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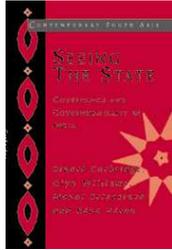
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Seeing the State

Governance and Governmentality in India

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Introduction

Michel Foucault once told an interviewer that it was important to be humble in the face of apparent social irruptions.¹ We should be properly alert, he said, to continuities of history and geography, and not constantly on the look out for markers of ‘the new’ or what today might be called ‘the post-’. This is surely good advice, and we need to bear it in mind when discussing issues like participation and good governance. The idea that states in the past have not been concerned with good government is clearly wrong. The emergence of biopolitics is one strong indicator of the responsibilities that governments are meant to have to their populations. Nevertheless, there is a strong perception in the development community that state failure and bad governance have become important issues since the 1970s, and this perception has been linked to a broader critique of rent-seeking behaviour, simple predation, and *dirigiste* development.

In the next part of the chapter we review some of the debates that have attended the rise of the good governance agenda. We shall also follow Adrian Leftwich and Rob Jenkins in drawing attention to the ways in which the agendas of good governance can be said to depoliticize accounts of development and rule.² They do so, not least, by refusing to pay close attention to questions of state capabilities, and the incapacity of some regimes to secure control over their territories. This matters most in parts of post-colonial Africa, as we indicated in chapter 1, but it is of significance too in parts of eastern India.³ They also make quite far-reaching assumptions about the self-regulating properties of the economy and civil

¹ ‘I think we should have the modesty to say to ourselves that, on the one hand, the time we live in is not the unique or fundamental or irruptive point in history where everything is completed and begun again. We must also have the modesty to say, on the other hand that . . . the time we live in is very interesting; it needs to be analysed and broken down, and that we do well to ask ourselves, “What is the nature of our present?”’ (Foucault 1983: 206).

² Leftwich (1993); Jenkins (2002).

³ For example, in Sahar Block, Bihar and in some of the more remote Blocks of Jharkhand.

society, and thus about the production of modern subjectivities. Roberto DaMatta suggests that in Brazil ‘the individual is considered an unpredictable and unstable force that must be contained through incorporation into the collective social body’ (after Nelson 2003: 12–13). The individual is someone who is not incorporated in a home and who does not enjoy the protection of membership in a social group. Such a person, DaMatta suggests, belongs to the masses, and finds him or herself at the mercy of the police and the law. For everyone else, ‘the laws seem not to apply, a concept captured by the Brazilian saying, “To our enemies, the law; to our friends, everything!”’ (Nelson 2003: 13, quoting DaMatta 1991: 168). Should we assume that matters are very different in India?

In the middle parts of the chapter we consider how the new governance agenda might look from the point of view of some of the key individuals at the Block and District levels who are charged with making it work. Instead of thinking of government actors in impersonal terms, we want to give a stronger sense of their embeddedness in local society. We can then begin to describe the contrasting and often competing pressures that are brought to bear upon them: pressures from their seniors and communities of experts, for example, and pressures from important actors in political society, and perhaps even from some poorer ‘clients’, citizens and family members. We do this first in regard to the Employment Assurance Scheme and discourses that circulate about corruption and development. We show that the good governance agenda presupposes the construction of a type of individual that is uncommon in our field areas, and the manufacturing of which is hampered by a lack of state capacity. Government officers will find it hard to behave like a Weberian bureaucrat when they lack the support of a Weberian bureaucracy. At the same time, however, it is not clear to us that subaltern officers subscribe straightforwardly to the tenets of vernacular society (as described by Chatterjee and Kaviraj, in unconscious recognition, perhaps, of DaMatta), or that they are opposed in principle to some of the developmental concerns that are voiced by higher-ranking public officials. We will maintain that neither perspective on governance (or rule) pays sufficient attention to the diverse ways in which government officers come to see the state. We make this argument, moreover, not simply in relation to the EAS, but also in regard to education. To a lesser degree, we are also able to report some of our findings about the ‘protective’ function of the state, or the ways in which the legal system is constituted, understood and occasionally put to use by different actors.

We conclude by returning to the critique of the good governance agenda that has been voiced by scholars and activists who prefer to concern themselves with politics (and political society). We have already said that

we share this preference in some degree, and we shall elaborate on the assumptions about the codes of conduct that are central to the new public administration. There are financial costs associated with what has been called the deepening of democracy. But we also want to make the point, which we develop further in chapters 8 and 9, that a degree of romanticism about politics is present in the claims of those who shout loudest about the dangers of depoliticization. These claims speak to an account of politics that makes reference to what we shall call an ‘ideal outside’, or a world where politics can be properly constituted and made to secure its desired effects.⁴ Our perspective is less enchanted. It is geared to thinking of politics as a continuum of practical and not always additive actions around the construction of social and economic relationships and forms of rule.

Good governance

Governance is generally understood as ‘the prevailing patterns by which public power is exercised in a given social context’ (Jenkins 2002: 485). As such, it has been a concern for all ruling parties and states. It is equally the case that all governments have concerned themselves with questions of good governance. Since there is no clear definition of ‘the good’, it is possible for totalitarian regimes to make claims about efficient rule, just as corrupt and inept governments can make it look as though they are addressing important issues of statecraft. As Jenkins reminds us, it is the chameleon-like quality of the good governance agenda that makes it so attractive to ‘stakeholders’.⁵ This is certainly the case when it comes to the Bretton Woods institutions, which are bound by their articles of agreement from intervening in a country’s politics. Politics is the preserve of sovereign countries. Institutional change and good governance supposedly are not.

⁴ We will comment in chapter 8 on the analysis of political society developed by Chatterjee and others. Romanticism is less evident here than a prevailing pessimism. This is the counterpart, in some degree, of a particular reading of Foucault on power, albeit one less imbued with the agentless and non-intentionalist reading of history that led Edward Said to criticize Foucault in the 1980s ‘for [his] refus[al] to consider the space of existence beyond the power of the present’ (Legg 2005a: 10, summarizing Said 1984: 245–7).

⁵ We are being polite. Jenkins refers to development agencies drawing ‘promiscuously’ on ideas that have sometimes emanated from the West’s largest consultancy firms, and which are then applied ‘to constrain the performance-inhibiting instincts of southern (and northern) governments by subjecting them to multilateral policy “disciplines”’ (Jenkins 2002: 486). The involvement of firms including Arthur Andersen (as was), Price Waterhouse Cooper and others, in the restructuring of forms of government in southern (and northern) countries, has not yet received the attention from academics and activists that it deserves.

This is a fiction, of course, albeit a necessary fiction, for it was precisely a concern for politics that prompted the most recent invention of a good governance agenda. This first became apparent when the counter-revolution in development theory and practice began to speak about ‘the economy’, and indeed of political economy. Writing in 1974, Anne Krueger suggested that trade distortions in India and Turkey were practised on a massive scale by governments that were content to abuse the privileges of sovereignty. The ‘total value of rents’ in India in 1964 was estimated to be Rs. 14.6 billion, or ‘7.3 per cent of national income’, of which more than two-thirds came from a system of import licences that favoured only a small minority of the population (Krueger 1974: 295). This in turn encouraged a ‘political “vicious circle” [wherein] people perceive that the market mechanism does not function in a way compatible with socially approved goals because of competitive rent-seeking. A political consensus therefore emerges to intervene further in the market, rent-seeking increases, and further intervention results’ (Krueger 1974: 301).

Krueger would later serve as the Chief Economist of the World Bank during the Reagan years. She would then press Bank directors to wean countries away from ‘inwardly-oriented’ development policies. She was helped in this task by the debt crisis of the 1980s. This paved the way for structural adjustment programmes that sought the liberation of ‘the economy’ from the public sector and government misrule. The World Bank also declared that oppressive marketing boards and overvalued exchange rates were responsible for a growing crisis of food production in sub-Saharan Africa. This pattern of ‘urban bias’, however, could not survive rising food prices. Food riots might break out in the cities, and regime change, to use the modern parlance, would create a space for external agencies to impose adjustment programmes.⁶ Devaluation could be pushed through, and marketing boards or their equivalents broken up. ‘The market’ would then do its work, and development would resume what Michael Beenstock called ‘its normal course’, undisturbed by the mistaken or simply venal claims of politicians.⁷

The idea that sovereign misrule could be turned so rapidly into governmentality (as expressed in the self-regulating capacities of ‘the economy’) was shaken for a while by the experience of Russia with shock therapy measures. The major architects of the ‘Washington Consensus’

⁶ The economic analysis can be found in the so-called Berg Report (World Bank 1981); the politics of urban bias was explored more assiduously, and from within a rational choice framework, by Robert Bates (Bates 1989).

⁷ Beenstock (1984) made this remark in the context of the debt crisis, where he was concerned to argue against proposals for greater regulation of the international economy. Nevertheless, the remark was clearly intended to have wide purchase.

now insisted they had been misunderstood and took care to distance themselves from the utopian project put forward by Jeffrey Sachs and his colleagues.⁸ Jeffrey Williamson declared that his original account of a Washington Consensus had not intended to prescribe a set of correct economic policies for all countries. He was mainly concerned that countries should avoid policies that were straightforwardly wrong, like running consistently high trade or budget deficits, or failing to deal with 'sick' industries.⁹ But a more significant change to the governance agenda was brought about by the end of the Cold War. Confident that socialism had been defeated, and yet mindful of the need for effective government to support 'free' or 'freer' markets, an agenda for good governance now took shape which married respect for the market's power to create modern subjects to an insistence that those subjects would flourish best in vibrant civil societies. Good governance, then, came to define those patterns of rule which protected the individual citizen from political society (politics still being seen in essentially negative terms) and from unrepresentative government.¹⁰

In sub-Saharan Africa and the ex-USSR this led to a particular concern for multi-party politics and democratization. In Latin America and South Asia attention was focused more often on the institutions of democracy, and on the need to strengthen civic associations. Side by side, then, with policies that were put forward to privatize or at least deregulate some parts of the economy, measures were proposed to transfer some of the powers of the central state to local government institutions and non-governmental organizations. As James Manor has shown with great clarity, the agenda for decentralization describes a range of policies that may or may not be pursued in tandem. It is important, at a minimum, to distinguish between: (a) deconcentration, or the dispersal of agents of higher levels

⁸ Even so noted a supporter of free trade and free markets as Jagdish Bhagwati was unimpressed with Sachs's activities in Russia. Alarmed that he might offer similar advice to his new 'interest', India, Bhagwati wrote that: 'The last time that technocratic full-speed ahead advice to a reforming government backfired badly was when shock therapy for macro-stabilization was prescribed for Russia, with a backlash that gave Russia much political turmoil and little economic progress while returning Jeffrey Sachs unceremoniously . . . to Harvard. [He would later join Bhagwati at Columbia University.] I am reminded of his famous line: "You cannot cross a chasm in two leaps", to which Padma Desai replied: "You cannot cross it one leap either unless you are Indiana Jones; so you drop a bridge instead"' (Bhagwati 1993: 37).

⁹ 'I can see no advantage to democracy having major parties spouting economic nonsense' (Williamson 1993: 1330. See also Williamson 1990).

¹⁰ In the World Bank's formulation it defined, 'political institutions such as constitutional rules, the division of power among levels of government, independent agencies, mechanisms for citizens to monitor public behaviour, and rules that inhibit corruption . . . [all these] succeed in restraining officials of the state from arbitrary action' (World Bank 2001: 115).

of government to lower level arenas; (b) fiscal decentralization, or the transfer of budgetary resources to lower level arenas; and (c) devolution, or the transfer of democratic and administrative powers to lower levels of government (after Manor 1999: 5, citing Rondinelli 1981). Perhaps more important, however, is the fact that one or more versions of this agenda are now circulating widely in both northern and southern countries. They have the *imprimature* not just of the Bretton Woods institutions but also of the world's leading consultancy companies (keen to make money from applying the lessons of the 'new corporate governance') and academic units like the Harvard Center for International Development.¹¹

In a striking demonstration of one of this book's central theses, indeed, it is clear that Merilee Grindle at Harvard has played an important role in 'challenging the state' (the title of one of her books) to do better. She has acted as a consultant to a number of countries, helped teach senior officials in short courses at Harvard, written widely on the need for public sector reforms, and become a champion of the view that a new generation of public servants must have a sense of ownership of the 'new governance' agenda. (This might be done by linking pay more clearly to performance and by sensitizing officials to their responsibilities to those they serve.)

We would also maintain, however, that the agendas of good governance are constantly in flux, and are open to at least some degree of critical reflection by their proponents. Judith Tendler's book, *Good Government in the Tropics*, provides a case in point. Her study of a preventive health project (Health Agent Programme) in Ceara state in Brazil in the early 1990s suggested that very significant health-care improvements had been secured by thousands of highly motivated field agents, including mainly female nurse-supervisors. Vaccination rates soared and infant mortality rates fell. Although poorly paid, these agents showed a 'strong commitment' to the programme because they had been engaged through a 'remarkable process of merit hiring' (Tendler 1997: 28).¹² More so than some other writers, however, Tendler was reluctant to focus only on questions of cost or the fact that the state had surrendered one of its traditional functions to a non-state actor. She also noted that the project has worked well in Ceara because higher-level state functionaries had taken actions to marginalize the role of local mayors, or political actors who might otherwise have seen it as a new source of patronage. Politics might remain a source of intrigue or even damage, but the suggestion

¹¹ Jenkins (2002: 485) refers to inputs from the fields of 'corporate governance' and 'network governance', but neglects the role of academic centres and the courses they provide.

¹² Although Tendler does not give it the same emphasis, she also points out that 'health-agent jobs offered full-time work year-round, in an agricultural economy where employment was highly seasonal' (Tendler 1997: 29).

that a strong (central) state might be required to make a space for non-governmental activities begins to point away from the middle ground of good governance studies. Whether it also begins to point towards a more robust understanding of political society is less clear, and is something we shall come back to.

Good governance in India

Significant elements of the new public administration are now recognizable in India and are being pushed quite vigorously by New Delhi. It is important to understand, even so, that the good governance agenda in India has taken shape with reference to a long tradition of concern about state–society relationships. The leading lights of India’s anti-colonial struggles all spoke about the importance of good government, and suggested that power had to be used for and by ‘the people’. The debates which surrounded this platitude related mainly to the site of empowerment. Gandhi pointed to the village and the *panch*, while Ambedkar looked to District and state-level institutions to break the power of locally dominant castes.¹³ By the 1960s, moreover, the question of corruption was forcing itself onto the national political agenda. The setting up of the Santhanam Committee in 1963 was one indication that the post-colonial state was not living up to its lofty ideals. Its report on the prevention of corruption recommended the setting up of a system of Chief Vigilance Officers (CVOs) to review existing ‘opportunities for corruption and malpractices’ (Government of India 1964: 289). The CVOs were also required to maintain ‘proper surveillance on officers of doubtful integrity’. Gunnar Myrdal later generalized some of the Report’s conclusions in his account of the ‘soft state’ in India (and other countries in Asia).¹⁴ His calls for less government, for government that avoided administrative delay, and for government that reduced the scope for personal discretion on the part of its officers, anticipated some of the concerns of the new public administration. The relevance of these calls was highlighted again in the 1970s and 1980s as concerns grew about the abuse of executive power and the criminalization of politics.¹⁵ By the end

¹³ Ambedkar referred to India’s villages as ‘dens of ignorance, narrow-mindedness and communalism’ (Constituent Assembly Debates, quoted in Galanter 1991: 3). He looked to strong, rational and centralized rule as a means of empowerment and enlightenment for the rural poor.

¹⁴ Myrdal (1968).

¹⁵ The offices of the *Indian Express* were raided in 1987 precisely and ironically because the newspaper was seeking to expose the government of Rajiv Gandhi over the Bofors affair. On the criminalization of politics, see especially Bardhan (2001), Brass (1997) and Kohli (1990).

of the 1980s, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was sufficiently convinced that decentralization would be a vote-winner that he built it into his electioneering slogan: 'We have given you power', he took to saying.

In fact, nothing much changed under Mr Gandhi, and it was left to Narasimha Rao in the 1990s to turn promises into policies.¹⁶ The economic reforms that were introduced by his government were at first intended to deal with India's balance of payments problems, but a broader programme of administrative and economic reforms was also meant to address what Atul Kohli had called India's 'growing crisis of governability'. It did so, however, in a manner that might have surprised Kohli. Kohli had suggested that widespread administrative failure in India was being produced by an absence of enduring coalitions and a structural incapacity to accommodate political conflict without violence (Kohli 1990: 23). It followed that a solution had to be found in the field of politics. Narasimha Rao, on the other hand, and the prime ministers that followed him in the 1990s, preferred to follow the logic of the new public administration. They looked, that is to say, to a slowly evolving mix of deregulation, privatization, civil service reform and decentralization to produce the administrative and political effects that Kohli had deemed necessary.

Embedded officials and the Employment Assurance Scheme

It is not possible here to comment on all or even most aspects of this new agenda (see box 5.1). In particular, we cannot discuss the local consequences of macro-economic policy changes, although we recognize that these might be significant for poorer people. Much will depend on how state governments amplify or dampen these changes in terms of their public spending decisions. We do note, however, that some very severe objections have been raised against the good governance agenda, several of which turn on the assumptions it makes about state capacity and the world-views of public officials. In the context of sub-Saharan Africa, especially, Rob Jenkins follows Robert Jackson in talking about the 'quasi-states' that are often to be found there.¹⁷ Unable to enforce even 'minimal levels of social penetration' across the territories they are meant to

¹⁶ This, at any rate, is the judgement of James Manor (1999: 44–5). It would perhaps be fairer to Mr Gandhi to point out that it was under his leadership that six Technology Missions were set up (to explore, for example, C-DOT connections to remote locations), and that the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments were prefigured by the PM-DM workshops that he instituted.

¹⁷ Jenkins (2002: 486), citing Jackson (1991).

Box 5.1 The new public administration and poverty alleviation in the countryside

In addition to a new emphasis on privatization, deregulation of labour markets, a slimmed down and more responsive civil service, and new initiatives in the fields of education and health-care, the Government of India has redesigned some of its poverty alleviation programmes, not least in the countryside. Very much in line with participatory development philosophies, and with ideas to the fore about the formation of self-help groups and social capital, the Ministry of Rural Development has launched two initiatives that have taken shape since the time of our initial fieldwork.

India's wage-employment schemes, the EAS and JGSY (formerly JRY), have been reformed as two 'streams' of the Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana (SGRY), which was launched in September 2001. The SGRY is self-targeting and has the primary objectives of providing additional rural employment and ensuring food security at the household level. Wage payments now include an in-kind component; that is, workers under the SGRY are partly paid in food grains from the Food Corporation of India. The scheme is decentralized and demand-led. Only those districts that demonstrate a popular need for the programme, by swift utilization of funds and a capacity to administer it, receive a second yearly instalment. SGRY projects are put forward by the *panchayats*, and the 'second-stream' village-level schemes require the approval of the village assembly (*gram sabha*). The *panchayats* are responsible for the implementation of SGRY schemes, but the execution of works can also be entrusted to well-established Self-Help Groups of the Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY) (SGRY Guidelines, Ministry of Rural Development, <http://rural.nic.in/g1.htm>).

The SGSY is India's other main poverty-alleviation programme. This self-employment scheme was launched in April 1999, and replaced the Integrated Rural Development Programme and a few other self-employment schemes. The SGSY is implemented in partnership between the District Rural Development Agencies, the *panchayats*, banks and NGOs. The programme's objective is to lift and keep *swarozgaries* (self-help families) above the poverty line by 'organising the rural poor into Self Help Groups (SHGs) through the process of social mobilization, their training and capacity building and provision of income generating assets'. The expectation is that the SHG approach will help 'the poor to build their self-confidence through community action', establish a large number of micro-enterprises,

and 'ultimately lead to the strengthening and socio-economic empowerment as well as improve [the] collective bargaining power [of the rural poor]' (SGRY Guidelines, Ministry of Rural Development, <http://rural.nic.in/g1.htm>). Although the SGSY had given loans to over two million individual *swarozgaries* by 2004, the discursive emphasis has been on SHGs, of which almost 1.3 million have been formed since 1999. These groups have between ten and twenty members and at least half of them should be women-only SHGs. The groups are supposed to go through four 'stages': (1) *formation*: where groups are mobilized and motivated by facilitators (including NGOs); (2) *stabilization*: where groups begin with savings and intra-group borrowing; (3) *micro-credit*: where the SHG gets access to revolving bank loans; and (4) *micro-enterprise development*: where the SHG takes up income-generation activities in a sector that has been identified as economically suitable for the region by the Block SGSY committee (SGRY Guidelines). The 'new paradigm' of development is also reflected in the evaluation of the SGSY. This tends to highlight the number of SHGs formed rather than the disbursement of funds or the value of assets created. The Ministry of Rural Development only notes the following regarding SGSY on its 'Achievements at a Glance' website (<http://rural.nic.in/rd2.htm>): 'Since the inception of [SGSY] – a holistic programme for promoting self-employment in rural areas – 11.45 lakh Self-Help Groups (SHGs) formed till date and about 1.00 lakh Groups have been constructed.' (Sources: as in text.)

command, these quasi-states are ill-equipped to govern, let alone govern well. Instead of strengthening local infrastructures of rule, however, the Bretton Woods institutions are now demanding that the governments of these quasi-states surrender such economic powers as they have to external agencies. Ever neglectful of political realities, these institutions fondly assume that structural adjustment programmes will pave the way to good governance, even when the evidence points in the opposite direction.¹⁸ Barbara Harriss-White, meanwhile, writing of India, argues that

¹⁸ The World Bank has acknowledged that 'The state cannot provide costly public goods without the power to tax individuals and companies to raise public revenues' (World Bank 2001: 99). What it neglects is the difficulty that many states face in raising taxes when a climate of opinion has been created which favours tax and spending cuts. Nowhere is this more evident than in the US, where George W. Bush exploited this climate to push through a fiscal regime which cut the taxes of the super-rich (and especially those trousering \$300,000 or more) before 'discipline' was restored by attacks upon the surpluses which working- and middle-class Americans had built up in the social security system. The most effective critic of Bush, by far, has been Paul Krugman, writing in the *New York Times* (see Krugman 2003, 2004).

'The World Bank's project for the State is the opposite of what is needed' (Harriss-White 2003: 100). She also contends that the World Bank is missing two more important points when it talks of corruption and the need for new and more efficient forms of government: firstly, that tax evasion is far more disabling of government than is corruption, and, secondly, that the so-called state in India has already been privatized and turned into a vehicle (the shadow state) for the accumulative projects of local capitalist classes (Harriss-White 2003: 100–1).

We shall come back to these broader observations at the end of the chapter. We shall repeat here only the rather cryptic remark that we made earlier on; namely, that while we are sympathetic to significant parts of this analysis, we are not fully in agreement with its political or policy-related undertow (see Conclusion). For the moment, however, we want to focus on larger issues by means of a much smaller lens. We want to consider the question of good governance at the local level, and with close regard for the ways in which government officers understand some of the 'new' initiatives they are meant to preside over. This will take us back to the Employment Assurance Scheme and village education councils, both of which advertise the concerns of the new public administration for flexible bureaucracies and the responsiveness of officials to the broader public. Is it the case that the local state is inefficient, overstuffed and fundamentally venal, as the new governance orthodoxy so often assumes, and if so, why? Is this likely to change as government servants are required to respond to citizens as clients? And is it sensible to assume that directives from New Delhi or state capitals will have the impacts at local level that are intended (or supposedly intended) by senior-level bureaucrats? Might there not be other pressures which affect the actions of members of what Kaviraj has called 'the vernacular state and society'? Might it be the case, as Ronald Inden has argued even more strongly, that men and women from this quarter are unimpressed by ideas of generalized morality, and are opposed in important ways to what he calls the grandiose discourses of planning, development and nation-building?¹⁹

These questions are not easily answered, for much will depend on the characteristics of local political societies. But consider how the Employment Assurance Scheme was redesigned in several of our Districts, and how this reworking speaks to questions of corruption and possible

¹⁹ Inden suggests that these discourses are underpinned by a concept of Reason that is every bit as transcendental as the religious progresses that endowed the medieval king of kings with the 'luminous will' of Vishnu (Inden 1995: 271). In each case, particular pilgrimages or progresses (small-scale developments) are sublimated into a grander idea of Progress or Modernity, a grander idea that turns its back on the lives and wishes of a majority of Indians who are expected to heed their master's voice and respond dutifully.

gaps in understanding between elite and subaltern officials. We know that the first aim of the EAS was to set up a demand-led system of employment provision. But an important second objective was to make sure that any schemes sanctioned under the EAS guidelines would be labour-intensive. Thus, while the Government of India insisted that 'the provision of employment under this scheme results in the creation of durable productive assets in the Block area' (Government of India 1993b: 3), it also required that: 'Only labour-intensive works of a productive nature which create durable assets should be taken up for sanction under EAS and included in the shelf of works/projects' (Government of India 1993b: 4).

In practice these guidelines gave District-level officers considerable room for manoeuvre, as we shall see later, but the bias to employment creation was clear nonetheless. Section 3.10 of the guidelines states that: 'All works started under EAS should be labour-intensive works only. Labour-intensive works are defined as those which have a ratio of unskilled labour to equipment, material, and other skilled work of not less than 60:40. Works requiring a larger component of materials like cement, steel, etc., should not be sanctioned under the EAS unless the excess cost on material components is provided from other sectoral programme funds' (Government of India 1993b: 5). The guidelines further suggested that this ratio of 60:40 could be met if new works under the EAS were distributed as follows: 40 per cent on water and soil conservation measures, including afforestation, agro-horticulture and silvipasture; 20 per cent on minor irrigation works; 20 per cent on link roads (as per the District's Master Plan guidelines); and 20 per cent on primary school and *anganwadi* (health-care) buildings.

Now consider table 5.1. This makes it clear that the schemes that were run under the EAS in our Bihar (and Jharkhand) research Districts (from 1993–4 in Ranchi, from 1996–7 in Bhojpur and Vaishali) were designed mainly to run as material-intensive projects. In Murhu Block (Ranchi) 156 schemes were sanctioned in the years 1993–4 to 1998, and of these schemes only seventeen could be described as labour-intensive (the pond or *ahar* schemes). A further ninety schemes worth Rs.18.5 million generated a demand for unskilled labour that cannot have amounted to more than 30–35 per cent of spending, and this percentage declined over time as individual road-building schemes became more expensive. In Bidupur Block (Vaishali) just fifty-seven schemes were sanctioned in a three-year period, and 90 per cent of the funds was spent on road projects that were often all-weather and black-topped. This did not deter the relevant officials from declaring that 58 per cent of the budget had been spent on the wages of unskilled labour. (In Sahar Block the figures were shown to be

Table 5.1. Sector-wise breakdown of EAS schemes actually implemented by the Blocks, Bihar

	Murhu Block, Ranchi, 1993/4–99: Average EAS spending per year – Rs 5.2 million		Sahar Block, Bhojpur 1996/7–99/00: Average EAS spending per year – Rs 3.6 million		Bidupur Block, Vaishali 1996/7–98/9: Average EAS spending per year – Rs 5.0 million	
	Number of schemes	Share of total budget	Number of schemes	Share of total budget	Number of schemes	Share of total budget
School building	20	11.0%	29	42.6%	12	8.6%
Community hall	8	4.3%	2	1.3%	–	–
PHC	3	2.6%	–	–	–	–
ICDS	2	0.5%	–	–	–	–
Road	62	29.0%	23	37.2%	42	90.0%
Check-dam	24	28.1%	3	4.9%	2	1.2%
Bridge/ culvert	9	13.4%	2	2.2%	–	–
Pond/ahar	17	7.2%	3	4.9%	–	–
Other	11	4.1%	6	6.9%	1	0.2%
<i>Total</i>	<i>156</i>	<i>100%*</i>	<i>68</i>	<i>100%</i>	<i>57</i>	<i>100%</i>

Notes: PCH = primary health centre; ICDS = integrated community development scheme* = all totals are rounded

Source: District and Block statistics.

exactly 60:40; a District-level officer in Vaishali told us that he favoured a 58:42 split on the ground that it 'appeared more credible'.²⁰

What accounts for this bias towards 'big' projects, and what does this tell us about the local state and the good governance agenda? It might be thought that a bias of this sort reflects a lack of understanding among Block-level workers. And it is true that none of the Block Development Officers to whom we talked had a good understanding of the EAS, despite the fact that they had the assumed responsibilities of the *Pramukh* (the elected chief of the *Panchayat Samiti*) in the wake of the dissolution of the *panchayats* in Bihar in 1998. The BDOs knew that the EAS was about employment provision, but they were poorly informed about the demanded or guaranteed nature of that 'provision'. The BDOs rather understood the EAS to be a sister programme to the Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY) programme, with the former taking up 'big schemes' and the latter 'small schemes' (interview with BDO, Murhu). Levels of understanding were still less clear lower down the government ladder, and we were assured by a Block Agricultural Officer in Sahar that '*EAS mein sunishchit samay per scheme ko poora ker dena hota hai*' (EAS means that we have to complete the scheme in the assured time frame).

Misunderstandings of this sort should indeed set off alarm bells when it comes to the assumptions that are currently being made about information flows in decentralized government structures. But they cannot explain the preference for 'big schemes' that is evident at the District level. The Block and village-level workers, after all, were receiving their information from their superiors at the District-level; they did not have access to the same manuals as their bosses. So why did District-level officers act as they did when sanctioning material-intensive schemes? Part of the answer is to be found in the technical imperatives of the Employment Assurance Scheme. The District-level officers who we spoke to in Bihar were well aware that the Block was the main implementing agency for the EAS. They also knew that many Block offices were overburdened. In the 1970s the Block office was required to deal with relatively few poverty-reduction schemes. In the 1980s and 1990s these schemes were significantly expanded, and, increasingly, were supposed to be run on a decentralized basis. By 1999 a typical Block was receiving six to eight times the funds flow it would have received in 1979, and the Block office might be asked to run 100–130 schemes under JRY and EAS, as well as providing 1,000 houses under the *Indira Awas* scheme and 500 wells under the Million Wells scheme.

²⁰ Wherever possible, we prefer not to state the name or the precise job title of our interviewees, many of whom talked to us on condition that they would not be identified. In some cases, however, as with well-known politicians who are easily identified, our rule had to be relaxed and this was explained to the respondent.

In a Block like Sahar these schemes were supposed to be spread across fifty-five villages in twelve *panchayats*, many of which are very difficult to access. The Block office in Murhu is responsible for 141 villages in twenty-four *panchayats*, while in Vaishali there are 133 villages to serve in twenty-four *panchayats*. Despite repeated and sometimes justified claims about government overstaffing in India, these workloads had to be shouldered by about the same number of workers as would be found in a Block in 1980. In Murhu, for example, the complement of civil staff in the Block office ran to the Head Assistant, the *Nazir* (accountant) and two assistants. On the technical side there were four Junior Engineers and one Assistant Engineer (who also worked for the neighbouring Khunti Block), while the complement of field staff ran to twenty-four *Panchayat Sewaks* and nine Village-Level Workers. The BDO of Murhu despaired of the situation. He told us that the better able and connected of his workers were trying to find work in urban areas, and that his accountant was not up to the task of handling cash transactions in the sum of Rs. 3–4 crores.²¹

The situation was not much different in Bidupur or Sahar. In Sahar there were only two Junior Engineers to deal with between 300 and 400 schemes. These men were expected: (a) to prepare estimates for proposed schemes (prior to any approval being granted at the District level); (b) to prepare the layout for a scheme and to work with the chosen contractor; (c) to supervise in person the most crucial stages of construction, which might include foundation casting, the fixing of a lintel, and roof casting; (d) to inspect and measure the progress of a scheme (in part to secure future fund flows to the executing agent); and (e) to assist senior engineers (including the Assistant Engineer) in their inspection visits. Naturally, these tasks could not be completed properly, even where the Junior Engineer was working to the best of his ability. If there is state failure – and significant leakage of funds – it is at least in part because the local state is underdeveloped in relation to the tasks set for it. And this will be true even when supervisory staff from the non-technical side are deployed to help the process of scheme inspection.

But it is not just technical or capacity problems that incline District-level officials against the sanctioning of a large number of labour-intensive (and *kuccha*) schemes. A Block-level officer in Murhu told us that: ‘We tried to include proposals of *morum* [unmetalled] roads and irrigation ponds in our proposal as they generate maximum employment. But, during the scrutiny at the level of the DDC [Deputy Development Commissioner], those were struck off the list. In fact, in 1997, DDC gave an oral instruction that henceforth no earthwork schemes should even be

²¹ About \$800,000 at 1999 prices.

proposed.’ When pressed on why he thought this was, the officer replied that: ‘They [District-level officials] worry about misuse of money if more *kuccha* works are executed . . . [This was] not simply because they want to save skins [but because] they genuinely believe that *kuccha* works will always be subject to siphoning off of government money, and they wish to safeguard against that.’

This understanding of the motives of a (senior) District-level officer proved to be extremely accurate. In our conversations with District Magistrates and District Development Officers we found that political considerations loomed large in their decision-making. Contrary to the assertions of some neoliberals, it is a mistake to assume that government officers in India are intent on maximizing the rents they can extract from the misuse of a public office. It is clear that a scheme like the Employment Assurance Scheme does lend itself to a system of institutionalized cuts and commissions, much as Robert Wade has described in the case of a south Indian irrigation department (Wade 1982). Junior Engineers regularly mark up the costs of a scheme, and there are significant opportunities for BDOs, JEs and others to receive a cut from the monies that are then spent. Nevertheless, we estimated that the magnitude of fund leakage from EAS schemes in Bihar was of the order of 30–35 per cent of the total flow of funds, and that (or rather ‘but that’, given received views about Bihar) we found no cases of outright looting where a scheme existed only on paper. (Matters were worse in Malda District, West Bengal.) Even corrupt officials find themselves in a more complex set of relationships than is acknowledged in a simple theory of predation. Perhaps especially in Bihar, given the publicity that has been given to the cattle fodder scam, government servants are mindful that they might be found out if they engage in corrupt behaviour, or that they might be informed upon by one of their colleagues.²² This cautions them against excessively predatory forms of behaviour. In the case of District-level officers, moreover, there are strong pressures not just to exact rents (which might be needed to maintain close links with sympathetic politicians, or to help secure better postings), but also to clamp down on the corrupt activities of their subordinates.²³ Thus, while it is clearly the case that some bribes (*ghus*) are channelled up the hierarchy of Bihar Administrative Service and Indian Administrative Service officers to the District and state levels, it was equally clear to us that District-level officials were pressing for *pucca* EAS schemes as a way of guarding against what they saw as the

²² A scam that allegedly involved the looting of state budget funds (possibly \$200 million) that were meant to pay for livestock improvements in Bihar. On this and other scams, see Nambisan (2000).

²³ For a more nuanced account of corruption and rent-seeking, see the collection of essays edited by Mushtaq Khan and Jomo Kwame Sundaram (2000).

twin evils of *kuccha* projects: the fact that they provide so much scope for corruption (on account of being difficult to inspect), and the fact that some of these schemes will be built to fail (or to fall down), thus denying any visible evidence of ‘development’.

What we observed here was a lack of trust in Block-level officials by their District-level bosses. But this lack of trust also extends upwards from the District to the governments sitting in Patna and New Delhi. When we pressed District-level officers on their efforts to reshape the aims and objectives of the EAS – efforts that were freely acknowledged – they focused on what they saw as the lack of credibility that surrounds the issue of the flow of funds. All of our respondents challenged the idea that New Delhi or Patna could ever hope to fund sufficient schemes to employ two adult household members for up to 100 days each year throughout India, and then mainly in the lean season. The DDC of Ranchi was adamant that the Centre simply didn’t have the resources to direct more than two instalments of funds to any District of Bihar in a given year, a view based, no doubt, on his difficulties in acquiring a third tranche of funds for Ranchi District. When we put it to him that some Districts in Andhra Pradesh were reputed to have received five or six instalments, he countered by saying that he had visited New Delhi to press for a fresh round of funding, and had been told by the Secretary of the Ministry of Rural Development that this was so much rhetoric: no District had received more than three instalments of EAS funds in a year.

Whether or not this is true is not really the issue. The point is that DMs and DDCs in Bihar don’t trust the authorities in New Delhi or Patna to provide sufficient funds to ‘check the out-migration and exploitation of *akushal mazdoor* [unskilled labour]’ – which is how, in 1995, the Government of Bihar described the main purposes of a programme that would be ‘demand-driven and [with] no financial limit’ (Government of Bihar, Secretary – Rural Development, Letter No.3248, 17 June 1995, sent to all DMs and DDCs, Bihar).²⁴ They also doubted whether their own Blocks and Districts, or indeed the government of Bihar, had the means or the drive to make demands of New Delhi at the right time. The DM of Bhojpur told us that even if the EAS could draw down unlimited funds from the Centre, those funds were still budgeted on an annual basis and would be taken up on a first-come, first-served basis. In his view, Bihar was too slow in making its demands for further instalments of funds. By the time it was ready to claim a third round of funds it was too late in the financial year: other states had got in ahead.

²⁴ It is significant here, as Ben Rogaly and colleagues (2002) have emphasized in their research, that the state is coding migration as a problem, even as a pathology.

Whatever the truth of the matter – and the fact that some Blocks always have EAS funds unspent suggests that local capacity is key – the fact remains that District-level officers are wary about advertising the EAS too widely. In their view, it is better to plan for a small number of well-costed and at least partly monitored *pucca* developments than to plan for a large number of *kuccha* schemes that will generate kickbacks and local conflict, and which cannot hope to soak up the local demand for paid labour. As the DM of Vaishali summed up: ‘The fund that we get now, two instalments, can hardly generate 100 days’ employment. In fact, with these limited resources available under EAS, the approximate labour days generated are around 200,000 man-days, and, the surveyed number of labourers being close to this figure, approximately one man-day for each labourer has been created in this District. If one looked at the man-days generated in the entire State, and the figure of the State-wide registered labourers, then by and large the same ratio would be observed.’

Counting on development? Politicians and the rural poor

The problem of trust that we have just described is bound up with the classic problem of principals and agents, and it is perfectly reasonable to maintain that the ‘new public administration’ has addressed itself to this issue. Indeed, it would be a disservice to the good governance agenda to maintain otherwise. Proposals for performance-related pay, and for regular information-sharing meetings between senior and junior officials, are geared in part to reducing the importance of inadequate and sometimes deliberately blocked information flows between the juniors (the agents) and the seniors (the principals). What this agenda seems to neglect, however, is that both principals and agents must also have regard for their relations with key actors in political society. Their calculations can never be confined to the circuits of government rule. Moreover, as we have seen (chapters 3 and 4, but see also chapter 6 for extended discussion), the structuring of political society in eastern India is often at odds with the descriptions that are put forward in the literatures on participation and good governance. In our Bidupur field site not a single person had taken up work under the Employment Assurance Scheme within the village, and yet there were few complaints about the workings of the scheme there, nor were there in Sahar or Murhu.²⁵ Part of the reason for this has

²⁵ Some work was obtained by a group of Harijans on another (non-EAS) road scheme connecting the village school to the western Yadav *tola*. They were promptly dismissed when it came time for black-topping the road, and skilled labourers were brought in from outside.

to do with lack of information about the scheme, as we have reported, but this is only part of the story. There were also pressures from within village communities, and from their political representatives, to see the EAS as a scheme that would create durable assets, and which would bring 'development' to rural communities. In an important sense, people were more interested in outcomes than in processes.

These pressures played themselves out in different ways. In Sahar Block, contrary to our expectations, there was only limited evidence of political mobilization around the benefits of EAS schemes. Such activities as there were took the form of direct petitioning of senior government officers through the institution of the *Janata Durbar*. There were efforts too by some Musahars in an adjoining village to make sure that someone from that community was appointed as an executing agent of an EAS scheme.²⁶ But in the poorest *tola* of the village where we worked no benefits from major government schemes had been received over the course of twenty years, despite this *tola* (with its high population of Scheduled Castes) being a stronghold of the sitting Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA), himself a member of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist). In this case a lack of mobilization did spring from a lack of information, as well as from reluctance in some quarters to engage with the state. The local MLA was unfamiliar with the demand-led provisions of the EAS guidelines, and had ceded responsibilities for the selection of schemes to District-level officers. They in turn ensured that every *panchayat* in Sahar Block had received some EAS funds by 1999, even if nearly half of all the *tolas* within the villages of these *panchayats* (including in the locality where we worked) received no funds at all (see figure 5.1). As we intimated before, the concern of the District-level staff was to ensure that 'development' was visible in the field, and, in Sahar especially, to make sure that 'development' did not stoke up political tensions or rivalries.²⁷ In practice, though, at least in the *panchayat* where we mainly worked, there were almost no efforts to ensure that schemes were placed in the poorest *tolas*, or to inform poor villagers of their right to demand work.

²⁶ We do not wish to underestimate the significance of this challenge. The fact that the Musahars successfully challenged the power of the Bhumihars in an open village meeting (see chapter 3), in the process mobilizing their women in an effort to secure the election of a managing agent, is remarkable, and is testimony to the concerted strength of CPI-ML activities in the area. It also suggests a deepening of civil society in the locality (see also chapter 8).

²⁷ Here, as elsewhere, District officials were wary of schemes that demanded the active participation of groups of villagers (or village factions, as they might be described). Many officials preferred to work with and through established village leaders or local politicians, the better, they said, to get the job of development done.

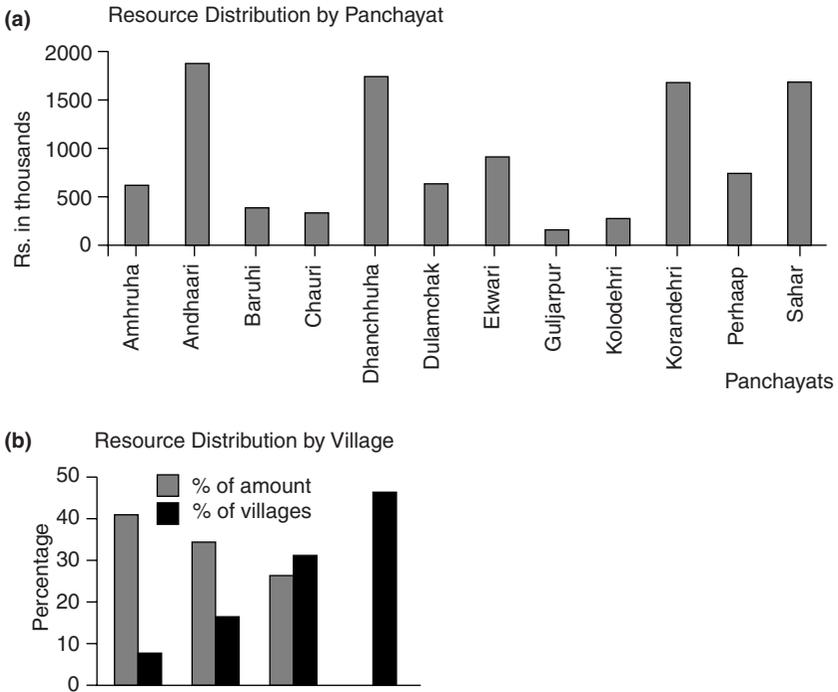


Figure 5.1 EAS spending by panchayat and village, Sahar Block, Bhojpur District, 1996–7 – 1998–9

A lack of awareness of the demand-led nature of the EAS was also apparent in Murhu Block (Ranchi District), but in several of the *panchayats* in this Block the *Mukhiya* (elected leader) was active in pressing for a flow of funds from government. In the *panchayat* where we worked (see figure 5.2), the *Mukhiya* was an especially strong representative of his community, and most of the (mainly tribal) villagers looked to him to access the state on their behalf. The *Mukhiya* had been responsible for getting EAS cards for a small number of villagers (admittedly only two from our sample population), and he worked closely with the *Panchayat Sewak* to draw up an annual list of possible schemes. One of his close associates told us that: ‘*Panchayat Sewak* comes and tells us that we should list out important schemes: check-dams, schools, roads, sitting platform, community buildings, drainage and so on. He also tells not to list more than 5–6 schemes, sometimes more when the *panchayat* is big. This is done after a few of us collect and deliberate [the *Mukhiya* and his inner circle], but usually we give 10–15 schemes. Ultimately, 2–4

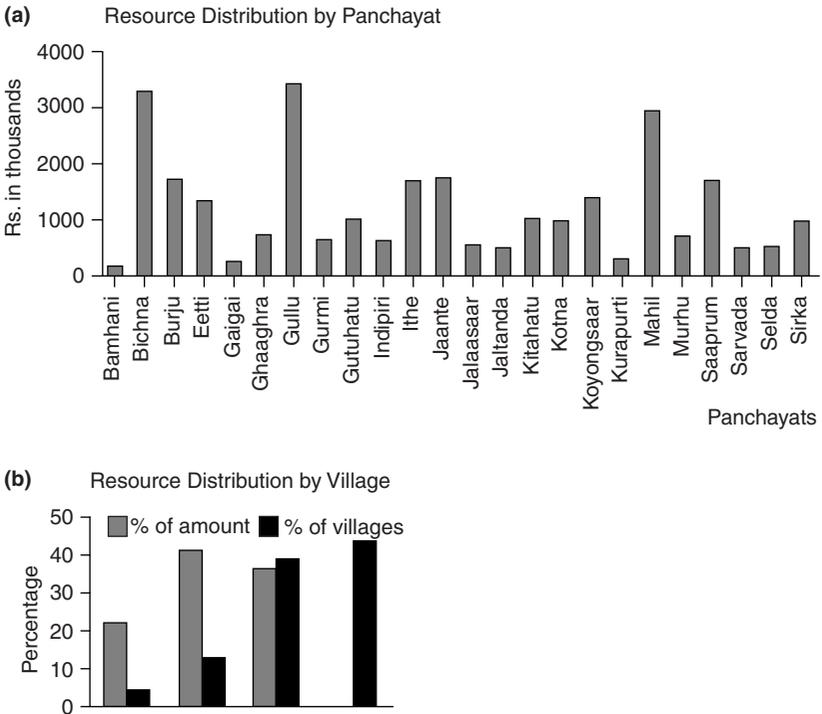


Figure 5.2 EAS spending by panchayat and village, Murhu Block, Ranchi District, 1993-4 – 1998-9

schemes come to the *panchayat*, and, he might have added, the *Mukhiya* largely takes responsibility for placing them and for carrying out the work. Interestingly, the only opposition to the *Mukhiya* came from a group of unemployed youths who wanted to control some of these schemes. In this case, though, and in several other cases which came to our attention, no argument was raised against *pucca* development projects. To the contrary, the youths wanted a check-dam to be built in their part of the village. Like the *Mukhiya*, they were happy to define the EAS in terms of the creation of visible and durable assets. If some work came from the scheme, that was well and good. But work was not always the main concern: that could sometimes be had in the brickfields of Gorakhpur, or at building sites in Calcutta. Even the poorest villagers understood development (*vikas*) in conventional terms, and welcomed tangible signs of it.

A commitment to ‘development’ was still more apparent in Bidupur Block, Vaishali District, but in this case, unusually, the leading local

politician was extremely knowledgeable about all government schemes, and had partly taken control of them in his constituency. Unlike his counterparts in Murhu and Sahar Blocks, the *de facto* MLA of this area (and *de jure* Member of the Legislative Council (MLC)), BB, was well aware of the demand-led provisions of the Employment Assurance Scheme, and he knew the details of those guidelines that specify the 'proper balance' of unskilled labour and materials in different schemes. Indeed, he provided us with a critique of those guidelines, arguing that it would be absurd to make afforestation a priority in Bidupur, given its location next to the Ganges: what was needed was all-weather roads, and if their construction required the importation of skilled labour, so be it.²⁸

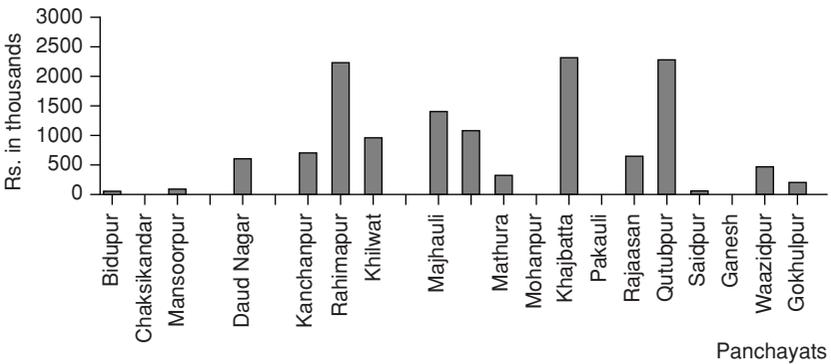
This attitude to employment generation is surely linked to the fact that BB, and RR (at the time the MLA for the Hajipur Assembly Constituency, into which six *panchayats* of Bidupur fall), are both members of the ruling Rashtriya Janata Dal, a political party that caters strongly to the interests of Yadav farmers. Those most in need of employment, including the Dusadhs and Paswans, are mainly supporters of the *Dalit* leader, Ram Vilas Paswan, and his acolytes.²⁹ But if caste and class antagonisms help us to understand why BB and his supporters are in key respects insensitive to employment issues, they do not gainsay the fact that his preference for using EAS funds to build all-weather roads is widely supported in the Block, even though it reduces the (still considerable) scope for skimming by his favoured contractors. Indeed, in terms of the more general arguments of this book, what is truly significant is the extent to which BB, as a leading member of 'vernacular society' in Kaviraj's terms, buys into the discourse of development as modernization, and works closely with his counterparts in 'elite society' to bring this about.

We received information on these transactions from BB himself, and from an ex-District Magistrate of Vaishali. The ex-DM told us that during his long tenure in Vaishali he adopted a quota system wherein local MPs and MLAs were asked to recommend and decide upon the schemes that would operate in their constituencies. His formula was simple, if quite at odds with the instructions he received from Patna or New Delhi. All programme resources that came to his District were to be divided up on

²⁸ 'The instructions direct that one should employ resources on various sectors. One of the sectors is forestry. If we implemented the scheme in [neighbouring] Raghapur Block, all the plantations in a year would get washed off next year due to erosion that Ganges causes in this area! How insensible to impose such restrictions from above without appreciating the ground conditions.' Interview with BB.

²⁹ The Musahars are less inclined to be strong supporters of Ram Vilas Paswan. Given that most Yadavs will not work as unskilled labourers, it follows that members of the Scheduled Castes are gaining work from BB's schemes, even if those schemes are not designed with employment provision as their main aim.

(a) Resource Distribution by Panchayat



(b) Resource Distribution by Village

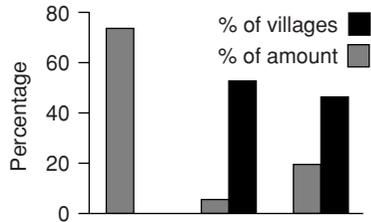


Figure 5.3 EAS spending by panchayat and village, Bidupur Block, Vaishali District, 1996–7 – 1998–9

a 70:30 basis between the MLAs and the MP. If a Block fell between two constituencies, the resources would be divided in proportion to the number of *panchayats* in each constituency. The representatives could then use the money as they saw fit. In the case of Bidupur Block, the records show that resources have been distributed almost exactly on a 19:6 basis, reflecting the fact that BB represents nineteen of the twenty-five *panchayats*. They also show that BB has been active in making sure that schemes are set up – or are about to be set up (see figure 5.3) – in all of the *panchayats* where he has supporters.³⁰ From his perspective, the building of all-weather roads not only makes sense in developmental terms, but also ensures that resources will quite literally follow a road map

³⁰ In the course of one conversation, BB produced a copy of the release letter of the second instalment of funds from the Government of India, as sent to the DM of Vaishali for 1998–9, and said: ‘Our people in Bidupur are patient. I tell them that when the next instalment would come, I would get the schemes in their area too [showing the letter]. Now the second instalment having been received, I would cover other areas as well. This is why you find only limited schemes in few areas until now.’

through his constituency, in the process dampening down inter-village rivalries. Naturally, his key supporters become the executing agents of these schemes. The DM, meanwhile, having ceded power to the MLAs in recognition of their local dominance – a labour contractor exaggerated the power of the *Mukhiyas* when he told us that: 'JRY is *Mukhiya*'s scheme and EAS is BB's scheme' – still made an effort to ensure that some funds went to those *tolas* or villages which were ignored by BB or RR. 'For those areas, and also areas that are of interest to important political leaders from opposition, I used the interest money accrued to the development funds. If any MLA or ruling party leader questioned as to why I was sanctioning projects in areas of their political rivals, I would say that that was being done out of the discretionary DM's funds and did not encroach upon their quotas, hence they could not have any grievance nor any *locus standi* to object to this.'

In Bidupur, then, as in Sahar and Murhu Blocks for quite different reasons, a combination of social forces came together to redefine the aims and objectives of what was intended by New Delhi to be an employment assurance scheme. The fact that black-topped roads were built in Bidupur also tells us something of importance about the good governance agenda. It is true that the EAS works poorly in Bidupur from the point of view of providing employment to local people holding EAS cards. It is also true, as we showed in the last chapter, that ordinary people have had very little say about the choice and running of EAS schemes. Levels of participation and employment provision were higher in Debra Block, Midnapore District. Most distressing of all was the fact that the roads built in Bidupur were mainly intended to benefit the Yadav communities and the inhabitants of what might be called the 'main villages' in the Block. By and large, the roads that were built did not make their way into the *tolas* of the Musahars or even the Paswans. And yet, importantly, tangible assets were built in Bidupur and a good deal of employment was provided to labouring households outside the formal structures of the EAS. Most of all, perhaps, this outcome was considered a reasonable one by most of the parties that were active in Bidupur's political society (with the possible exception of the Paswans).³¹

Many poor non-SC households were pleased to see evidence of government spending in their villages. Philip Oldenburg has reported that in a village near Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, perhaps 25–30 per cent of JRY funds were 'eaten' and didn't make it to the villages. A number of villagers expressed their concern about corruption, but for the most part

³¹ For elaboration, see chapter 6.

‘what matters to villagers is perhaps how much reaches them, not how much is siphoned off, which sum they are unlikely to know or be able to find out’ (Oldenburg 2003: 18–19). Similar sentiments were expressed in Bidupur and Murhu. Where the state is seen mainly as a provider of funds rather than as a collector of taxes, as it is in much of rural India, it is perhaps understandable that villagers would come to such a conclusion, and that they would like to see evidence of government spending. Roads, schools and houses built count for rather more than meetings held or attended.

Many of the public officials charged with running the EAS also knew this. They were mindful that their own desire to ‘eat the state’ had to be tempered by the need to provide physical evidence of government at work. Officials also worried about the consequences of being seen to be corrupt. Some proponents of good governance and participatory development might claim this sighting of the state for their own agendas, and not without reason.³² Nevertheless, it is clear that some accounts of the scale of rent-seeking behaviour in India, and in Bihar in particular, are absurdly high, and we say again that we see no reason to endorse Evan Osborne’s claim that more than 45 per cent of India’s national income takes the form of government-disposed rents.³³ In addition, it needs to be said that the *Mukhiya* in our field site in Murhu, and BB in Bidupur, are providing at least one model of ‘good governance’ for their supporters and even for their localities. The outcomes of EAS spending were certainly more visible in Bidupur and Murhu than in Debra Block, Midnapore (where closer adherence to the guidelines had led to the proliferation of *kuccha* schemes of limited value), and both men worked closely with District and Block-level officials to diffuse fears about civil disorder. Just as importantly, both men had provided leadership in a context in which ‘the official state’ is more fragile than it is assumed to be in the mainstream literatures on good governance. They did so, moreover, not so much by

³² Up to a point. The good governance agenda at times comes close to the view that there was only bad governance previously, and that ‘unreformed’ governments were unconcerned with corruption. This is an exaggeration, to say the least.

³³ See also chapter 1. Osborne estimates that government-disbursed rents of the order of 35–45 per cent of India’s national income are channelled through the system of reserved jobs alone (Osborne 2001: 679). His figures draw on data provided in Mohammed and Whalley (1984). We do not share his underlying assumption that the reservation of government and public sector jobs is necessarily evidence of the distribution of government rents. Nor do we agree that this distribution system must promote or reproduce ‘the inevitable Balkanization of Indian politics’ (Osborne 2001: 679). For a more subtle understanding of the ways in which the sectoral and spatial distribution of government funds (and rents) can help to bind India together, see the outstanding essay by Dasgupta (2001).

playing the part of elected local delegates, as by playing the role of the provider, or the traditional patron or *dada* (elder brother or bossman) figure who gets things done.

Educating the state

Many of the same strengths and weaknesses of the good governance agenda are apparent in the fields of education and the law, although in Bihar they come with fewer reinforcing pressures from political society. The main strengths are as we began to report them in chapter 4. The government of Bihar has since 1995 been committed in principle to the formation of Village Education Councils that would be presided over by a chairperson elected directly by a village open meeting. The chair is supported by an elected vice-chair, and one of them is meant to be drawn from an SC community. The committee would be supported for a while initially, and then periodically, by officials of the Bihar Education Project (BEP). This initiative replaced an earlier notification of 1988 'which suffered from the basic problem of the members [of the VEC] being nominated by the Block Education Officer (BEO) and of the *mukhiya* being the president' (Kantha and Narain 2003: 134). The state also initiated a Total Literacy Campaign in Bhojpur District in 1992, and this later spread across the state. Kantha and Narain report that 'When the literacy programme began . . . Madhubani and Madhepura produced such exciting results that these soon began to be cited as model examples in Bihar' (Kantha and Narain 2003: 131). They go on to note, however, that 'the enthusiasm generated soon declined and the second stage of the campaign could not take off in these Districts' (Kantha and Narain 2003: 131).

If there was an exception to the law of diminishing returns it was in Dumka, a District dominated by the Santhal and Mal Paharia (ST) communities that is now in Jharkhand. There is evidence to suggest that significant improvements in male and female literacy rates have been sustained in Dumka.³⁴ At the same time, however, it is widely agreed that the main reason for this success story is that 'the Collector himself' spearheaded the literacy campaign, and this poses problems for the good governance agenda. If the role of the Collector is acclaimed as a sign of committed officialdom this comes close to saying that good governance will be achieved where there are good governors, a proposition that is

³⁴ Srivastava (1998).

true but not very helpful.³⁵ The same argument could be made of good teachers or good BDOs, with just as little gain.

Many proponents of good governance will recognize this danger, and will want to pay close attention to 'failing' Blocks and Districts, and to those many BDOs, BEOs and BEP officials who do not show a proper commitment to their jobs and those they serve. But what they would find would not always be of great cheer. As we reported in chapter 4, very few officials of the BEP carry out their duties as they are meant to. It is common for mid-ranking officials and the village catalyts (the *utpreraks*) to spend less than a day in a village. VECs are often set up on an *ad hoc* basis, on the basis of quick conversations with those village leaders who can be met in an afternoon. Return visits are a rarity. But we should be careful about accounting for this behaviour in terms of the laziness of some *utpreraks*, or even with reference to the lack of a well-functioning system of performance-related pay. Again, there is a lurking danger of tautology, or the assumption that if the *utpreraks* are well motivated, well informed and well paid the formation of active VECs will be more easily achieved. In important respects this will be true, but it begs important questions about where the money will come from, and about the *utpreraks*' own understanding of their 'subject positions' and their responsibilities.

Our conversations with BEP officials showed they were put under considerable pressure by the target-driven nature of the new governance agenda. Measurable outputs had to be shown in short order. In Bhojpur District, about 200 *utpreraks* were given the responsibility for forming over 2,000 VECs in the years 1997–8 and 1998–9. This might not seem like a large number, but the VECs had to be formed in 1,794 villages in a District where many roads are impassable in the rainy season, and which can be dangerous and slow at the best of times. Getting petrol for scooters and motor-bikes can also be a problem in Blocks like Sahar, where the infrastructures of rule and development are often in retreat. And then there is the question of how the petrol is to be paid for, and whether the *utprerak* (or another quasi-governmental official) will be reimbursed. Some 'rent-seeking public officials' use their own resources to carry out the official business of the state. Officials must also have regard for public safety issues and for their standing in the community. In the case of lower-level officials this often translates into acts of obeisance, not least to members of village elites and the schoolteachers they are meant to be

³⁵ We would also need to know more about how the Collector fired up his staff, and took steps to nurture women's organizations, and what the opportunity costs were of this commitment to education.

looking after (or over). Higher-level officials more often express a desire to return to an urban area before nightfall. Ever mindful of bandits and ‘extremists’, they also find it difficult to meet the expectations of their own families in the countryside. Better rates of pay, although welcome, would not address these broader issues of state capacity and the provision of rural infrastructure.³⁶

Proponents of good governance are on stronger ground when they point to the power of vested interests in the education sector, and on the need to rethink the roles of some members of the teaching profession. We noted in chapter 4 that the teaching unions are especially strong in West Bengal, where teachers are part of the core support base of the CPI-M. (Most teachers we met were members of the All-Bengal Primary Teachers’ Association (ABPTA), which is affiliated to the CPI-M.) Even where school attendance committees function well, as they seem to in Debra Block, and where there is a well-established system of school inspection, it can be difficult for parents (and Sub-Inspectors [SIs]) to remove or even rebuke well-connected teachers. We also saw that VECs in Bihar failed to sustain interest once a teacher was able to exert his or her power over committee members, or where the government refused to transfer a teacher or pay for the addition of another. This had significant repercussions for how poorer people came to see the state, for ‘the teacher’ was often near the top of their list of ‘known state functionaries’.

Nevertheless, the question of how to bring teachers to book is a thorny one. If VECs might in time be part of the answer it is clear that not much progress will be made until politicians are brought more squarely into the picture. But here too there are problems, and not simply those that derive from the mistrust of politicians that is a feature of the new public administration. Politicians in Bihar and Jharkhand are not much interested in education. They are occasionally interested in the funding of new schools, for they can then pose as providers of resources. For the most part, though, the politicians we spoke to were agreed that there was neither money nor votes in education. The flow of funds was not sufficient for them to consider it a significant source of patronage. Nor did it create many opportunities to provide contracts for *dalaals* who would turn out the vote in their favour. The idea that individual men and women would

³⁶ We should emphasize that regular staff members of the BEP had few problems with payments, reimbursements and getting access to fuel. The BEP was well-funded by the World Bank and staff members could fill up their bikes or scooters with petrol at the District headquarters, Arrah. They could also access small amounts of petrol in jars in Sahar, if the necessity arose. The problems we have described here are more serious for staff such as Junior Engineers and *panchayat sevaks*, who can often be seen riding on the back of the motorbikes of important villagers or contractors out of necessity.

Table 5.2. *Schools with only one teacher, selected Districts of Bihar, 1996–1999 (percentage)*

District	1996–97	1997–98	1998–99
Vaishali	18.8%	11.3	18.2
Bhojpur	15.9	17.2	19.8
Ranchi	N.A.	25.4	30.2

Source: BEP State Office, Patna.

cast their votes on an issue like education also struck them as mistaken, and out of touch with local realities. Votes were not cast on this basis, and electors would not give up the security of a bloc – the protection of a social group in DaMatta’s terms – for a more abstract right to press the case for better schooling of their children. It is not surprising, then, that officials of the Bihar Education Project came under few pressures from politicians in a Block like Bidupur. The laziness that we observed in some BEP officials can largely be explained in terms of the lack of competition we observed in political society around the issue of education.

The lack of proper funding of education in all three states also impacts on parental perceptions of the costs and benefits of schooling, and it is here perhaps that we see the most glaring weakness of the new public administration – its suggestion, implicit or explicit, that money is not the central issue, and that what matters is the quality of governance in a cultural or institutional sense. Our work suggests that a more common-sense view is in order. Parents that we spoke to were agreed that public education for their children would be more attractive to the extent that several teachers were provided in each school. The quality of the school building(s) should also be adequate, at the very least. BEP data for the research Districts suggest, however (see table 5.2), that between 18.2 per cent and 30.2 per cent of schools had only one teacher in 1998–9, and less than 5 per cent of schools provided a separate toilet for girls (table 5.3).³⁷ The condition of many of the schools that we visited was rudimentary at best, and in some cases called to mind the semi-deserted Block development offices we had observed in Lapong Block, Ranchi District,

³⁷ We say ‘suggest’ because the BEP’s data are not always consistent on a year-by-year basis: compare the figures for presence/absence of girls’ toilets in Bhojpur from 96/7 to 97/8 in table 5.3. There is no doubt that such facilities are underprovided. At the same time, however, the ability of the state properly to sight itself must be open to question. This too might relate to questions of state capacity, or to the monitoring of the officials charged with data collection and presentation.

Table 5.3. *Schools with a toilet for girls, selected Districts of Bihar, 1996–1999 (percentage)*

District	1996–97	1997–98	1998–99
Vaishali	4.7%	4.4	4.7
Bhojpur	13.0	3.1	2.9
Ranchi	N.A.	3.6	4.6

Source: BEP State Office, Patna.

Jharkhand (while searching for a Ranchi field site) and in Sahar. Good governance is all but impossible when the state is stretched this thin.

Matters were much the same in Malda District and no better even in Midnapore. In Malda just over half of all school buildings could be described as *pucca*. The District is hit regularly by floods, and the administration finds it hard to keep up with the major repairs that are often required. The DPEP's Perspective Plan for Malda, 1999, reported that 430 (of 1,877) schools needed major repairs and a further 941 needed minor repairs. Only 13 per cent of schools had toilets, and only 14 per cent had enough rooms to allow the teaching of four classes at the same time. (According to official data, 40 per cent of schools in Malda District have only one room or building, and 8 per cent have none at all). In addition (see table 5.4), the teacher–pupil ratios in Malda District and Old Malda Block were reported to be higher than the called-for figure of 1:30. The ratios were better in the two primary schools in our Old Malda field site, indeed considerably better than in Midnapore, but as table 5.5 shows there were still significant capacity problems in School No. 1 (five teachers but only two rooms), and very large numbers of children were being taught in one room.

Money matters, and it is important to recognize the truth of this when we consider the 'educational state' from the point of view of some of its employees. Even allowing for the power of the teaching unions in West Bengal and erstwhile Bihar, and for the legitimate nature of many of the complaints that are levelled against teachers, it is important to get a sense of how they – the educators – see matters. Two points are worth making here. First, it is clear that most teachers are unsympathetic to the idea of 'parent power'. Unionized teachers express resentment at the idea that they should be accountable to parents, and particularly to parents who are 'barely educated' or from 'the lower classes'.³⁸ Well-educated teachers

³⁸ In reverse: 'If we made a suggestion to the teachers, they would laugh at us': interview with a group of poorer villagers, Old Malda, 1999.

Table 5.4. *School infrastructure in Midnapore and Malda, 1998–99*

	Midnapore			Malda		
	District	Block	Surveyed <i>Gram Panchayat</i>	District	Block	Surveyed <i>Gram Panchayat</i>
No. of primary schools	7,627	202	22	1,877	99	16
No. of child education centres (<i>Shishu Shikha Kendras</i> [SSKs])	700	24	2	105	3	0
Primary schools per 10,000 population*	9.2	9.6	11.2	7.1	6.8	15.8
Average no. of households per school (incl. SSKs)	174	N.A.	N.A.	244	N.A.	N.A.
Average no. of school-going children per school	208	N.A.	N.A.	187	138	N.A.
No. of primary schoolteachers	18,072	N.A.	N.A.	6,019	321	N.A.
Average no. of teachers per primary school	2.4	N.A.	N.A.	3.2	3.2	N.A.
Teacher–pupil ratio	1:88	N.A.	N.A.	1:58	1:43	N.A.

* Population per 1991 census. All ratio figures will have worsened by 1998–9.

Sources: DPEP School Survey, Malda; Midnapore District Profile; Information from SIs.

Table 5.5. *School infrastructure in field site primary schools, Malda and Midnapore*

	Midnapore			Malda		
	Field site School 1	Field site School 2	District average	Field site School 1	Field site School 2	District average
Schoolchildren per school	109	296	208	102	119	187
No. of rooms	2	3	N.A.	2	2	1.9
Schoolchildren per room	55	99	N.A.	51	60	100
No. of teachers per school	2	4	2.4	5	3	3.2
Teacher–pupil ratio	1:55	1:74	1:88	1:20	1:40	1:58

Sources: DPEP School Survey, Malda; Midnapore District Profile. Survey, Malda; Midnapore District Profile.

who hail from towns and cities find it hard to treat poorer people as equals, and in *adivasi* areas they are more likely to think of STs as ‘jungles’ than as citizens or clients. Educated or not, it would be a mistake to think of such teachers as rational or disinterested actors in the Weberian sense.

Second, most teachers, and perhaps as many as 90 per cent in our Districts, look after their families with sources of income from outside the public school system. They have a business, perhaps, or land, or they teach on a ‘for money’ basis. This insulates them from political pressures. In West Bengal, too, teachers receive a reasonable wage from the state. Monthly salaries in 1999 were Rs. 3,350–6,325 for teachers with junior basic training.³⁹ Set against this, it was an open secret in the late 1990s that recruitment into the teaching profession was expensive. This was true in both states, but in West Bengal, where the cost of a first job ran from Rs. 10,000–50,000 depending on the strength of a person’s political connections, it is also led to a flood of litigation. Disappointed applicants charged that the selection system operated by the District Primary School Council (DPSC) gave too much weight (40 per cent) to an interview, as compared to examination results (60 per cent). This allowed for a lot of ‘flexibility’ (corruption) on the part of DPSC officials and their counterparts among local employment exchange personnel. In Midnapore, no recruitment of teachers could be carried out between 1983 and 1996, partly as a consequence. (Some few appointments were made on ‘compassionate grounds’.) Recruitment began again in earnest in April 1999,

³⁹ By comparison, a fully-employed labourer working at the government minimum wage would not earn more than Rs. 1,200 per month. It is worth noting that the salaries of teachers are generally paid on time. In Bihar, problems of non- or late-payment of wages are far more acute in state transportation concerns, or in services like refuse collection.

when 2,600 teachers were taken on, but at the end of that year about 2,500 posts, or 10 per cent of the total number of all teaching positions, remained unfilled.

In Malda, meanwhile, a senior official of the DPSC pointed to an *almirah* full of court cases, and declared that: 'This is the District of court cases.' He was not wrong, although he might have added that it was the same in many other Districts. By 2000, a legal system that was overloaded and open to corruption, and which was poorly regarded by many 'citizens' in consequence, was contributing significantly to the underperformance of the education system in both states. The fact that many teachers and potential teachers saw the state as a supplier of reasonably well-paid and secure jobs – jobs worth going to court for – had significant consequences for the ways that poorer people would see the state in the educational sector. Very often, they saw it as remote, perhaps even as foreign, and simply not worth their while. The schooling of boys and girls suffered hugely in consequence.

The politics of good and bad governance

The dismal state of school buildings in Bihar and West Bengal can certainly be read as evidence of poor government, but whether this lack of spending is an indictment of the agendas of good government is much less clear. Those agendas are remarkably flexible, as we noted at the start of this chapter, and arguing against 'good governance' in general is about as helpful (and welcome) as arguing against parenting and *chola chai*. Proponents of good governance would look at our stories about education in eastern India and make at least three points in quick response.

First, the rules governing the recruitment of teachers in West Bengal have changed in recent years. A government circular of 1991 announced a new method of recruitment that is weighted more to 'assessed merit' (65 per cent from marks in the final school exam, 20 per cent for teacher training and 5 per cent for co-curricula activities) than it is to the interview (10 per cent). It is true that no teacher had been recruited under the new rules in Malda at the time of our field studies (1999–2000), but the new rules were employed in Midnapore in 1999, and by mid-2000 no allegations of corruption had been lodged against the decisions that had been reached, and no court cases were pending. At the very least, this would seem to be a step in the direction of better government, or government that is more rule-based and transparent.

Second, the established powers of the teaching establishment can be challenged by a process of circumvention. Both the Conservative and Labour Parties have tried this route in England and Wales, where they

have pushed strongly for the recruitment of additional teachers who have not completed a full course of studies at a teacher training college. Teachers in the private sector are also hired directly from universities or from other professions. Accreditation is not necessary in this sector in either the UK or the USA. In Madhya Pradesh, too, steps have recently been taken in this general direction. Under the Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS-MP) introduced by former Chief Minister Digvijay Singh, the state now has three classes of teacher. About 200,000 teachers are employed by the state's Education Department in 80,000 formal primary schools. They are paid according to a pay scale that has been agreed with the teachers' unions. A further 20,000 schools are staffed by *shiksha karmis* under the terms of the EGS-MP. The first batches of *shiksha karmis* received 'rigorous training' and were paid Rs. 1,000 per month while they were placed 'on probation' in the formal school system. 'They are more likely than the formal school teacher to be a local person' and 'are recruited and posted by the *janpad panchayat*' (Noronha 2003: 107). Finally, there are the EGS-MP *Gurujis*; they are nominated by the village community and the *sarpanch* to teach fellow villagers for a stipend of Rs. 1,000 per month, but with no tenure. These jobs have proved attractive to local youth leaders who might otherwise remain unemployed.⁴⁰

Third, the importance of careful political management can be demonstrated at the national level. In her account of the 'contentious politics of education reform', Merilee Grindle argues that substantial progress has been made in Latin America 'despite the odds'.⁴¹ She agrees that most politicians are lukewarm about reforming the educational system in their countries, and that powerful forces are ranged in support of the status quo. Grindle's focus, however, is on the efforts of the 'counter-forces' which are pressing for educational reform. She seeks to establish both the means by which they have set national policy agendas, and the steps that were taken to defuse opposition to these initiatives. Her wider argument is that change is possible, and (or but) that it comes in small and unexpected ways. Progress is rarely continuous, but when it is achieved it is because skilled reformers have been able to exploit general sentiments about efficiency and transparency to effect specific policy changes. These policy changes in turn begin to change the terms under which succeeding debates about education (or health-care, or poverty alleviation schemes) are discussed.

⁴⁰ In addition, while the *Gurujis*' posts came without tenure, the hope and perhaps expectation was that they would in time be absorbed into the government cadre and made permanent. This is one reason, Srivastava reports (2003: 25), why many *guruji*s performed their jobs with more dedication than at first might have been expected.

⁴¹ Grindle (2004).

These specific rejoinders also point to a more important set of claims that must be weighed when we consider the agendas of good governance. These claims have to do with politics, but in a much broader sense than is intended by some critics of 'good governance'. We stand beside these critics in important respects. We have tried in this chapter to show that money really does matter. It will be difficult to improve education or health-care in eastern India when financial issues are so easily discounted. We have already mentioned the lamentable state of many Block offices in our Districts, and we shall have more to say about the late or non-payment of public servants in chapter 7. We might add that Sub-Inspectors of Primary Schools in West Bengal currently have responsibilities for 'circles' of between 60 and 110 schools, and that their job description requires them to make at least ten inspections per month. (In other words, they are required to visit each school once or twice a year, on average.) The SIs we spoke to, however, said they could only manage five or six inspections per month because of serious capacity problems. There was a shortage of clerical staff and vehicles, and SIs could only borrow the DPSC jeep in Malda on an occasional basis.

This is small beer, perhaps, but it is telling nonetheless. Critics are right to suggest that an agenda of administrative reform does not always sit easily with a strong bias away from the state and towards the market. There are doubtless efficiency gains to be made in government, and special interests to be confronted, but in eastern India the absence of a well-resourced public sector is what is most often noticeable. In some cases, the resources of the state have been looted by private interests, much as Harriss-White describes in her account of the formation of shadow states in Tamil Nadu. Government can then barely function, and ordinary men and women see the state mainly as an absence, or perhaps as a phantasm. And when they see government officials they often see men (or women) who are very far from being the disinterested public servants in which the new public administration invests so heavily. In the lower reaches of government, especially, the pressures that are brought to bear on officials come far more from family and community, and from brute economic circumstance, than they do from abstract models of the law or due process. Moreover, the fact that some schoolteachers in West Bengal, including some members of the CPI-M, are sub-contracting their jobs for Rs. 2,000 per month, suggests that money alone is not the issue, and that the sort of 'calling' that Tendler has described for health workers in Cereia State, Brazil, remains a long way off.⁴²

⁴² We do not dispute that performance-related pay might help here, along with a more clearly defined career path. At present that path runs directly from teacher to head-teacher.

We agree, then, with Leftwich and Jenkins that the agendas of ‘good governance’ should be regarded critically, and at times even with suspicion. It is certainly possible for these agendas to deflect attention from what many on the Left would insist are the ‘real’ issues: the need to build a committed left-of-centre political party, for example, or to campaign for a redistribution of assets towards the poor (including land), or to ensure that land can be owned and controlled by women.⁴³ We are also in agreement with Leftwich when he suggests that the good governance agenda is inclined to substitute wishful thinking for the hard task of building political forces capable of putting into place the institutional reforms that it favours.⁴⁴

But we also detect a measure of wishful thinking on the part of the critics of good governance. This romanticism is to be found, in part, in the suggestion that the agendas of the new public administration are depoliticizing, when it would be more accurate to say that they have changed the terms of debate about government reform. In other words (and Leftwich would surely recognize this), the movement from politics to the economy and public administration is itself a political act. We should also recognize that a shift in the direction of governmentality, for all its evident flaws, is not simply an act of partisanship or class warfare, as some radical critics maintain. Corbridge and Harriss have described the process of economic reform in India as an ‘elite revolt’, and we agree with this assessment.⁴⁵ The reforms in the 1990s were clearly meant to advance the private interests of some of India’s urban and industrial elites. But when it comes to questions of accountability, or decentralization, or even participation, the lines of intent are less easy to discern. An intelligent defence of ‘good governance’ is that it is meant to widen those spaces of empowerment that can be found in a world of the second-best. In other words, in a state like Bihar, where land reform is not on the cards, and where its advocates have not shown how (and with what consequences and at what cost) political forces might be built up to press for it, it ill-behoves some critics of institutional reform to talk about political naïvety. To put it more positively, one possible defence of some parts of the good governance agenda is that it refuses a Jacobin conception of politics which depends upon an idea of perfectibility, or an ‘ideal outside’. It recognizes

⁴³ We fully support these normative claims, and we would underscore the importance of providing poorer men and women with land. Studies clearly show that the ownership of land translates into greater employment opportunities, an increased ability to borrow money, greater self-respect, and less vulnerability: see Herring (1983); Singh (1990).

⁴⁴ ‘[T]he [World] Bank’s analysis is naïve . . . because it entirely ignores that good governance is not simply available on order, but requires a particular kind of politics both to institute and sustain it’ (Leftwich 1993: 607).

⁴⁵ Corbridge and Harriss (2000: chapter 7).

that the world is imperfect, and yet still open to contestation, and advances a politics of the possible which is expected to broaden the canvas on which a more committed pro-poor politics can be played out.

We shall come back to this general argument in chapter 8. Before we get embroiled in an assessment of 'the morality of politics', however, we need to return once again to Bihar and West Bengal, but this time with a view to saying something more concrete about the nature of political society in our research Districts, and especially in Midnapore, Malda and (again) Vaishali. If the new public administration is not wholly opposed to politics, it is largely silent on the matter of political parties and political fixers. As we shall see, though, in chapters 6 and 7, there is much to be said for the view that it is in political society, and not in civil society, that many of the most important questions relating to participation and government will be decided and fought out. For poorer men and women, especially, and indeed for many government employees (as we saw in Bidupur), the state is sighted in large part through the lens of political society. We need to pay close attention to those sightings. We also need to review some of the incentive regimes that structure 'real democracies', for these often cut against the grain of the good governance agenda. Competitive politics can be an expensive business and it is by no means clear that it must lead in the direction of a decline in corruption. Foucault reminds us to be humble in the face of the past, but we should also have regard for the messiness of the world around us.