but without linkage to 1966 Roll.
2. Persons whose claims were rejected during revision of rolls in 1985.
3. List of persons served with Quit India notices on the basis of orders of FTs.
4. Refugee registration list prepared in 1971 of persons migrating to Assam in the wake of the Bangladesh war

Draft Rolls were published containing names of those in List I, names of those from List II in respect of whom ERO, after enquiry, concludes that they are eligible for entry in the draft rolls and, also, those in whose cases the ERO could not complete the enquiry before draft publication. Deletions of those found ineligible, whether on account of their citizenship or any other account, were made during the process of revision following due process. Final Rolls were accordingly published.

2.7.5. 1993 (de novo revision) : The state government was initially asked by the Commission to identify all polling station areas where there was an increase of more than 4% in the 1992 enumerated figures over the 1990 rolls. The state government duly identified certain such areas in all LACs. But representations to the Commission from various quarters alleging that the 1990 rolls suffered from major defects and some discrepancies in the figures projected by the state government and those available with the Election Commission resulted in the Commission ordering special instructions for revision of rolls with 1/1/93 as the qualifying date in all LACs of Assam. These instructions, which were issued after consultation with the Ministry of

Home Affairs on 21/8/92, prescribed a new procedure for verification of names enumerated so as to exclude all foreign nationals from the E/Rolls.

In pursuance of these instructions, names of all persons enumerated after house-to-house visits, after consolidation polling station wise, were referred to the District Administration for verification of status as Indian citizens (through established laws, linkage to **1966 E/Rolls/** NRCs etc). From the consolidated list, **List I-** containing names of those verified and found to be Indians, and **List II** –containing names of those not considered Indian were prepared. Those in List I automatically found their names in the Draft Rolls. Observers from other states were appointed by the Commission to oversee revision work. Deletions were made during revision process by EROs from List I where the ERO was satisfied, even after verification by District Magistrate, that the person was ineligible for entry in the E/Rolls on ground of citizenship.

The Commission however allowed final publication of E/Rolls only in respect of 86 LACs after this revision exercise and withheld the publication of E/Rolls in 40 LACs, being dissatisfied with the revision exercise in those LACs. The Commission then ordered special revision in these 40 LACs in 1994 and ordered summary revision with 1/1/94 as the qualifying date in respect of the other 86.

In view of Special Leave Petitions no 2484-85/94 in the Supreme Court, these twin processes were suspended by the Commission in April 1994. Following affirmation by the Supreme Court on 5.5.94 of the Gauhati High Court order dated 28.1.94 (and modified on 1.2.94) in Civil Rules 1566, 1616, 1836 and 2814, all of 1993 that challenged some of the provisions made under this de novo revision process, the Commission directed that the names of persons in List II prepared in 1993, except the names of persons declared or detected by Tribunals under IM(D)T and FT and those whose claims/ objections have been disposed off by the EROs) be published as supplementary draft rolls. But the names of those who were not entitled to be registered in the rolls for disqualification or lack of qualification on ground of citizenship or any other ground were to be deleted after following due procedure, including providing opportunity to the person concerned to be heard. All the above

were duly followed. The rolls were finally published on 31/8/94 in consonance with the instructions of the Commission.

2.7.6. **1997:** The Election Commission ordered intensive revision with 1.1.97 as the qualifying date and issued special guidelines for this purpose. The guidelines were framed keeping in view the judgment and order dated 28.1.94 and 1.2.94 of the Gauhati High Court in the case of HRA Chaudhury vs Election Commission of India and others (Civil Rules 1566,1616,1836 and 2814 of 1993) which was upheld by the Supreme Court by its judgment and order dated 5.5.94 and Civil Appeals no 4171-4180 of 1994 arising out of SLPs(Civil) 2484-85 of 1994) and the judgment and order dated 6.2.95 of the Supreme Court in the case of Lal Babu Hussain and others vs Electoral Registration Officer and others.

The Gauhati High Court had held in HRA Chaudhury vs Election Commission and others (upheld by the Supreme Court)

“the draft rolls are to be prepared on the basis of the statements submitted by the heads of the households in a constituency in Form 4 under Rule 8.....the statement made by the head of the household has its own value and cannot be lightly brushed aside. Rules do not contemplate any inquiry into the question of citizenship at the stage of preparation of draft roll, although there is provision for objection after a draft roll is published on the ground that a person who is not a citizen of India has been erroneously included.”

The Supreme Court had held in Lal Babu Hussain vs Electoral Registration Officer and others:

“Thus the question whether a person is a foreigner is a question of fact which would require careful scrutiny of evidence since the enquiry is quasi-judicial in character....”

(This implied that the question of citizenship is to be determined by the authorities vested with such powers under the Citizenship Act 1955 and other laws relating to citizenship)

The 1997 draft rolls that were published after enumeration comprised two categories of persons:

1. Persons whose names appeared in the roll prepared in 1993-94 and further revised with reference to 1.1.96 as the qualifying date.
 2. Persons who did not find their names in the roll prepared in 1993-94 and further revised with reference to 1.1.96 as the qualifying date
- 2.7.7. After publication of rolls in draft, the EROs caused verification through Local Verification Officers (LVOs) in respect of those in the draft rolls where linkages could not be established with the earlier rolls but were provisionally included. After due verification, the LVO submitted his report in a specified format to the ERO, who in turn forwarded the cases, where he had reasonable doubt about the citizenship of any person, to the Competent Authority under the IM(D)T Act or the FT Act for further reference to the concerned Tribunal. Where decisions of the Tribunals on referred cases were not received before the date of final publication of rolls, the letter 'D' was marked against the name of such electors to indicate that the citizenship status of those persons is Doubtful/Disputed. The names of such persons were either retained or deleted based on the decisions of the Tribunals on the references made. Persons marked as 'D' in the E/Rolls are neither allowed to cast their votes at elections nor allowed to contest any elections.



Photograph 1: Poll officials demonstrating the use of EVM.



Photograph 2: A sick and old man coming to the polling booth for casting his vote.



Photograph 3: A cycle rally in Behali constituency.



Photograph 4: A child playing with the flag of INC.



Photograph 5: Voters waiting in a queue in Napam Panchayat.



Photograph 6: Eateries near a polling booth in Panchmile area.



Photograph 7: The coming of a *messiah*.



Photograph 8: The son of AIUDF leader Badruddin Ajmal.



Photograph 9: Defunct toilet in a school in Noorbari Tea Garden



Photograph 10: Anganwadi School near Napam Panchayat office



Photograph 11: Napam Gram Panchayat office in Solmara



Photograph 12: An old woman sitting in front of the Napam panchayat office with the names of IAY beneficiaries written on the wall



Photograph 13: Work going on under MGNREGA in Napam Panchayat



Photograph 14: People attending *Vishesh Gaon Sabha* in Napam GP office



Photograph 15: Children having MDM in the open in Parmaiguli village of Napam Panchayat



Photograph 16: A defunct hand pump in a school of Napam Panchayat



Photograph 17: A class room