Chapter 7

Conclusion

This thesis argues that notwithstanding the overarching nature of the state and its programmes and policies, a host of local specificities mediates and conditions the system of governance. It argues that a system of governance has two facets, formal and informal, and that both are important in the day-to-day functioning of the state. While the state uses the structure of formal governance as a legitimate means of reaching out to the people, informal governance structures facilitate people’s negotiation with the state for access to different limited resources. The thesis explicates this with the example of the class of intermediaries, who play a very critical role in the state’s transactions with communities. It shows how the state’s functioning creates space for the emergence of these informal agents. On the one hand, intermediaries bridge the gap between the state and the community, thereby apparently adding to the state’s legitimacy and presence among the latter. On the other hand, intermediaries also erode the state’s formal legal authority by underscoring its own indispensability for the community.

There is no doubt that it is difficult for a state to fulfill or match all the expectations of its people. But a state needs strong social protection schemes to protect people, especially the marginalized, from falling into destitution or crisis. Even if particular state policies have good objectives, various factors undermine implementation, which often becomes the undoing of the state. Political sociologists Malpas and Wickham (1995) articulate that failure is not governable; it happens because of the incompleteness of governing practices. They emphasize that even if it wants, governance cannot control objects and subjects. That means people can be neither totally controlled nor regulated. Therefore, failure is inevitable, and one has to acknowledge this.

The meaning and notion of governance has changed over time. Law and order is one of the important elements of any governance system. In earlier days, law and order used to be controlled by kings, where it could not be challenged. But due to democratization and
modernization of the governance system, it can be challenged and reviewed. Technically, today, everybody can access the law. Justice is also dispensed through modern legal institutions, whereas earlier it was the jurisdiction of the king’s court. Welfare spending has gone up. The election is one of the most important features and prerequisites of the modern governance system.

Like many scholars on governance, political scientist Mark Bevir emphasizes collaborative governance, which he thinks provides an alternative in which modernist expertise gives way to participation and dialogue. He sees the possibilities of improvisation of governance by the democratic participation of all members. Local organizations can adopt experiments in which members solve their collective problems and manage collective affairs not in accord with ideal types of modernist social science but collaboratively, by engaging with each other. According to Bevir, democracy can create the knowledge necessary to improve governance (Bevir 2012, 119).

In Napam, one of the most common phrase one hears is *Sarkare amak eko dia nai* (government has not given us anything). Poor people often say this when they are asked about any government-related scheme or about the status of governance. The relationship between the postcolonial Indian state and society has become interesting, especially after the advent of PRIs and devolution of power to local bodies. People have their own expectations from the state, which they see as provider and problem solver; the state also expects its citizens to conform to a particular mode of behaviour. When there is a mismatch, the relationship between the state and society is ruptured.

While all citizens depend on the modern welfare state for social welfare measures, the degree of dependence of the poor and marginalized is most obvious. That is why the poor and marginalized are affected worst when the state withdraws from its social welfare schemes or fails to implement them effectively. Few government welfare schemes work properly at the grassroots, where specific circumstances impair their implementation. Although the factors that contribute to this failure are known broadly, the specific factors need to be inquired into, given the particular local context.
India is considered a successful democracy, but fares worse than many developing countries (such as Bangladesh) on various human development index or social development parameters, as pointed out by Amartya Sen and Jean Dreze. Despite fair economic growth over the past 15 years, India has failed miserably in investing in human development, basic health care, or primary education (Sen and Dreze 2013). With the advent of neoliberal economic policies, the Indian state has gradually been withdrawing from crucial social sectors like health, education, agriculture, etc., which has created serious survival questions for millions of its poor citizens. This issue is discussed in detail in Chapter 6.

To placate the public outcry during the past decade or so over its withdrawal from critical social sectors, the Indian state has undertaken several flagship programmes to improve the life and livelihood of its poor, but these have performed poorly. Allegations of misappropriation of funds, discrimination in distribution of benefits at the local level, and malpractice by state agencies have been widespread, and there is a serious communication gap between grassroots communities and the state. Henri Bang (2003) defines governance as a form of social and political communication, and says those well versed in the language of governance can exploit its various programmes while the ignorant must fend for themselves. My fieldwork demonstrates that the communication gap between grassroots communities and the state is a reason that governance has failed at the grassroots.

This study sets out to examine people’s perception on various developmental schemes and their approach towards government institutions and its officials. It studies how elections have an important place in marginalized peoples’ life, and analyses the process of privatization and the state’s apathy towards welfare programmes.

Chapter 1 examines the possibility of studying the issue of governance through the lens of sociology. It discusses briefly the problems in studying the state. Society and the state share a thin line; their relationship is porous. Therefore, drawing on various previous works, the chapter paves the background for the arguments of the dissertation, and depicts the methodology and field of study.
Chapter 2 surveys various works on the sociology of governance, and outlines the possibility of using sociological methods to study governance. It uses the concept of embeddedness in analysing governance in a vernacular society. The chapter emphasizes the importance of both formal and informal governance. Further, taking its cue from James Scott’s idea of failure, the chapter highlights the significance of failure in governance, which policymakers and bureaucrats often tend to ignore. The chapter then discusses local governance and how poor people perceive the governance mechanism and development schemes.

Chapter 3 provides an account of the multi-ethnic social setting of Assam. It discusses the formation and evolution of PRIs in India, and in the light of that discusses the PRIs in the context of Assam. It examines the working of various welfare schemes and policies for developing rural areas through various state agencies. It argues that with the coming of the PRIs and the political parties, the nature of the community’s engagement with politics has been undergoing change. While earlier a community was collectively mobilized, mainly in terms of caste, religion, ethnicity, etc., it is now also mobilized in terms of loyalty to various political parties. While inquiring into people’s perception about government (‘sarkar’), this chapter finds, interestingly, that they often equate the latter with the political party in power.

Chapter 4 focuses on people’s opinion on various development and welfare programmes in Assam in general and in the Napam panchayat in particular. Due to clientelistic politics and the importance of brokers/intermediaries (‘dalal’) between the state machinery and society, the needy always find it difficult to access these welfare services. Interviews, surveys and focus group discussions undertaken by this study find much discrepancy in the distribution of welfare schemes. This chapter also argues that the notion of trust in informal governance and economic transactions plays a significant role in the everyday life of the rural poor. They are afraid of official paperwork and find nationalized banks difficult to access, which make them depend on private bankers.

This chapter also argues that the human body is also a site of politics. It discusses how people without legal documents are described as D voters, which emphasizes how
documents have acquired magical power in modern bureaucratic practice. Non-citizens can acquire documents through extra-legal means to prove their citizenship whereas actual citizens can be labeled illegal if they do not have the requisite documents. This chapter argues that the state must not ignore the idea of embeddedness of social and cultural linkages in governance. However, it must remain careful not to allow informal ways of governance based on community networks of local institutions overplay themselves, which might destabilize democratic governance and deprive marginalized and smaller groups. In fact, the study finds that much apprehension and mistrust remain between communities and local panchayat functionaries and other political leaders if they belong to different communities.

Chapter 5 examines how various democratic practices manifest during the elections. Regular elections—parliamentary, assembly and panchayat—hold a very important place in marginalized peoples’ life. This chapter inquires into the reasons of peoples’ participation and voting. Elections are important for people sidelined in everyday life. During elections, they are visible and assert their presence. They seek to affirm their existence so that they can also compete for the benefit of the government welfare schemes. The chapter is based on an ethnographic study of the day-to-day canvassing and campaigning, motives, and actions that govern the people during elections. One significant finding of this thesis is that most migrant communities in Assam vote in significant numbers, but not the native Assamese population. For example, polling turnouts in most of the tea gardens are always high, because workers get a day off and treat it as a festival or carnival. They come with their family, buy sweets, and drink. They get free drinks and food from the political parties who have money. Secondly, traditional parties like the Congress regard them as vote banks. The tea garden community is also part of political clientelism; they think the party they will vote for will help them in achieving their social and economic goals.

This study finds that marginalized communities, especially Muslim immigrants, whose identity and legal status is contested, come in large numbers to prove their citizenship. They also vote for a political leader who can support them in need. A poor fish seller, whose 10-year-old son had a heart ailment that could be treated only at Narayana Hrudayalaya,
Bangalore, would not have been able to afford the treatment but for Himanta Biswa Sarma, a Congress leader popular among Bengali Muslims. He, therefore, feels obliged to vote for the Congress. Thus, the vote and clientelistic politics hold much importance for poor people.

Political parties, brokers and leaders say that the action of casting one’s vote is proof of one’s citizenship, which will be scrapped if one does not vote. Settled immigrant communities in Assam take this falsehood seriously, and vote to prove their citizenship but also to strengthen their tie with the leader who, when elected, will make them a full citizen of the state.

The chapter argues that elections in post-independent India have been like the theatre. Powerful leaders are projected as demigods in terms of spiritual and political power. They raise a ray of hope among the marginalized poor and draw their support from their magical power. This chapter examines why people vote for a particular candidate, which becomes a very crucial question during elections. Every candidate campaigns as much as possible, and tries every bit to turn people in his or her favour, yet only one emerges as a winner. People consider several factors in voting—caste, class, age, religion, gender—and the considerations differ within and between communities. Generally, Hindu voters believe that Muslim candidates will serve Muslim interests only in accessing government schemes, plans and programmes. But, if the vote is being cast out of loyalty to a party, the candidate’s community and religion stops being a factor. People said that they may vote for a Congress candidate, because it is the ruling party in the state, and they would benefit only if a Congressman wins. A contestant from an established party will have more resources to spend on elections and buy votes than an independent candidate who might lose because he/she lacks resources. People see no point in electing an independent candidate who has no backing of any party because such a candidate would not be able to help them. A party’s image or position also determines the contestant’s fate. People’s trust or distrust of a party plays a major role in determining the contestant’s future. Thus, a candidate’s party affiliation plays a major role in his success or failure in the elections.
Local Factors Influencing People’s Choice in Elections

The study finds many factors influence people’s decision to vote for a particular candidate in local elections. There is no doubt that there are broader level general factors too playing their own role in elections. However, the study attempts to inquire into the major factors influencing voter choice at the local level.

Community Sentiment

People choose to vote for a particular candidate because they belong to the same community, religious, caste, or region. Community sentiment therefore plays a significant role. When the contestant is from the same community, voters feel that he/she will understand their needs and help them, he/she will be easily approachable, and would give their need a priority. Further, they relate community prestige to the candidate’s victory. Thus, the ‘we feeling’ becomes very strong and they vote for the candidate belonging to their community.

Village Sentiment

Just like religious or other kind of sentiment, village sentiment is also an important deciding factor. If a contestant is from the same village, people easily relate to him. He becomes the pride of the village. In the Amolapaam village, a lady while talking about a contestant from their village in a panchayat election said, “She is like my sister. We have grown up together and if she wins, it will be a victory of all the people in our village. We can then proudly say to others that she is from our village. Moreover, we will get the benefits of government-run schemes. She is our neighbour and she is going to help us.”

Gender

The gender of a candidate also shapes voting behaviour. Interviews in the field revealed that if the contestant is a woman, other women may vote for her on the grounds of gender. They see her as a role model, and find a women candidate more understanding, approachable, responsible and less corrupt. They feel that women candidates will be of more use than a male candidate. On the other hand, menfolk were seen to be a little
apprehensive about women. Though they did not directly oppose women candidates, they did not much support the idea of women contesting elections. They had a patriarchal mindset and felt that elections and politics are not for women; it is not safe for them. The brother of Hasina Begum, a contestant for the post of the gram panchayat president, said that they were not in favour of their sister contesting elections. He argued that politics is dirty and it hurts one’s prestige especially if she is a woman. Various rumours spread about the candidates and this harms the women candidates more. Further, it may also lead to disintegration of her family life. But in the above case, the seat was reserved for women, and finding the girl qualified, the local MLA persuaded her family members to let her contest elections and they agreed. Many men feel that women are weak, emotional, and not clever, and so will not be efficient if elected, although a few men feel that women may excel if given a chance.

Class

In Napam, voters’ class also influenced voting behaviour. Because of their purchasing power, the middle class voters could avail the benefits of government schemes, and were therefore in favour of the Congress, the ruling party in the state. The poor, who are not benefited by government schemes, favoured other opposition parties (like the AIUDF) in the hope that things may improve if the ruling party changes. Thus, their class position, their access to resources and governmental schemes also influenced their voting behaviour.

Qualities of the Contestants

While talking about the qualities of a candidate they would like to support, people make mention of qualities such as helpfulness, sincerity, honesty and contacts with influential people. Thus, a contestant’s personal image, activities, and friends determine his suitability. One’s family is an important source of identity and, therefore, family background is also a criterion for evaluating a contestant. A voter said that Hasina Begum (a contestant for the post of president) might lose votes since her brothers are corrupt and have a bad reputation in the village.
The interviewees even said that age can also become a factor, even if not a major one. Some believe that young people can be better leaders because they are more educated and exposed while some others feel that they are too restless, not very mature, and aggressive and, therefore, middle-aged contestants are more suitable.

*Role of Media*

Most respondents in the study were following TV and newspapers. People agreed that though media production is not free from the political bias, it does influence their decision to some extent. They could learn of candidates’ positive and negative aspects only from the media. Most of the newspapers were publishing news against the Congress (I) party candidate Moni Kumar Subba in 2009 general elections, which he lost. This is not to say that he lost the election only because of the role played by the media. Rather, what is emphasized here is that media's participation in the electoral process and its influence cannot be ignored in today's context.

The chapter also addresses the perception of the right leader and leadership at the grassroots. Jan Kooiman (2003) rightly suggests that leadership is an important concept in governance. In this study, we find that community leaders play a very crucial role in community affairs. People follow a particular leader because of trust and rationality, i.e. the calculation of gain and loss in expressing their allegiance to that leader. Again, people repose a trust on the party leader from the neighbourhood. If the party leader belongs to the same community, his/her bond with the people becomes stronger. The amount of trust and respect the member from the same community commands is not generally found in party leaders from outside one’s own community.

The study finds that the election process involves many interesting social factors and in-depth research into election dynamics helps us understand these factors better. The study has underscored the importance of elections in the life of poor people. Through the process of election, the poor and marginalized confront the symbolic state and reinforce them into the state machinery as a legitimate member and legal citizen.
The voters cast their votes not for any revolutionary change; they know it is just a political right and want to establish it. Campaigning in the form of public meetings, rallies, door-to-door contacts, etc. positively influence the decision of the voters to vote. The study also finds that the tendency to vote varies from community to community. For example, people belonging to some indigenous tribal communities are not much interested in voting. On the other hand, immigrants, especially the Bengali speaking section and who are usually addressed as illegal migrants, are very particular about voting. They think that their name in the voters’ list is a sign of being a citizen of India and may lose citizenship if they do not vote.

The study observes that common people are not much aware of policies and programmes of different political parties despite all the campaigning and publicity. Campaigning unofficially continues even at polling booths. The general tendency among the common people is not to disclose their political stand as to whom to vote for because they are afraid of backlash from the opposing groups.

The panchayat elections in Assam in general and in Napam panchayat in particular shows that while people are fed up with the working of the panchayat system—where the really needy often do not get the benefits of various welfare schemes—voting in elections is a ritual. This is so because for them panchayats are the only local governance institutions they can access and interact with. The rural population in India feel that the panchayat elections are the most significant and relevant to them of the three levels of elections. Both sides put various strategies, game plans and manipulations into play to get and give votes. The everyday language they use for the winning and the losing candidates is likened to having passed and failed in an examination.

Chapter 6 examines the nature of the contemporary state through its engagement with the grassroots with the help of the data generated from the field study. This chapter argues that the contemporary Indian state is changing its character with the advent of neoliberal policy in the early 1990s, which has led to its gradual corporatization which, in turn, implies that its critical spheres of action are gradually being handed over to the private sector. Simultaneously, the state is relegating its welfare responsibilities to various NGOs and civil
society organizations. However, the chapter argues that in order to maintain its legitimacy, the state initiates few employment generation schemes like MGNREGA and health schemes like NRHM and so on.

Education and health services are also being usurped by private players, leaving many of the poor hapless. The government even wants to consult private players to improve the standard of public health and education. There is a popular discourse that private education and health services are better than the government ones, so people tend to believe this and those who can afford it are adopting it. Further, this chapter examines the contemporary discourse on ‘good governance’ by locating it within the agenda of neoliberalism, and explicates the state’s changing nature under the impact of neoliberal policies and the manifestation of this change in the implementation and withdrawal of various welfare measures along with its implication on everyday local politics.

From different cases and arguments, it is apparent that the state’s nature has changed recently; to understand it, we need more micro-level insight into its functioning. Multilateral organizations such as IMF, World Bank, ADB, etc have been arguing for good governance. Governance has emerged as the new avatar of development. In the post-Cold War era, multilateral organizations and first world countries used development as a panacea for the so-called underdeveloped countries. The failure of development is widely acknowledged now, and its new avatar is governance. Through empirical evidence, various studies have shown that programmes of new or good governance are as much a failure as development. In fact, scholars have already underlined the deceiving nature of development as it depoliticizes the whole grassroots political mobilization.

John Harriss (2001), for example, argues that there has been an attempt at segregating development from politics. He demonstrates how in the name of developmental programmes people’s rights at the grassroots are being seriously undermined. This process paves the way for civil bodies and NGOs to work as the bridge between people and the state. The corporate media, big corporations, World Bank, ADB all create narratives of malnourished and underdeveloped regions like Ethiopia and Kalahandi to justify the need of investment, reform and aids, which eventually ruin the age-old traditional self-
sufficiency of the different communities based on indigenous knowledge and resources. Arundhati Roy (2004) terms it as ‘depoliticizing the resistance’, and argues against the NGO-isation of resistance. She says one has to look into this NGO phenomenon in a broader political context. As the thesis argues, NGO-isation started when neoliberal policies came to be implemented in India. It worked very well when the welfare state started withdrawing from the welfare provisions like public transport, free education, public health, etc investing very little through the NGOs. The SAP worked according to plan with all these NGO-isation and economic reforms cutting state expenditure.

Local practices of governance and politics seem to be highly influenced by the dominant neoliberal agenda of the state. The state–society relation is also influenced by neoliberal operations at the micro-level. In this situation both state and community negotiate with each other for a win-win type situation. In his idea of political society, Partha Chatterjee (2004) explains the politics of the governed in developing countries. His concept of political society might hold relevance in many parts of India, but this concept may not be applicable in Napam. Chatterjee differentiates between the concepts of ‘citizen’ and ‘population’. He writes that ‘citizen’ inhabit the domain of theory which carries an ethical connotation of participation in the sovereignty of the state. On the other hand, population inhabits the domain of policy. It is a concept based on descriptive exercise and empirical evidence. The category of population is identifiable, classifiable, and describable by empirical statistical techniques such as censuses and sample surveys. Chatterjee further states that “population makes available to government functionaries a set of rationally manipulable instruments for reaching large section of the inhabitants of a country as the targets of their “policies” – economic policy, administrative policy, law and even political mobilization” (Chatterjee 2004, 34). Chatterjee defines two sets of conceptual connections: “one is the line connecting civil society to the nation-state founded on popular sovereignty and granting equal rights to citizens. The other is the line connecting populations to governmental agencies pursuing multiple policies of security and welfare” (Ibid, 37). He distinguishes the latter from the classic associational forms of civil society, which he calls political society (Ibid, 38).
Political society takes up means that are not available in the domain of civil society. Chatterjee describes political society as a site of negotiation and contestation opened up by the activities of government agencies aimed at various population groups. He states that many of these groups, organized into associations resort to illegal means to sustain their lives and livelihood. While the authorities cannot treat them on the same footing as other civic associations following more legitimate social pursuits, they cannot be ignored either. The state agencies and NGOs “therefore deal with these associations not as bodies of citizens but as convenient instruments for the administration of welfare to marginal and underprivileged population groups” (Chatterjee 2004, 40).

From his fieldwork in Orissa, Akio Tanabe shows how moral society (and not civil or political society) often comes to play its role in the governance in vernacular democracies. He argues that while Chatterjee's concept of political society captures the actual field of mediation between the people and the state in which various groups, factions and communities are the main players, it does not capture the other side of the imaginative power of the community. This is an aspect of the community which Chatterjee himself has paid attention to in a different context as the site of ‘ethical life’ where he highlights the condition of human beings who are born as members of society in which “subjective rights must be negotiated with the ‘ascribed’ field of the ethical life of the community” (Chatterjee 1993, 232 quoted in Tanabe 2002, 41).

Tanabe defines this site of ethical life of community, in which “rightness and goodness rather than individual rights or political gains are at issue, the space of ‘moral society’” (Tanabe 2002: 42). He distinguishes his concept of moral society from ‘civil society’ and ‘political society’. He argues that while the ideas of equality and human rights pertaining to ‘civil society’ have “profound influence upon the idea of rightness and justice, they have not replaced the morality of the community by individualist ethics”. Moreover, he maintains, the concerns of ‘moral society’ cannot be reduced to the strategy of survival and political gains as in the case of ‘political society’. The concerns of ‘moral society’ are about what kind of practices should be considered right and good. However, Tanabe emphasizes that the “moral society is not a mere residue of the traditional community norms that stand
against modern ideas and institutions. It is rather a site where continuing conceptions of what is right and good are connected and mediated to the contemporary context. Here the symbols and rhetoric of morality may be used for affirmation, resistance and/or transformation of the existing socio-political order” (Tanabe 2002, 42).

Like political society, the concept of moral society is also pertinent to many societies in India. The chances of the prevalence of a political society, as defined by Partha Chatterjee, are more when a group more or less belongs to particular class. In such situations, it will have more power to confront or negotiate with the state. However, the possibility of a moral society will be more in a place where population is socially more or less secure and stable. However, in societies where population is neither socially secure nor socio-economically homogenous are not in a position to indulge in a politics informed by an assertion or negotiation for fulfillment of their demands. Such a population is also not animated by the concerns of a moral society as discussed above.

In many pockets of Assam including the field chosen for ethnographic study, we always find a relationship between community and governance that defies the processes identified by Chatterjee and Tanabe. In Napam, for instance, we find a community-governance relationship that is dependent on negotiation and remain open to adjustments if necessary. In this case, the requirements of political society or moral society are differently viewed.

For example, a mixed or fluid population in terms of its composition does not allow the kind of stable identity that facilitates political and moral society. Here we find people’s negotiation with the process of governance from a perspective that can be broadly described as clientelism. A seminal feature of clientelism is that neither governor nor governed remain fixated in their positions or self-imaging. Each tries to fashion itself and the other according to the changing political or strategic requirement. An implication of this phenomenon is that people are willing to modify the basic rules of government and change their expectations from government or governance according to the condition or need demanded by circumstances.

In places like Napam where the population settlement is not settled, communities are heterogeneous and most of the time they have fear of rejection from the state. The
demography in Napam has changed rapidly with increase in population. Poor people compete for limited government welfare resources. Even school teachers and the non-poor have BPL cards. Respondents complain that rich and salaried people benefit from the IAY but not the needy. Here the issue of material existence takes priority over morality. In Napam, poor people from the Bengali Muslim, Bengali Hindu and Nepali communities are often considered illegal immigrants. Due to their marginal status in society and fear of state action, these people tend not to form a political society and depend instead on political clientelism. Therefore, moral ethics is sidelined where existence is at stake, and moral or political society becomes not very relevant.

Thus, I would like to suggest that political clientelism is more relevant as a conceptual tool to understand the relationship between the people and the governance in such societies than political society or moral society. We may also call the political process in such societies as ‘politics of negotiation’. Here the communities negotiate with the local agencies of the state on various issues of governance and their benefits most of the time.

There is a need to understand the relation between democracy and governance. It is generally held that good governance will lead to more voting in elections, reflecting the continued interest and trust of people in democratic processes, and bad governance would alienate the people from democratic processes and their participation in electoral processes would be limited. However, this thesis of relationship between the nature of governance and level of electoral participation need to be contextualized.

The study throws light into the relation between the governance and electoral processes. Napam, as is the case in various other parts of Assam, is inhabited by different ethnic communities. The ecology and economy of the region encouraged immigrations in various ways which is discussed in Chapter 3. Continuous immigration to the state, both from the neighbouring countries as well as from other parts of India, also adds to the fluidity of the society in Napam and such other parts of Assam. This long process of immigration over the period gave birth to a society where there is a diversity of caste, tribe, class and religion and so on. However, massive immigration also created its own pressure on the available resources in the state and this issue came to be raised strongly by the local people. There
have been agitations by various groups to identify and expel the illegal immigrants. There has been also anger against immigrants from other parts of India. Violence involving these groups is a fact of everyday life. This has created a political space where the issue of one’s existence became the most crucial political issue. The insider-outsider debate has today become the ‘dominant ideology’ around which other elements of the socio-political life function.

The different groups of people looked forward to the state and other political agencies for their intervention in the insider-outsider debate. This has brought a different meaning to the democracy for different stakeholders. Each group of the stakeholders has tried to influence the state and polity to their advantage. As state itself is defined by the way it relates to different social groups, the state here becomes more like a mediator and peacekeeper. For certain sections of populations who become the potential target of being designated as outsider and are not sure about their social and political identity, the only way left to prove their identity as a citizen is their relationship with the state.

But state itself is divided between the conflicting demands of different groups. While the suspected illegal immigrants do everything to prove their citizenship, the insiders try out various possibilities to counter the effort of the outsiders. The legal existence of the suspected illegal immigrants as citizens is dependent upon the documents they possess and their involvement with various functions and rituals of the state. In that context, voting in elections becomes probably the most important action to prove one’s citizenship. This voting exercise becomes a fiercely debated issue since it has the potential to legitimize and delegitimize the citizenship of certain social groups. This condition is exploited by politicians and political parties by seeking votes from these immigrants by promising them political protection. This has brought a new type of player into the political system who mediates between the state and its ‘citizens’. As discussed in the thesis, they are often termed as dalal (intermediaries or political broker). For instance, many people are not well aware about the way state functions and they fall back on these intermediaries for their needs. These intermediaries become a layer which fulfill various functions that otherwise
come under that domain of the state. Hence democracy and voting take the form of a religion for these social groups.

Under the neoliberal political economy of contemporary times, the state is withdrawing from various social sectors and leaving the space for the market. The services provided by markets and private sectors are not only costly and beyond the reach of the large number of people, but also often sub standard. Though the state has taken various welfare measures these measures are intended to get the votes of the people and are more political in nature. Even local level political institutions become sites for the generation of votes and creations of political support base. Just maintaining law and order and certifying who is insider and outsider has become the most important function of the state. This type of politics suits the political class which is incapable of delivering on welfare fronts. The result is that people feel that the state is not doing enough on welfare front and are very much critical of it. Yet rather than discarding the governments and demanding better facilities they stick to the state and politicians. The issue of physical existence takes precedent over issues of welfare and governance. Thus the thesis claims that there is no direct correlation between the issue of good governance and people’s attitude towards the democratic polity in a society where features of political society are mostly absent.

This study tries to understand people’s perception of the state, its governance, and of the various schemes and policies the state has implemented. It analyses various schemes implemented by government bodies and shows the gap between delivery and implementation, and how embedded governance makes it difficult to create functional assets at the grassroots. During the delivery of the mechanism, the state and society both have various other considerations that come into play. This ethnography of everyday practices and the state’s mechanism only offers an example from a vernacular society. This study shows how the neoliberal agenda has influenced the state and society relationship to a considerable extent. It also finds that rather than sharing a dichotomous relationship, state and society are embedded in each other. And it is only from this perspective that one can make a more meaningful analysis of the political and societal practices.
This thesis argues that the political and ethnic affiliations of a community in a multi-ethnic society affect its access to the state machinery and various welfare schemes. While this may be true even at a broader level, it argues that such affiliations play out among the poor, marginal, rural communities at the local level in distinctive ways. The manner in which the state negotiates and renegotiates with the multiple interests of these local communities and yet sustains its paramountcy makes the study of its functioning in a multi-ethnic context interesting. Neoliberal forms of governance are new and need to be understood at the micro-level. Marginalized and vulnerable populations are capable of governing themselves as evident from the informal governance. This is seen in their engagements with these new forms of governance.

It was found from the study that poor people often complain about the mismanagement of fund in PRIs. They complain about the nepotism and mis-governance. Even then they come out in a large number to cast their vote. Generally, in other parts of India, people do not vote when they are disillusioned with the political parties or leader. But in the multi-ethnic societies under the present study the case is different. Marginalised people get legitimacy from the state and their patrons through voting. So, it is one of the most important political activities for the marginal groups in the Napam area.

The common people look up to the state for fulfilling their needs and are driven by a belief that the state would cater to their needs. On the other hand, the state is changing its character and getting corporatized. It seems there is a gap between people’s expectation and state’s delivery of social welfare measures. As such, the only panacea which can solve the problem seems to be either good governance or development. As a senior bureaucrat in the Sonitpur Zila Parishad puts it, “development is the motto of the whole world. All countries are developing by adapting to modern technology and economic activities. Even countries in Africa are developing. Then why should India leave behind? India should not miss the development bus. One cannot imagine the power of development. There is no limit to development and the real development only can be achieved through efficient and good governance”. However, from the study it becomes clear that the meanings and functions of development and governance cannot be conceived in black and white terms. They are complex and nuanced concepts and susceptible to the social processes of those societies where they are practiced.