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)\(^1\).

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\(^1\) 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 governance\(^2\) 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 it’s 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

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 legitimate 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 Rajadharma 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 politics 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 a 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 legitimate 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 it 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 emphases 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 prescription. 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

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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' maneuvering 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 the 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

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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. (Bevir 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 though 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 it 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).

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 though 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”
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.
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.