Chapter 1 - Introduction

India’s colonial past has weighed heavily on her development. The growth of electoral representation in India did not emerge in the context of a developing public sphere, but rather as a mechanism by which the colonial state could encompass more effectively a society composed of a number of particularistic local communities. The legacy left behind by the colonial rulers who created channels through which the public could make itself heard and thereby claimed for itself the post of sole arbiter that decided the legitimacy and illegitimacy of public discourse, has now been appropriated by the post-colonial state.

Colonial rule was characterized by the existence of contradictory ideologies in which on the one hand, based on the principle of liberalism of the colonial rule, the colonial state needed to accommodate Indian participation in the public area whilst at the same time securing power firmly in British hands. This was not an entirely easy task because it involved the extension to India of the Victorian liberal ideals of public discourse and representative government, and yet sought to confine them in the ideology of difference.

Liberal ideology first took institutional shape in local government. No attempt was made to challenge the notion of India as a society of diverse interests, each entitled to representation. Hence, Lord Ripon’s local self-government reforms inaugurated a vast proliferation of communal electorates, and laid the groundwork for much that was to follow at the provincial and national levels.

The most important reforms the post-colonial state witnessed in the area of local government are the 73rd and 74th Constitutional amendments that devolved powers to local units of governance. Thus, the structure of governance in India was transformed permanently from a two-tier to a three-tier system with the Union, State and Panchayats/Nagar Palikas. Not only devolution of powers, but devolution of funds, functionaries and functions as well as the capacity building of the elected representatives
and locals were and still are necessary conditions for transformation of Panchayats/Nagar Palikas to local governments.

The passing of the 73rd and 74th Constitutional amendments may be viewed as the culmination of various attempts towards institutionalizing good and efficient governance via decentralizing the highly centralized parliamentary democracy and its rather inefficient bureaucratic arm. States too have met their legal obligations by passing conformatory legislations, however, the experience has varied across states, where this has, to a large extent, depended on the willingness of those who draw power from the existing state structures to implement these Constitutional Amendments.

Experience from many countries has shown that while good governance can help secure human well being and sustained development, poor governance is easily capable of eroding the individual as well as institutional and community capacities to meet even the basic needs of large segments of the population. This is particularly so for the poor, the disadvantaged and the marginalized sections of society, and specifically so in the developing world. It is now generally accepted that economic reasons alone cannot be made to account for human deprivation and inequalities. Rather they go hand in hand with social and political factors rooted in poor governance.

India began its post-colonial political structure with, and still continues to have, a representative form of democracy. The question is: has representative democracy in India reached a saturation point in terms of the extent to which it can meet the needs of its people? It certainly has not been able to deliver on its promises, especially those concerning accountable governance and attaining a just and equitable society. Even today, overwhelming numbers of Indians continue to live in conditions that are chronically disabling and the state seems to have moved on from its role to uplift these sections, as can be seen from the fact the broad consensus that exists amongst the political, social and economic elites with regard to continuing with economic reforms through liberalization.
In this Thesis, "Mobilization for Participatory Democracy and Good Governance in India: A Sociological Study"., I study the role played by a Non Government Organization (NGO) in "filling in" to an extent, the role traditionally the domain of the state – that of empowering people to become active citizens who participate in the political decision making process of their district as well as keep a watchful eye on government functioning in order to hold functionaries accountable for their actions.

The first chapter, i.e. the Introduction underlines the objectives and scope of the study, the research questions that will be answered in the course of the study, the area of study, the limits of the study, so that the concepts that will be examined in this study are clarified in order to set the parameters for the theoretical framework of the study, and a chapterization that would briefly describe the course that each chapter in this study would take.

Scope and Objectives of the Study

In this study, I first attempt to trace the emergence and role of two grassroots mobilizations; the first being a mobilization to demand the basic right of people to water, and the second being a mobilization demanding the fundamental right to information of the people. I trace the growth and efforts of these movements to garner public opinion in their favour in order to pressurize the state to alter some policy or enact a law, with some measure of success, especially in the case of the demand for the right to information. I demonstrate how, in the case of both these mobilizations, the state is described as the culprit, which serves one section, the elite and the bureaucracy, at the expense of the underprivileged. Both these grassroots mobilizations emerge as a negotiation, sometimes bitter and passionate, between individuals and the state.

Secondly, this is an exploratory study in which I investigate the role played by non-state actors to assume some responsibilities traditionally considered to be the domain of the state. For this study, I look at the role of a specific NGO in empowering the most vulnerable section of Indian society, i.e., poor, illiterate, rural women belonging mainly to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, in one of the poorest districts in this
country, i.e. Palamau in Jharkhand, to become active and ever – vigilant citizens that discuss issues relevant to them, on the one and, and on the other, play the role of watchdogs to ensure good governance at the level of the local government.

The tools used by the state to meet its moral obligation of creating empowered citizens include provision of basic rights such as education and universal suffrage and by creating a just society by redistributing wealth equitably. However, the Indian situation shows clearly that the state has failed to meet these obligations for a very large number of people. Thus, I attempt to study the means by which civil society organizations operate to realize these obligations for the people.

I raise four research questions here, which I hope would be answered in the course of the study of the intervention by an NGO called the Integrated Development Foundation, which is headquartered in Patna, Bihar and has a branch in Palamau, Jharkhand, where it operates through a Government – Funding Agency – NGO tripartite to build the capacities of rural local women to become holistically empowered citizens. The answers will be explained in detail in the final chapter.

Research Questions
The specific research questions that will be considered in order to examine the relevance of the role of voluntary groups and associations to fulfill these basic obligations that were traditionally the state’s forte are:

1. What are the tools used by the NGO to fill in the responsibility of the state, to create socially, economically and politically empowered citizens?

2. Can non-state actors such as Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) successfully empower citizens?

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1 In the context of this study, empowered citizens mean those who can demand their rights to education and universal suffrage as well as participate in future elections to the local government as candidates, campaign mobilizers and knowledgeable voters.
3. What are the expectations of the NGO from the state and the funding agency?

4. What is the response of the state to the NGO and the funding agency?

5. Is the impact of such role assumption sustainable?

Area of Study

Palamau district is situated in the North West region of Jharkhand, at a distance of 165 KM from Ranchi, which is the capital of the state of Jharkhand. To the North of Palamau is the river Sone, which separates it from the districts of Rohtas and Aurangabad in Bihar and to its East are situated the districts of Chatra and Hazaribagh. Latehar district is situated to the South of Palamau and to its West is Garwah district.

Palamau is rich in forests, rivers and waterfalls and hills, thereby making it one of the richest districts in India, in terms of its abundant forest and natural resources. It covers an area of 1,27,490 square kilometers, and is divided into three sub-divisions, twelve Blocks and 289 Gram Panchayats constituting a total of 1980 villages. Its most important Blocks are Daltonganj, Chattarpur and Japla.

The main occupation of the people of this district is subsistence agriculture due to the lack of proper irrigation and other infrastructure for commercial agriculture. Droughts occur at certain intervals, which makes it difficult for the district to diversify in terms of the crops for cultivation.

Chronic poverty, high rates of illiteracy and unemployment, low status for women, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are other characteristic features of the district. These have resulted in the spread of Naxalism, which holds the state to ransom by calling for bandhs to meet stated needs, on the one hand and terrorizing police officials through mass killings of officials on duty every once in a while, on the other. Naxalism is a product of and now contributes to the prevailing bad governance that plagues the district.
Limits to the Study

In addition to NGOs, which is a concept that is described in detail in Chapter 3, the three other relevant concepts in this study are "civil society", "democracy", "citizenship" and "good governance". For, it is only in a democracy that the state would allow space for civil society and NGOs. Additionally, only a democratic state would create an environment suitable for the formation of an intermediary sphere between the family and the state, which can protect the people against government excesses while at the same time, remaining ever vigilant to inefficiency and callousness in the governance process.

Chapter 2, i.e. *The State and Civil Society: Setting the Theoretical Framework*, sets the conceptual and theoretical parameters within which the primary concepts of democracy and citizenship, civil society and good governance are studied. This chapter traces the evolution of democracy, as studied by the Scottish Enlightenment theorists such as Hobbes and Locke, the Liberals such as Bentham and James Mill, John Stuart Mill (Held 1992) who espoused representative democracy, Rousseau (Held 1992) who could be called one of the first proponents of participatory democracy, the Marxists (Held 1992) and finally the neo-liberal point of view, spearheaded by Hayek (Pierson 1993).

The concept of citizenship is also highlighted, beginning with the notion of the multi-dimensional citizen, as espoused by Marshall (1992), and then drawing attention to a critique of this notion by Barbalet (1988), Held (1993), Zolo (1993) and Oommen (2005). I also draw attention to idea of inclusive citizenship by Dahl (1989) and Dworkin (1998) before ending this section with the notion of the active citizen who participates in the political process, as espoused by Barber (1984).

I trace the origin of civil society to its pre-Hegelian form, starting with Khilnani (2002), who gave credit to the Scottish Enlightenment thinkers for this, and then proceeding to Chandoke (1995) who acknowledges the classical political economists, before she traces the definition of civil society by Hegel, Marx, Gramsci and the post-Marxists. I
conclude this section with an analysis of the notion by De Tocqueville (1899) and Habermas (2000).

I also highlight briefly the idea of the centrality of the citizen in civil and political society, as envisioned by Chomsky (1991) and Chandoke’s (1995) emphasis on the Marxist and Feminist critique of the liberals’ idea of defining civil society as the private domain.


Before summarizing the second chapter, I draw attention to the notion of civil society in the context of the realities faced by India today, its pluralistic society being the most significant of these, and the ideological contestations that are a feature of Indian civil society, as these would not find resonance in the European tradition.

Chapter 3 titled *The Emergence of Civil Society in Post – Colonial India*, is suggestive of the fact that civil society in India is not a post – colonial or post – liberalization phenomenon. Rather, it has its origins in the 19th century when enlightened Indian thinkers such as Swami Dayanand Saraswati and Raja Ram Mohan Roy, founded associations such as the *Arya Samaj* and the *Brahmo Samaj*, in order to socially transform
Indian society, by removing prejudices and regressive ways of thinking and acting. The freedom struggle saw an active phase for civil society, as can be seen in the use of the vernacular press to promote nationalistic views as well as in the innovative use of civil society by Gandhi to expand the mass base of the movement as well as to bring about a social transformation of Indian society.

In this chapter, I outline the rationale behind the formation of the welfare state in India and how it failed to meet the needs and aspirations of the people which the post-colonial welfare state had been committed to, at least in letter, i.e. in the Constitution. I explain how the failure of the welfare state coupled with an inefficient and corrupt bureaucratic arm to implement its development projects, serve to alienate the people from the state and finally results in the call for emergency by an authoritarian state. I explain how this relates with what Habermas (Edgar 2005) called the legitimation crisis, Singh (1993) considered the crisis of success and the crisis of failures, and Desai (1975) blamed as the result of a conspiracy by the post-colonial capitalist state to work for only the political, economic and social elites.


I then trace the growth trajectory of NGOs in India, first as a result of the famine and drought of the mid-1960s and the common features that characterized them (Mencher 1999; Sengupta 1999; Ebrahim 2003). I then tackle the emergence of voluntary organizations that aimed to protect the civil liberties and human rights of the people in the post-emergency period, when alienation from and distrust of the state ran deep in the public mind (Oommen 2005; Gudavarthy 2008).
I also highlight two grassroots-based mobilizations, which have marked a watershed in relation to the manner in which the state and policy makers view such mobilizations, and the impact they can have on national and international audiences as well as for policy making. One is the *Narmada Bachao Andolan* (Save the Narmada Campaign) of Medha Patkar that successfully mobilized locals, mainly the tribals to come together and fight for their right to water and highlight the consequences their displacement would have on their lives and livelihoods.

The Right to Information movement was spearheaded by the Aruna Roy's *Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan* (Organization for the Empowerment of Workers and Peasants). It began as a movement to demand for minimum wages of the poor labourers in rural Rajasthan, who were hired on a contractual basis for the implementation of various government programmes and schemes. This movement aimed to mobilize people to enforce good governance by holding government officials accountable for their actions and making governance more transparent, by viewing government files and records, which contain information on government functioning. This is the most successful post-Independence grassroots mobilization and it is unique because India is the only country where the right to information movement began from below and was transformed into a law, which is not the case in other countries.

In this chapter, I also create a comparative table of the strengthening of civil society in India and the United States of America. I have selected the United States of America for purposes of comparison since, even though these two countries have a lot of dissimilarities, they also share some similarities in terms of both having plural societies, an active civil society, and struggles for the demanding rights of the marginalized. I end this chapter with a summary on the successes that the state and civil society have faced in India particularly in terms of empowering citizens and effectuating good governance and the failures in regard to the class, caste, religion and gender – based pressures that continue to plague the state.
Chapter 4, titled Effectuating Participatory Democracy and Good Governance at the Grassroots, is a result of my field observations in Palamau, Jharkhand, where a UNDP project titled “Capacity Building of Elected Women Representatives and Functionaries of PRIs” was being implemented with the help of a local NGO called the Integrated Development Foundation (IDF). I highlight the Government – Funding Agency – NGO tripartite that has come together to empower the most marginalized section in Palamau society, i.e. the rural, illiterate women who belong mainly to the Scheduled Caste community, to monitor government functioning and themselves participate in the political process. I highlight the strategies employed by IDF to unite women and make them an empowered force that can counter the might of a corrupt state, while at the same time become more knowledgeable about the local governance process. It must be noted however, that Jharkhand is the only state where elections to Panchayati Raj institutions have not yet taken place, even almost eight years after its conception. The matter is now pending with the Supreme Court.

Before I delve into the case study, I draw attention to the enactment of the 73rd Amendment Act and the emphasis placed on women therein, by means of reserving 33.33% of seats for them in the local elections, and the rationale behind the state placing such emphasis on women.

Once the case study is elaborated, I draw attention to the citizen typologies that have been created on the ground by IDF, on the basis of class (Marx), status (Weber) and caste (Srinivas), to empower the women and effectuate good governance through participatory democracy. Before I do that, I explain the Indian situation that has led to the increasing role of civil society organizations such as NGOs, with the help of Sheth (2004) and Oommen (2005).

In Chapter 5, i.e. Conclusion, I summarize what I have obtained in terms of my stated objectives at the beginning of the study, in terms of the conceptualization of citizenship, state, civil society, and good governance in the second chapter and in terms of the

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2 PRIs – Panchayati Raj Institutions
processes, particularly the mobilization to demand the right to water (Narmada Bachao Andolan) and the mobilization demanding access to government records (Right to Information). These processes are outstanding examples of an active civil society in India, which has resulted in a key reorientation of its role and significance for a truly democratic state in terms of a transparent and responsive state and empowered and inclusive citizenship that can participate in the governance process.