Chapter 4

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

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

People’s perception of development and governance

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

People’s Perception on Education

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opinion/Income category</th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Vulnerable</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Non-Poor</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Affluent</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not good</td>
<td>15 (17.0)</td>
<td>3 (10.0)</td>
<td>1 (3.2)</td>
<td>6 (15.4)</td>
<td>25 (13.3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>52 (59.1)</td>
<td>17 (56.7)</td>
<td>21 (67.7)</td>
<td>19 (48.7)</td>
<td>109 (58.0)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better than earlier</td>
<td>4 (4.5)</td>
<td>6 (20.0)</td>
<td>2 (6.5)</td>
<td>4 (10.3)</td>
<td>16 (8.5)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack higher education</td>
<td>16 (18.2)</td>
<td>3 (10.0)</td>
<td>5 (16.1)</td>
<td>7 (17.9)</td>
<td>31 (16.5)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannot say</td>
<td>1 (1.1)</td>
<td>1 (3.3)</td>
<td>2 (6.5)</td>
<td>3 (7.7)</td>
<td>7 (3.7)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>88 (100.0)</strong></td>
<td><strong>30 (100.0)</strong></td>
<td><strong>31 (100.0)</strong></td>
<td><strong>39 (100.0)</strong></td>
<td><strong>188 (100.0)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

But 60% of people feel that education is good in the Napam area. 13% population said quality of education is not good. 8% population opined that the current status of education is better than earlier days. However, 17% of them said there is a lack of higher education facility in the locality. People showed their concern about lack of college education in the Napam area. Students have to go to Tezpur town to attend college education which is around sixteen kilometres away. They have to spend a lot of money on travel. They emphasised the need for some more development in terms of increase in the number of educational institutions in the area. People think that curriculum of the government school is not good. That is why, in various competitive examinations which are meant for employment, they are lagging behind than the students of the private schools. Many people opined that the status of education is directly related to the economic condition of the family. Due to poor economic condition of the local communities the educational quality of the local schools is not improving, as the local communities are not able to intervene in the education process. Lack of teachers is affecting the quality of primary education.
Table 4.2 - Opinion on teachers’ quality

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

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

Majority of people feel that the infrastructure of the government run school is very poor. They lack proper building. In many villages, they are made from thatch, bamboo, and mud. People feel that they should be converted into *pucca* buildings. Students mostly use broken desk and bench. In some of the schools due to lack of infrastructure they even take classes under tree or in the school veranda. Some respondents informed that due to lack of buildings, in some primary schools, teachers take classes in their own houses.
Regarding the education of girls, almost everybody opined that girls’ education is very essential and necessary. The respondents felt that higher education is necessary for girls which will make them aware of their rights. When a girl child is educated, it leads to the development of the family and society. However, one old man from the Muslim community opined that girls should be given only basic primary education. As they will have to look after the household after their marriage, there is no need for them to get higher education. If they have more education, they may not obey their husbands’ command. This will create rupture in the family life. Therefore, there is no need for the girls to go for higher education.

Table 4.3 - Perceived problems in education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opinion/Income category</th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Vulnerable</th>
<th>Non-Poor</th>
<th>Affluent</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of teacher</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>(20.5)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>(23.3)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facility insufficient</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>(15.9)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>(16.7)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of affordability</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>(12.5)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>(13.3)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(1.1)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(3.3)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fast lack of accessibility</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>(3.4)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No problem</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>(20.5)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>(20.0)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>(3.4)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of trained teacher</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>(13.6)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>(10.0)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(2.6)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>88</td>
<td>(100.0)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>(100.0)</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>39</td>
<td>(100.0)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Problems affecting the education**

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Table 4.4 - Whether there is any VEC in the village

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>No of HH</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>89.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannot say</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>188</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
VEC is one of the features of decentralised form of governance. When asked people said that often VEC is formed in the village but it is not functional. In two villages, there is no VEC. They said it was once implemented but after that nobody talks about the issue.

**Health: Facility, Perception, and Participation**

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

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

One of the respondents in the tea garden said that “Amar gaon ot etai sasthya kendra ase, eitu companion hoi” (In our village there is only one health centre, it belongs to the tea company). When asked about the services it provides, the respondents replied that “ami akol dorob ekta duta pao. ketiaba bemar bhal hoi aru ketiaba nohoi. Aru dorob pale bhi bohut bemarot dorob nakhate.” (We get few medicines, sometimes it helps and sometimes it does not. For many diseases, one does not get medicine here). These statements reveal that the quality of health services in the Noorbari tea garden area is poor. It also speaks of the medical facilities in the tea gardens of Assam. The sick person here gets limited amount of medicine from the health centre, which often does not cure the illness. Only a single compounder is available in the health centre. The health centre lacks infrastructural
facilities. People at first consult the health centre. Later, if the disease is not cured, then
they take the patient to Kanaklata Civil Hospital in Tezpur town. “Amar gaonot 108¹ nahei”
(in our village 108 ambulance service hardly come). A poor woman of the village said, 108
services has never been active in this village due bad road connectivity.

**Why Health Services are Important**

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

**Table 4.5 - Whether government has implemented rural health programme**

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

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

² It is widely known that in Kharupetia village which is 100 km away from Tezpur town, many farmers are
engaged in vegetable farming. It is infamous for using excessive pesticides and fertilizers to grow more
vegetables quickly, to increase profit and win in the competitive market.
NRHM programme of the government is perceived as one of the most successful programmes. Few respondents said that they get iron tablets from the local health centre. Sometimes vaccination is done in the government run schools. The JSY, Mamoni, Majoni, Adoroni schemes are very much popular in these areas. These schemes are operational under NRHM in Assam. These are planned for mothers and babies. Most of the respondents claimed that they are beneficiaries of JSY, Mamoni, Majoni, schemes.

Table 4.6 - View about functioning of NRHM in villages

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

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

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

**Availability of Medicine**

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

Most of the people responded that facilities in the hospitals are either not good or not adequate enough. People get hospital beds with great difficulty even at the time of delivery.
cases and receive Adoroni\textsuperscript{3} scheme. On a positive note, people have expressed their happiness over the availability of ambulance facilities. Many people agreed that the ambulance facility is very good in their area. Regarding the question of visiting ASHA in their locality, 81\% of people said yes. 18\% of people opined that they do not visit regularly. 2\% of people said that they visit only when they are called or required.

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

**Suggestions for Improving the Health Services**

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

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

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

Majority of people felt that MDM is a useful programme. But almost half of the population felt that MDM is not the reason for children’s presence in schools. Most people felt that the quality of food served is not good even though the MDM scheme is regular in the school. While expressing their opinion on the MDM people suggested that it can potentially attract students to schools. They also said that it is good for the poor people. Few argued that it should be discontinued as it has affected the quality of education, since more attention is paid to cooking than pedagogy. According to them, if at all government wants to continue this scheme then it should be managed by NGOs. It harms the classes and education quality as teacher are busy in managing MDM. One middle aged man opined that though it is affecting the education, it is nevertheless helpful for the poor children who are getting at least a meal a day. Therefore, the government should continue with the programme. One guardian who belongs to the non-poor category asserted that this programme should be scrapped as students are interested only in food and run away from the schools after having their meal. They argued government knows what is good for the poor people. That is the reason it has floated this scheme. It is very much beneficial for the students who do not get food at home.
People expressed their opinion like NGOs should be employed in managing the MDM. Food having more nutritional value should be provided to the school children. Teacher and authority should give more importance to education rather than to distribution of the food. The responsibility of preparing food should be removed from the teachers. Instead of food, government should provide books, writing note pad and uniforms. It should also take measures so that the issue of MDM should not harm the educational quality of the schools. If government is planning to run these schemes, reputed NGOs should manage this programme. Schools should emphasise more on learning than eating. Food should be hygienically prepared. Interestingly one respondent told that the government should provide money instead of food. Another opined that non-vegetarian food should be included in the MDM. Some people said that the food in Anganwadi school is bad, there is a need for good, healthy and hygienic food. One respondent said because of the MDM, children lose their attention at learning. Because of MDM activities, classes become irregular. Some parents informed that the food sometimes creates stomach pain among the children.

**Source of Drinking Water**

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

In Napam village sanitation and drinking water facilities are of major concern to the villagers. Many poor people do not have their own source of water and they use hand pumps and wells of others. Some of them access hand pumps provided by the government which is far away from their home, so they face problems in collecting drinking water.
Regarding sanitation, the existing government schemes provide only 300 bricks, some amount of sand and cement which is not sufficient for making a toilet. Moreover, a monetary payment of Rs. 300 also has to be made to the government. There are some cases where people have received toilet facilities. They have built a *pucca* toilet with concrete roof. Instead of using that as toilet, however, they use it as a granary. When they asked why they have done it, they responded that this room is the sturdiest one in the entire house. So they cannot use this as toilet. It is better to use this for storing grains. This is another instance of James Scott’s idea of planning and governance failure which has been discussed in the chapter 2.

**Employment**

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

**Table 4.7** – Whether aware and avail any employment schemes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Awareness</th>
<th>Benefit</th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Vulnerable</th>
<th>Non-Poor</th>
<th>Affluent</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
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<td>No</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>93</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>58</strong></td>
<td><strong>16</strong></td>
<td><strong>24</strong></td>
<td><strong>31</strong></td>
<td><strong>129</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>46</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>30</strong></td>
<td><strong>14</strong></td>
<td><strong>7</strong></td>
<td><strong>8</strong></td>
<td><strong>59</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the rural areas of India, ensuring employment throughout the year is a big challenge. In the absence of employment people tend to migrate or starve. The above table shows that 129 people out of the 188 surveyed household are aware of the employment generating schemes of the government. Out of that only 36 people have benefited whereas 93 people have not benefitted. Out of 59 people who are not aware of employment schemes of the government, 46 people have not been benefited whereas 13 people are benefited.

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

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

**Solution of Villagers for Unemployment**

The educated unemployed should be given loan by the government. Along with formal education, vocational courses should also be offered in the schools and colleges. Government should implement new schemes which will help the educated unemployed people. Local unemployed should be given more preference in employment opportunities.
Government should give importance to the agricultural sector as Napam area is known for agricultural activity. These days people have stopped farming their land. Government should encourage people to open small scale industry and industrial loans should be provided in every locality. Training in agricultural practices and other allied services should be provided to the youths. The youth should be encouraged and awareness campaign should be organised to impart training on self-employment.

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

**Dispute Settlement**

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

Some people told that they prefer Panchayat because they will be better informed of the nature of the dispute. Village headman will know the issue properly so they prefer him as an adjudicator in mediating disputes. But in the tea garden area people informed that initially the go the Noorbari tea estate office, if it cannot be handled there than they go to police station or court.
People think it is better to consult traditional Panchayat-like bodies or village headman for the settlement of dispute because it will consume less money and time which is helpful for poor people. Local people will know the issue better and work out an unbiased resolution. Proper justice will be provided and people will be able to express the issue frankly without hesitation. Sometime the issue goes out of control for the village headman to mediate and then there is a need to go to the police station. But some people told that they do not prefer village headman. There is a chance that favouritism will be there. So there will be injustice to them.

**Need of the Village**

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

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

**Peoples’ Suggestions for Panchayat**

PRIs are considered to be the primary agency of development. In the Napam area, people do not consider Panchayats to be an organ of the government. They consider it a local entity whereas government is something which is superior and inaccessible. Many people suggested that a village development committee should be formed. Strict governmental rules and regulation should be observed and pressure should be built from the top. Panchayat members must be educated. Better inspection, strict rules and regulations should be put into the place. More pressure from the higher government officials is required. Educated and qualified, patriotic, social activists can strengthen the working of the
Panchayat. Senior citizen and learned people of the village should be elected to the Panchayats. On various village developmental programmes awareness should be created. Panchayat should have members who are concerned about the development of the village. They should have the capability to administrate. People should elect eligible candidates and not vote on the basis of their favourite party. The village urgently needs health and sanitation facilities as felt by the people.

**Rural Development Programmes**

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

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

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

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

**People’s Experiences in the Government Office**

In their everyday life, most people visit the court and the government offices such as agriculture, block development, Panchayat, Deputy Commissioner, post office, revenue office, District transport office, etc). Officials there ask for bribes even for routine work. The problem is especially severe in the offices of the Panchayat, Circle, and DC, and at the court and at the police station. For a caste certificate, one has to pay at least Rs 50 at the Panchayat, which is very difficult for poor people. Similarly, to get any work done at the circle or DC office, one has to bribe officials directly or indirectly. Government officials behave well with people who bribe them and do their work, but ignore people who do not bribe. State government officials do not come to office on time, do not give people vital information, and take lots of time to do even a small job. There is a problem of communication in terms of the language of governance and, often, people have intermediaries do their paper work. But government officials say people are illiterate, ignorant of paper work, and do not understand official procedure despite officers’ best efforts to help.
The president of the Panchayat claimed that it has implemented many developmental schemes and programmes like IAY and MNREGA, from which 82% of the population of the Napam Panchayat have benefitted. Panchayat members said that it transferred all central and state government funds and benefits to the people, but the people say only a few benefit from Panchayat activity, and that its officials asked one IAY applicant to pay Rs 10,000.

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

**Suggestions for Improvement in Governance**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Clientelism in the Political Arena

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

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

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

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

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

Is there any difference between clientelism in the feudal period and clientelism in modern democracy? During feudalism, clients used to have a relationship with a particular feudal lord, and there was little scope for them to change their position but, in the modern democratic system, clients can switch to a different patron depending on the favour or scarce resource they get from the patron. As Hopkin argues, “(O)f course, the distribution of such benefits does not require strong clientelistic ties. The typology distinguishes between cases where club goods are made available to a group with a durable and close
relationship with the patron and cases where benefits are acquired on an ad hoc basis in return for short-term political support, or often money campaign contribution, etc” (Hopkins 2006, 11). It is not always easy to define what political clientelism is, as no precise definition exists in the literature. The NDRI report says it is “a more or less stable network of asymmetric dyadic relationships; the exchange of primarily private goods (and occasionally ‘club goods’) in return for political support and/or loyalty; benefits intended to influence political preferences and behaviour that include but are not limited to voting; and/or the assurance that even non excludable public goods reach their beneficiaries in a relatively expeditious manner” (NDRI 2010, 2).

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

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

Janus-faced dalals

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

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

From the respondents in Napam area, it was found that there are rates fixed for paying the dalals for getting the benefit of various government schemes, which are supposed to be distributed free. People therefore demand prevention of corruption in the gaon Panchayat.
During this fieldwork, the villagers also informed us about many instances of discrepancies at the gaon Panchayat level. Brokers have fixed rates: pay Rs 10,000 for the IAY; between Rs1000–1500 for a latrine from the WASH scheme; and around Rs 300–500 for a tin roof — but the price may be discounted for a person loyal to the political party in power.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Documents and Body**

Governance in Assam is challenged by multilevel migration, that is, migration both within the country and from outside the country. In the above section, the issue of out migration was briefly mentioned. However, it is the issue of in-migration especially from the neighbouring country of Bangladesh which is considered by the politicians and bureaucrats
as a big challenge. This problem of immigration creates the issues of livelihood, of access to resources and conflict of citizenship. In the following section, the issues of D voters and citizenship are discussed.

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

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

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

One can see how it happens from empirical evidence. Let us take the example of the IAY scheme. The names of the beneficiaries are documented on the walls of the Panchayat office. One old lady from the tea garden community who hails from Noorbari tea estate was sitting in front of the Napam GP office since morning. I asked her why was she waiting
there? She said, ‘I have been coming here for so many days but have not been able to figure out whether my name is there in the list of approved beneficiaries who are eligible to get IAY. The assistant who is dealing with the papers is not giving me proper information. Then the peon of the office asked her whether she can read or not. When she said she could not read, she was asked to bring somebody who can read the names written on the wall. After some time, I saw the Panchayat secretary coming out of his office and giving her a grim look. She was able to communicate with the secretary, who told her ‘Naam nuthile kaam no hobo’ [nothing could be done if your name is not there (on the wall)].

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

Humans get their identity both from biological as well as social body. The biological body is one which an individual inherits from the birth while it transforms into a social body gradually through socialization. The kind of social identity one would get from the body depends on the person’s position in the society. That position might be determined through multiple factors such as sex, gender, class, caste, religion, and ethnicity and so on. Of late, looking at the whole idea of political and social body from the sociological perspective has received popularity in the discipline under the rubric of the sociology of body. In the era of modern market economy human labour is being used as commodity. Human beings and their bodies are used as resources. The image of body and body as symbol has emerged in a socio historical process.
According to Chris Shilling, “Our very ability to intervene in social life is dependent on the management of our bodies through time and space” (Shilling 2008, 7). Bryan Turner has argued that body has not been an important part of classical sociological traditions. However, it is important that one should seriously deal with the social body from sociological perspectives. Turner formulates the idea of somatic society whereby the body is regulated from a regimental domain. Modern medical knowledge is equipped with the power of classification there by controlling the body and society (Turner 1992).

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

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

Sadiq in his book Paper Citizens (2009) demonstrates how people can challenge the documentary process of the state through their network and produce such documents to challenge states legitimacy. They put question mark on the mechanism of the state to distinguish citizen from non-citizen. He further establishes his argument by showing the importance of documents in acquiring citizenship. He tries to argue that it is not only state but documents can also produce paper citizens. He says the states challenge to non-citizen is countered with legal citizenship infrastructure. It develops into a standardised state practices to curb irregularities. Sadiq explains, “The purpose of the citizenship
infrastructure is to identify and order individual subjects so that they can be ruled by the state” (Sadiq 2009, 9). He emphasises that it is not possible for the state to counter the documentary citizen as states existence depends on the documents itself.

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

**D Voter and the Issue of Citizenship**

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

It is exciting to analyse the politics surrounding the discourse on D voters. Human rights activists along with civil society bodies of religious and linguistic minority groups are fighting and alleging the government of favoritism and parochialism in dealing with the issue. If we look at published news reported in various newspapers, then the issue will be clearer. Both from field data and news sources, it is found that there are broadly two sides to the discourse. One argument is that most of the D voters are Bengali Muslims from Bangladesh; they should not get the status of citizenship. But, Bengali speaking Hindus should be granted citizenship and they should be elevated from refugee to citizen. On the
other hand, Muslim students bodies including other minority activists group allege the
government of parochialism by saying that generally poor Bengali Muslims are harassed by
the police and administrative authority. Measures should be taken immediately to stop and
resolve the issue as soon as possible.

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

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

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

Baharul Islam raises few interesting questions regarding the issue of D voters. He asserts
that thousands of Adivasis, Bengali Hindus and other communities were driven out of their
homes in 1993-94. Were they also ‘illegal migrants’? It is easy to term Muslims as ‘illegal migrants’ and hence this invented ‘struggle between the Indians and the migrants’. He argues that in Assam if you are Bengali speaking Muslim you are “infiltrator” but if you are Bengali Hindu then you are ‘refugee’ – this dichotomy of the BJP and the right-wing sections has now invented a new discourse of “struggle between Indian origin people and the Illegal migrants from Bangladesh”. Islam argues that D-voter Muslims are very few than the Hindu in Assam. BJP and right wing forces bring in communal argument against Muslims (Zafar 2012).

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

Among the D voters I interviewed, some even make sarcastic comments on political parties. One of them said, “government is losing our precious votes by putting our names in the list of D-voters. We are losing nothing” (Begum 2011). According to an official source, EC records have about 1, 51,374 lakh "D" voters. The maximum number (26,484) of “D” voters is in Sonitpur district followed by 24,247 in Barpeta.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Serial Number</th>
<th>Name of The District</th>
<th>Numbers of D Voters</th>
<th>Serial Number</th>
<th>Name of The District</th>
<th>Numbers of D Voters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Sonitpur</td>
<td>26,484</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Kamrup</td>
<td>2196</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
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<td>13</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Dhubri</td>
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<td>Nalbari</td>
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</tr>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Udalguri</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>Dibrugarh</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Bongaigaon</td>
<td>1395</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Tinsukia</td>
<td>2854</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Numbers of D voters 1,51,374

On the issue of the D voter, it was reported that Arjun Namasudra age 32, a resident of Haritikar (Subodh Nagar colony) under Katigorah circle in Cachar district near the India-Bangladesh border, allegedly committed suicide on 8 June 2012 after he was declared a 'D' voter. He was not given the form for voter photo identity card. Citizens' Rights Preservation Committee (CRPC) functionaries claimed Arjun was an Indian but was tagged as a 'D' voter. His father, late Ananta Namasudra, came to India in 1950 and had a refugee card, but
Arjun was born in India. After the incident CRPC also approached National Human Rights Commission (NHRC). They emphasised that there has been harassment of a large section of citizens of Assam in the name of 'D' voter which needs to be stopped immediately (Times of India, 2012). Human rights activists argued that Namasudra was a poor daily wage labourer and could not fund the legal proceedings after a case was filed against him at the Foreigners' Tribunal alleging he was a doubtful citizen. Though he had received a notice twice from the Tribunal but could not appear in court because of his helplessness (Ibid).

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

Abass Halim, a middle aged man from Muslim Bengali community, says that his family have been staying in this Napam village since many generations. I do not even remember. Everybody in my family is having name in the voter list. But against my name D category is marked. I do not know the reason. The only thing I get is humiliation during the time of election as since last 4 elections I have not been able to cast my precious vote. When he was asked what situation he faces when election is not around, he said that he lives a normal life as everybody including the Panchayat members know about him. But only during the elections he feels like a non-citizen. In this area, people consider any kind of election as a carnival. They come out in a large number to vote. In a sarcastic tone, Halim said that during the election time I am a Bangladeshi, but otherwise I am an Indian. He said this because his name appears as D voter in the voter list.
There are many cases of D voters in the Napam Panchayat. It is mentioned in the above table that Sonitpur is having the maximum numbers of D voters in its voters list. Even few members from tea garden community are also victim of this problem. Asma Begum is a young Muslim woman who had her name in the voter list in her father’s villages where she grew up. When she came to her in-laws house to Amolapam, her name surfaced under the D voter category. She narrates that it is unfortunate and awful to become a D voter from the regular voter. She asked, “What wrong did I do to Assam or to the Indian nation that they have given me this punishment?” Being in a D voter category invites social stigma and humiliation. There are many other stories which people narrate and express their anger and anguish against the government officials who have done this mistake. They say that due to some government officials’ negligence we lose the status of the citizen of this country. Government must take serious action against such officials.

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

Another officer from the Assam Civil Service added that generally D voters are marked on account of failing to establish citizenship during upgrading of voter’s list. Indeed, she admits that sometimes the real citizens also face harassment in the process. She mentioned that the name of the wife of an Additional Deputy Commissioner also appeared in the list as D voters. Policy of the state government of Assam discussed in the white paper on foreigner’s issue is provided in the annexure- IV.
It is evident from the expression of people how the tag of D voter is a stigma to them. Casting vote is an important activity for many villagers in the Napam area. During the time of poll everybody including the old aged and sick wants to cast their votes. This exercise legitimises them as the citizen of the country and at the same time they are saved from the threat of being disfranchised as Indian citizens. There is propaganda in this area that if one does not cast his/her vote then he/she will lose citizenship status. For this reason many of them come forward to cast votes and the area invariably experiences a high turnout of voters in the elections.

**Informal Governance and Trust**

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

In Chapter 2, the issue of informal governance has been briefly discussed. One of the interesting features of informal governance is governing the people by manipulating the rules and regulations. In the above sections it has been discussed how people often complain that those who have kinship relationship or party affiliation get most of the benefits of government schemes. One of the interesting features of the informal governance that I found from field research is the system of private or individual bank people run in this area. It is known by various names such as *Gaonlia* bank (village Bank), private passbook and *got* bank. There is a banking system where most of the petty shopkeepers have put their money as part of savings. Every day evening, one could see individuals moving in these places and collect money from the shopkeepers. The amount of money collected from each individual ranges from Rs. 20 to Rs. 1500. In this system, shopkeepers keep a passbook and each time they pay money to the agent, he would enter the amount and
put the signature with date. Hardly any regulations, copy of agreements or MoU exists between the agent and the shopkeepers. But they keep investing money without any hesitations. This is part of the trust network and rationality where they try to get optimal utilisation of their money. There is no proper information as to how many of such banks exist in the locality. But I have been informed that there are as many as 30-40 such banks within the Napam Panchayat area alone. Most popular banks are Jeevan Mitra Sanchayan, Samaj Kalyan Sanchayan, Jeevan Kalyan Sanchayan etc.

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

These banks are different from the chit fund system. In chit fund system, a group of people can open their chits informally or deposit money under a registered firms. They have to deposit money periodically and can take a particular amount of money depending upon the auction value. Recently, chit fund companies like Saradha group and Rose Valley came under such scanner of irregularities. Even big company like Sahara group was asked by the Supreme Court of India to return money to its investors. Sahara group owner is in the jail for not returning the money to Security Exchange Board of India. Time to time, there are many news and stories from different parts of India that some financial investment company has vanished with their customers’ money. Even with the circulation of all these stories, it is interesting to see how these informal money investment schemes are run
without any distrust among villagers. I argue that this scheme is a part of informal governance system. Where many state-authorized banks and private banks fail to run the deposit and money lending system, how are these small private players running their business? It all depends on the trust and convenience. This is possible on the basis of Granovatter’s (1985) concept of embeddedness.

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

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

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

Some shopkeepers, mostly those who are having bigger volume of sales or business, prefer nationalized or regular banks. They are not in favour of the kinds of small private banks
operating at Napam. They do not trust such type of savings in private groups, because there is lack of security of the money saved. They are apprehensive about these banks running away with their savings.

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

**Seeing Like a Citizen**

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

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

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

Often people complain of not getting the benefits of a BPL cardholder. Most of the time, people belonging to non-poor categories such as school teachers and other types of salaried people get benefits under BPL category. This happens because the survey of the Panchayat to identify the BPL households in the area itself is bogus. They opine that this kind of survey should not be done by the Panchayats. The latter is accused of favoritism and bias in their approach in deciding who should be a beneficiary rather than giving it to the genuinely needy person.
Often poor people negotiate with the state mechanisms while getting the welfare schemes. The poor have their own idea about the living conditions which is different from the state. They have a different world view about their existence and management in everyday life. But state understands and plans things differently from the people. That is why, most of the time there is a failure in the process of governance. Poor people feel the difference from non-poor in terms of sending their children to government schools. People who can afford send their children to private schools. The poor people also take the help of government health services when they are sick while those who can pay go to the private health services. Though people feel that government run schools and hospitals are not that bad, it is due to mismanagement and poor infrastructure that they are forced to go the private hospitals and clinics.

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

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

People feel that politicians should work honestly, as they consider politicians in power as the sarkar. The field data suggests that people feel humiliated when government officials do not attend to them or waste their time. That is when they feel a dalal is necessary. Although there are various difficulties in accessing the state’s welfare provisions, people
from various communities form networks to acquire certain necessary things for themselves. When poor people are treated as objects, they try to pursue their goals through various mechanisms. In this way, the combination of vernacular society and informal governance produces a peculiar kind of relationship between the state and society in many parts of rural India.