

## **Chapter Eight: Good Governance Reforms or Subversion of Democracy and Rights?**

Consider the following two quotes for analysis. The first one is by Mark Twain from his 1901 article *To the Person Sitting in Darkness*, who added to the Kiplingesque arguments regarding the White Man's Burden and said:

"The Blessings-of-Civilization Trust, wisely and cautiously administered, is a daisy. There is more money in it, more territory, more sovereignty and other kinds of emolument, than there is in any other game that is played."

The second quote is by S M Krishna, the Chief Minister of Karnataka in 2003, who during the inauguration of World Bank's annual conference on development economics in Bangalore said:

"Despite the everyday rumblings that are inherent to a democratic society, I will not be deterred in implementing structural reforms in the economy."

Like the White Man's Burden of the yore, Mark Twain's quote is similar to the contemporary thrust to defend the 'universal model of good governance' which is based on approaching issues of freedom, democracy, development and Human rights in a particular way to promote globalisation and economic liberalisation. Like the Blessings-of-Civilization trust, good governance, uncritically pushes the universal model in ways typical of Orientalism, in the global South.

By equating political voice, protestations and calls for transparency with rumblings, SM Krishna with his quote appears to imply that the expression of people's aspirations is of nuisance value, a hurdle to the determined path of good governance. He uses the World Bank platform to put across his resolute intent of

pursuing this path even if it is at the cost of democracy. Whether they are aware of what they are implementing in the name of reforms is against the democratic will of the people or not, the determined path of the water sector reforms in Karnataka since late 1990s has been based on the market principles of good governance.

While some of these “reformers” may genuinely believe that their actions are ‘acts of reason’ to transform the society and improving the lives of the poor, there are others would do it for matters of career growth and professional satisfaction. The contemporary history of water reforms in Karnataka is one of conflict between these trustees of reforms and those who are resisting it. , The activities of the trustees of the determined path to development are governed by the principles of good governance which has radically reorganised the way we understand the relationships between people, the state and private market.

Good governance has reformed institutions of the state to be concerned about “efficiency” rather than to its relationship to the processes and outcomes of democratization. By doing so it has engendered a modern institutional practice which reiterates the hierarchical dimensions of the social structures, and exclusionary and discriminatory tendencies inhering within traditional structures leading to unsustainable and iniquitous forms of development. Historically, the ‘lean but efficient’ state as promoted by good governance has strategically evolved from the concept of a ‘minimal state’ advocated by structural adjustment policies of the 1970s and the 1980s which in turn was a shift from the principles of the Keynesian idea of the state playing a central role in the economic affairs of the society.

Good governance is hence possible through a lean state which organises governance “very much for shaping the incentives and opportunities for private sector development and engages in technical functions that are vital to the creation of a favourable climate for investment and trade. This in turn will operate in interest of society as a whole, especially the poor<sup>99</sup>.”

---

<sup>99</sup> DFID 2007

This thesis has illustrated that such complementarities between liberal democracy, people's participation, capitalist economic growth and human rights has limited outcome. It was the objective of this thesis to critically examine the proposal of the good governance discourse that for governance to be good and democratic that it should promote a capitalistic economic growth. By this, the discourse portends that democracy cannot envision anything besides capitalism. In a more specific manner the thesis critiques the proposition that commercialisation and privatization of water services helps the poor in realising their Right to Water.

By getting the poor to pay for basic services, the dominant discourse suggests that the poor can use their "client power" to amplify their political voice and make the service provider accountable. Through this parochial view, good governance overlooks the structural causes of deprivation and poverty. The documentation of the processes of water campaign in Bangalore and in North Karnataka against commercialization of water shows that contemporary struggles against the dominant governance discourse are for social inclusion and social justice as much as they are for democratization of water governance.

I started the thesis by placing the contemporary political dynamics of water governance in a historical framework of shifting ideas of water over past one and half centuries. Then I analysed five critical implications of good governance for a better understanding of its practice. The first is the good governance agenda in transforming the state to be subservient to the market. The second is to redefine citizen's participation within a liberal democracy frame work. The third is how institutions of good governance relate to calls for political consensus based on the principles of plurality and inclusive politics. The fourth is the conflict between increasing role of external technical experts, knowledge creation and sovereign decision making and the fifth is the proposition that human rights are best secured when public services are commercialized and privatized.

While doing this I considered the good governance discourse as having evolved from earlier dominant socio-economic policies. In light of this continuity the thesis examined the commonalities and differences between the contemporary discourse and its historical lineage with earlier development discourses. Key commonalities that have continued into the good governance era include rendering development technical and depoliticization of participation, marginalisation of local wisdom and promotion of foreign experts, imposed conditionalities and pre-determined ideas of development. I have detailed how these similarities need not just be between development ideologies which appear back to back in a historical context but can have a checkered evolution spanning centuries.

The principles of good governance for example can be linked to the economic liberalism of 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe. Both these development ideologies have worked to conserve and expand the interests of the capitalist class. Though these ideologies have made their marks a century apart their choice of representative liberal democracy over more profound forms of participatory democracy remains similar and intact. I have argued that the choice of representative local democracy was to promote institutional arrangements and cultural norms that support the expansion of capitalist market and reduce options for citizens to voice their opinion and make demands for social and economic rights. This developmental paradigm continues to this day under good governance discourse.

This thesis identified the contradictions that manifests between the promises of the good governance discourse and the policies that it actively puts to practice. I see the opportunities for the deepening of democracy in the well informed forms of resistances being offered by the civil society against the current good governance discourse.

The choice of critical ethnography and anthropology of public policy seem more appropriate as a combined social research methodology in the present context of good governance as they helped to probe obscure operations of power and control

beyond the visible realm, unsettling the status quo and challenging the project neutrality of good governance. Further, it helps the researcher engage in a dialogue and visualise the relevance of specificities local experiences and stories in a broader meaning of how the water sector reforms were acting on human conditions and preventing them from exercising their rights. Through this methodology helped to expose injustice and unfairness within the lived domain with a sense of commitment and duty on principles of social justice, democracy and human freedom.

The anthropology of public policy complements critical ethnography by identifying individuals, institutions, regimes of knowledge and social practices that limit choices constrain meaning and denigrate identities and communities. On a practical level that the combined methodologies provided me with a framework to explore the intersections between the proposed theory of good governance, its policy implications and everyday practices. This strengthened the ant's eye view nature of the study to understand the water sector reforms from the perspectives of those who are most affected by it.

From chapter 4 through 7, I focussed on the radical reforms in urban water sector in Karnataka under the guise of good governance through policy changes, institutional restructuring, power realignment, new actors, projects and their implications. The potential for deepening democracy has been explained in these chapters while documenting the dynamics between those with power to implement reforms and those with power to resist them. In the case of Bangalore, it was the power of those who resisted that prevailed over the propositions of good governance with all its global backing. Through these detailed interventions in understanding the dynamics of the reformers and its opposers, I question the promises of good governance of promoting democracy and expansion of human rights.

Good governance is portrayed as a solution to the challenge of achieving the Right to Water. However, its constructs a discourse which merges the commercialisation of water services with and human right to water. I presented this while examining

world development report 2004 of the world bank- *making services working for poor people* in chapters 2 and 3. The report asserts that water security is achievable, even dependent on privatisation and commercialisation of service delivery. The rationale for introducing water tariff for the poor has helping their client power has been proved to be of limited use in the water sector reforms in Karnataka. The assumptions that this approach will help an empowered community of the poor to bypass vested political interests and make the water service provider accountable are also not true in the case of Karnataka.

This has not stopped advocates of privatisation to keep promoting Karnataka as a reforms leader with a successful track record of water sector reforms. The overall aim of making urban water services commercially viable and sustainable entities included the removal of public taps, metering of individual dwellings in slums, running public utilities on commercial basis and privatising operation and maintenance of the system. These assumptions and strategies, as exposed in the thesis, have been revealed to have had the opposite of what was claimed by the World Bank leaving the poor even more distanced from achieving water security and without ways to make the service providers, whether public or private, accountable.

In the chapters discussed GBWASP, a unique project to service the peri-urban area of a rapidly growing showcase city of Bangalore, I examined two specific aspects of the reforms that included new forms of financial decentralisation with the intended "Beneficiaries" having to pay an upfront fee to cover the project cost and predetermined plan to handover the system to an international private water company.

The GBWASP was entirely planned by USAID with elected governments of Bangalore and the 8 urban local bodies around it having no role to play but in the implementation of the plan. As the project intended to raise the required budget through "Beneficiary Capital Contribution" with "future users" paying the project cost upfront, the poor who constituted up to 35% of the peri-urban areas according to the

studies mentioned were entirely excluded from the project. When water campaign raised the exclusionary nature of the financing plan of the project, BWSSB acknowledged by describing it an “anomaly” and agreed to reduce and finally waive off the capital contribution for people in slums.

The project points to serious flaws in the governing logic of completely keeping the citizens and elected representatives unaware on issues of beneficiary capital contribution and privatisation of the system. It is clear that the adoption of a reforms based financial planning in GBWASP would never include the poor as equal citizens in the project; it was only after visible protestations that the poor were considered, albeit as an afterthought. Even the “Pro-Poor Policy” that emerged later was to facilitate subsidised operations to poorer neighbourhoods in the case of privatisation. As privatisation plans were shelved, the “Pro-Poor Policy” also disappeared. The policy for the poor was hence a part of a larger plan to maintain the commercial viability of the project and its attractiveness for private companies rather than with a specific intent to secure the right to water of the poor. Though, protests ensured that the GBWASP was strongly in public hands, it was still governed by a new logic of commercial viability. The poor lost their access to public taps and were either priced out of water services for not being able to pay the increasing water tariffs or were made dependent on even more insecure ways of accessing water.

However, international organisations like the ADB (2007), WSP-SA (2006) have heralded this project as a successful demonstration of a commercial water service is good for both the poor and the service provider. By removing public taps and pricing out the poor with high water tariff for an inadequate service, the BWWSB programme compromised the lives of the poor and breached their right to water. In an IFC publication Liepziger and Foster (2002) found the 2 points:

“It appears that in many countries fiscal concerns, rather than poverty issues, have been upper most in the design of privatisation transactions”.

The World Bank's own evaluation department's evaluation of the bank's water reforms strategy concluded that "getting the private sector to focus on the alleviation of poverty and to design tariffs in a way that it does not discriminate against the poor has proved hard to achieve in practice" (Pitman, 2002, P point 25).

Most concerning aspect of water sector reforms in Karnataka has exposed by the detailed analysis of KUWASIP and the GBWASP is the scant attention given by the world bank to the direct impact of these reforms on the poor. As Bull and McNeill conclude after careful research of public private partnerships from around the world, "Balanced review of experience confirms fundamental problems with water privatisation. Both the legitimacy and the authority of the World Bank have suffered as a result".

The projects in Karnataka also give enough reason to be deeply sceptical of the approach that whatever is good for a commercialised utility is also good for the poor. Further, the attempts to depoliticise water sector reforms by BWSSB and the Karnataka Water Board by mainstreaming the poor into the commercialised water utilities did little to empower them, to exercise their rights as citizens or to make the service provider accountable.

The WDR's assertion that commercialised service delivery and charging of user fee tariff would strengthen the political voice of the poor and let them exercise their client power to make the service provider accountable was clearly not working. Instead of "voting with their feet", the poor were struggling to find their next glass of water. But rather than being passive victims of the reforms, there were organised protests by the people in most project areas. Various strategies were employed to manage the opposition including misinformation about the project process and its goals, views of NGOs to manufacture compliance, the use of police force etc. The protestors clearly articulated reservations against the reforms, reform implementers as well as against the implement designers. The water campaign hence called on the need to

democratise water governance by building processes allowing for improved water services based on the needs and aspirations of local communities.

Despite, empirical studies on privatisation experiments proving that financial decentralisation, commercialisation and privatisation of water utilities are incompatible with people being able to exercise their right to water (Bull and McNeill, 2007; Morris and Cabrera, 2003), the good governance discourse continues to inform the water sector reforms across the globe. Even public utilities are made to function on principles of water business if they need to survive, or in preparation of privatising them. As in the case of Karnataka even as the determined path of reform will attempt to perpetuate, newer ways to resist it are organically emerging.

This thesis contradicts the contention that good governance discourse is about improving democracy and participatory methods to reach consensus on how the resources of the society should be managed and allocated<sup>100</sup>. As Mosse says “Never before has so much been made of the power of ideas or right theory or good policy in solving the problem of global poverty<sup>101</sup>”. But, good governance, though a powerful idea has been found in this thesis to be an anathema of democracy. Elucidating the internal dynamics of developments “Regimes of Truth” where professional identities, disciplines, policy ideas, institutions and networks of knowledge get produced,

Mosse explains that “Between global expert consensus, on the one hand, and local ownership, on the other, much disappears from view: the institutional settings of global policy thinking at the point of origin; the enclave agencies and expert communities involved in the unseen processes of international transmission and imposition; the political processes, institutional interests and social relations which interpret and transform global policy locally; and the social construction of expert knowledge and professional identities themselves”.

---

<sup>100</sup> DFID 2007

<sup>101</sup> Notes on the ethnography of expertise and professionals in international development. Ethnografeast III. ‘Ethnography in the Public Sphere’. Lisbon: Portugal. June 20-23, 2007.

This thesis does not dismiss good governance as a theory of conspiracy but situates it in the larger hegemonic development apparatus which promotes market oriented development as a determined path and operationalises it through a politics of consensus that is antagonistic to democracy. This critical ethnographic study identifies how the hegemonic development apparatus has deployed its knowledge locally through a vast network of reform agents in the urban water sector in Karnataka and sustained it through powerful international, national and sub-national actors to build consent and compliance for reforms and engage in deliberate practices to manage dissent. This illuminates the limitations of water sector reforms in Karnataka for the deepening of democracy and thereby exposing critical tensions between the dominant discourse, its deployment and implementation.

The world water council's argument of "making water everybody's business" (2000), seems like an invitation to only those who confirm with the determined path of development. Conversely, those who are not invited are termed anti-development. Though this position of mine might compliment commentators like Joy and Hard Staff (2005) who have highlighted how national sovereignty is compromised by the imposed conditionalities of international development agencies, I have also exposed the active role played by 'native' actors in transposing them locally.

With international development agencies imposing "ex-post conditionalities" where elected governments need to demonstrate their commitment to dominant policy reforms before the release of funds, the state itself has been made an agent of reforms. This has transformed elected governments at higher levels into hegemonies of their own desire. The case of JnNURM, one of the largest urban renewal programs in the world where the government of India has laid strict conditionalities on states and urban local governments illustrates how national governments can do an equally good job at driving unilateral conditionalities against democratic aspirations of local governments and people.

The stealthy role played by senior bureaucrats in Karnataka to align state's water sector reforms with the demands of the World Bank is also a case in point that demonstrates the significant burden shared by local actors in the deployment plan of the good governance discourse. To interpret the active roles played by a select group of senior bureaucrats of a state in the reforms process as the state taking "ownership" over reforms is a mockery of democracy. By their active engagement in the reforms process as ghosts in the machine, bureaucrats have worked to protect and extend their own power rather than strengthen the democratic quality of the society. Besides the extensive employment of expert consultants and "rendering development technical, I will argue that the water sector reforms in Karnataka has expanded the reach of bureaucracy 'rendering development bureaucratic'.

The unilateral actions of global experts and senior bureaucrats were legitimised by KUIDFC, an institution with the scant record for democratic norms and demands for accountability. KUIDFC anchored water sector reforms in Karnataka and let the bureaucrats and the experts shape its progress with minimal or no involvement of elected representatives and the people affected by reforms. The "Culture of Consultancy" is based on reforming the problematised present in order to achieve a particular vision of a society pre-determined by the dominant discourse of the day. In the 'Nobel Mission' consultants see themselves as the epitome of rationality. Not a single consultant's report involving water sector reforms in has challenged the pre-supposed reforms agenda.

Bureaucrats, who perceive the plurality of people's opinion and participation of people as a nuisance, find it necessary to employ trusted consultants to provide the right recommendations. The employment of private consultants and the creation of a particular kind of knowledge was yet another prospect to extend the power of bureaucrats and the international development agencies who designed the reforms. As an obvious outcome the reforms and the process of their implementation go against the claimed values of good governance of decentralising governance,

improving the quality of democracy and making government practices accountable and transparent.

Neither the bureaucrats, consultants, the KUIDFC nor the international reformers have been accountable to the public or the elected representatives. NGOs too played a significant role especially as an interface between the public and the reform actors. As I cited WSP-SA earlier, NGOs were chosen because “they command respect from the community”. The primary objective of the NGOs was to convince “consumers” in slums to install individual water meters. While it may be possible that many of these NGOs believed that their involvement would enhance Right to Water of the poor, they had no influence over the reform objectives of commercialising and privatising water services. When these reforms impacted the lives of people in slums in ways that countered the assumed empowerment, the NGOs did little to support the communities. While there was active NGO participation in both the KUWASIP and the GBWASP their level of interventions differed.

In the KUWASIP the role of the NGOs mainly focussed on communities in slums, while in the GBWASP, NGOs like Janaagraha actively partnered with designers of reforms like USAID and the IFC and played a more central role in constructing and implementing water sector reforms in Karnataka. The contracted NGOs worked to reiterate the inherent exclusionary character of reforms with its mechanism of incentivising those who confirm and marginalising those who opposed. The NGO RUDA’s report terming non-conformists as “World Bank bashing vested interests” is an example of how NGOs perpetuated the power of the reformers to disown and marginalise alternative visions of water governance.

Despite the willful undermining of democracy by a complex network of actors, Karnataka has been consistently showcased as a successful reform leader by national and international agencies, the KUIDFC remains a favourite destination for international development agencies with the reform plans. Individual bureaucrats who played a key role in the course of water sector reforms have been promoted to

powerful positions. K P Krishnan, is now the additional secretary in the department of economic affairs with the Government of India and P Manivannan is the managing director of Karnataka water board with a mandate to reform the entire water facility in the state. In contrast, Ashok Manholi, the chairman of BWSSB who challenged the reforms and offered to make BWSSB accomplish the proposed role of a private contractor at two third's the cost was transferred to an insignificant post. At the beginning of the book I left a question hanging: if everybody's need for water cannot be reconciled with the desire of some to profit from its sale, which should lose out?

Clearly, water privatisation prioritises the financial profit of a few people over the need to provide all people with the water they need to survive. The water 'reforms' in general make people's basic needs subordinate to running an economically 'efficient' service. If we choose privatisation and the other water 'reforms', people who need water but can't pay for it lose out. But policies like these are advocated in both rich and poor countries with the language of reform. None of the 'reform' initiatives described in this book are worthy of the word in any positive, social sense; the sense in which we use the word to describe Ram Mohan Roy's work to abolish sati, the ANC's efforts to abolish apartheid or Ambedkar and his supporters' struggle to abolish the discrimination of the caste system.

The wider 'reform' agenda is devoid of any sense of struggle and supposedly offers win-win development. This is not a new way of presenting policies of course – not many people have ever liked to admit (or accept) that what they are proposing will lead to some people being worse off – but the people pushing the reform agenda have certainly mastered the art of presenting win-win scenarios. Through its arguments, the thesis proposes:

- The new market-friendly, human rights neutral paradigm impacts all social economic and cultural rights but it affects social justice and Human Right to Water the most

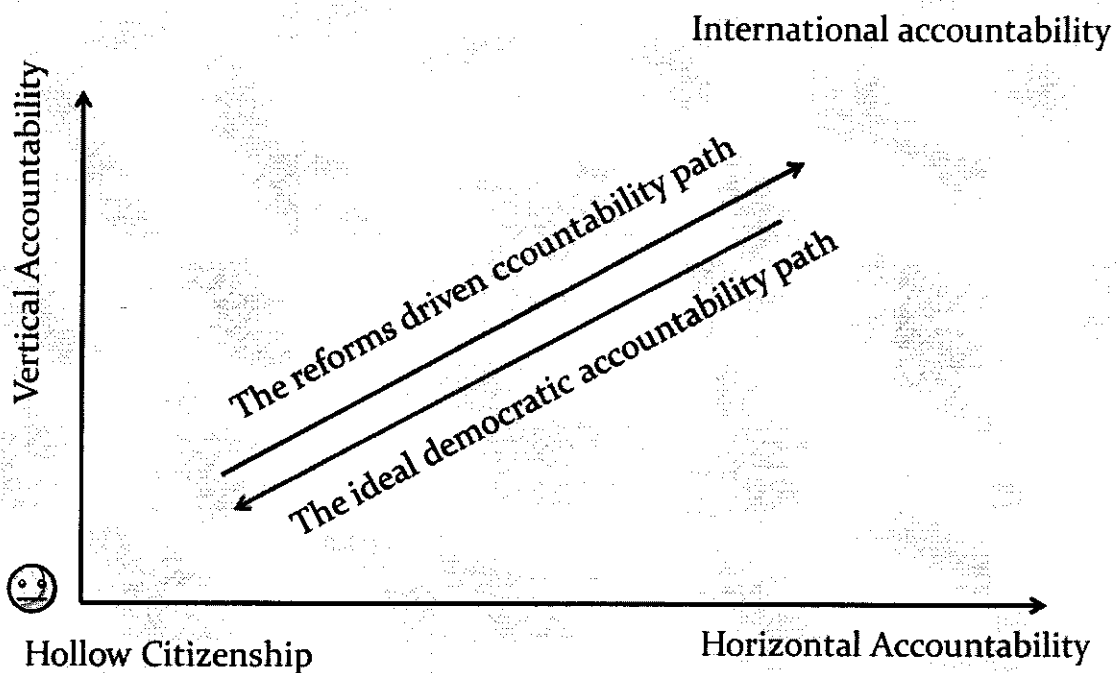
- Constitutionally mandated decision making responsibilities of elected governments are being transferred to aggregations of techno-scientific capital and sanitizing governance from the vagaries of plurality
- Depoliticization of the civil society by reframing citizen's participation within a liberal democracy framework
- The language of Human Right to water in reforms is aimed at cleansing the odious flavour of the unfair global market practices
- The internationalisation of reforms and the 'culture of consultants' works to develop literature – knowledge, perspectives and plans - aimed at obscuring the value of local knowledge and distinctive narratives of people in struggle and communities in resistance
- It works to undermine the constitutional role of elected representatives, public officials and more importantly the general public by making them subservient to visions and decisions promoted by consultants
- It demoralizes, destabilizes and dismantles public institutions and normalizes an alternative culture to perpetuate the increasing role of consultants in depoliticizing governance
- This thesis demonstrates how the type of democracy that the discourse has promoted is not in the least emancipatory especially when it creates situations where people have rights they cannot exercise, participate within a preordained policy framework, vote without being able to make a change and a supposed political equality which conceals extremely unequal power relations
- It also describes how the dominance of the good governance discourse in the water sector is being resisted, offering newer opportunities and limitations in the deepening of democracy and the emergence of new forms of water governance that is socially just, culturally sensitive, economically prudent and ecologically sustainable.

The publicity given to water sector reforms is seductive and they are presented in such a way as to suggest that if you are against these reforms, you are against reform itself. This is not true of course - who would ever say they were against all

reform? For Bangalore as a global city and Karnataka as a reform leader, the reforms seem to offer development and catching up: Bangalore as 'the new Singapore', or the 'next Shanghai' or, most famously, 'India's Silicon Valley'.

The pictorial representation of the contemporary reforms on democracy looks like the following:

**Insert 8.1: Contemporary Water sector reforms and the alienation of people**



For the last person in the society, lack of vertical accountability would mean limited or no access to decision making processes while lack of horizontal accountability puts the person at loss on whom to approach for support while in situation of crisis. The local corporator, the lowest elected representative in Urban government and the most proximal to citizens is now usually unaware of, and not privy to policy making that completely bypasses the elected corporation. Lack of International accountability suggests that global agreements are unilateral and not mindful of the requirements of democracy, or the local impact of such a decision making process.

The process of alienation would hence involve the distancing of democratic institutions away from people rather than converging, to enable them to realize their rights as citizens. Consider the example of the demonstration wards in Belgaum where 32% of people, usually from upper middle class neighbourhoods, are consuming 71% of the total water supplied to those areas where as 68% of the population are left only with 29%<sup>102</sup>. Analysing this in comparison to the actual number of people would mean that the upper middle class are using 214LPD and poor have access only to 60LPD. The situation of those who have been disconnected from the water grid for want of ability to pay the increasing bills is even worse.

Many people have of course prospered from Karnataka's tryst with water and urban reforms. But many have not; many more have suffered because of this new found status, millions continue to live in slums, in low income housing, the only refuge for displaced families from rural and peri-urban areas are the streets; many remain without secure land to call home; many continue to walk a couple of miles for water in the morning, to crouch over a leaking pipe waiting for their bucket to fill with 'illegal' water. These people who have not so far lived the Bangalore dream are those, are being further shut out, not only from the dream, but their city and their livelihoods.

But it is interesting that the reform agenda tries so hard to present itself as a win-win formula. It accepts the legitimacy of people's participation, it accepts that everybody should have access to water but we saw the tortuous efforts to make non-participatory, anti-poor policies look participatory and pro-poor as a sign that the basic argument for the universality of fundamental rights is over and has been won. You could also see it as one of the achievements of liberal democracy – the fact that all citizens, including the poor now have to at least be seen to be included in and positively affected by policy-making.

---

<sup>102</sup> RTI response from KUIDFC in Belgaum.

But this is a distinctly unsatisfactory achievement and the very fact pro-poor language, rather than policies, could be seen as an achievement of this democracy shows how little we now expect from it. What is worse is that this language gives a veneer of respectability and common humanity to these policies and provides its protagonists with just enough material to inculcate within themselves the habitual, unconscious self-deception they need to forge ahead with the policies, even as they undermine the very principles they invoke – democracy, human rights and participation.

But there's a limit to this argument and we shouldn't emphasise it too much. Do the CEOs of the water companies honestly believe they are the best people to provide water to the poor? Does the Director of Janaagraha honestly believe his organisation was facilitating citizen's participation in the GBWASP? Does the KUIDFC really believe that it is doing Karnataka a favour by establishing a parallel governance system with no accountability to people? Do the 'global consumers' of Bangalore really believe the Bangalore dream is inclusive?

The main incoherency of the Karnataka dream though is that, while its local avatars – be they politicians, software CEOs or high level bureaucrats – have stressed its importance for the state, they are advocating for reforms that have originated outside Karnataka, have often been brought to them by people outside Bangalore – be they from the World Bank, a consultancy firm or an NGO - and crucially, make no provision for the local specificities of Bangalore. The local agents, like the 'ghosts in the machine' work to implement it within the state. This is an old argument but it retains its power and significance as long as generic solutions continue to be offered.

This isn't to say that everything local is great and all outside help is bad or to encourage any sort of communalism. It's just to say that, if we believe in any form of democracy and in the importance of choice, it makes sense for the people who are going to be affected by a project or a policy to have the power to choose and direct

that project or policy. If the project is to do with a natural resource, the equitable sharing of it must be the only objective of such democratic discourses. This is obviously a very basic principle – as shown by the constant references to it by all the projects that ignore it – but it is still one that is ignored or subverted all too often. So where does that leave us? If we agree that the ‘reform’ agenda will not bring the required equitable comprehensive reforms then it is time to look elsewhere. Genuine reform will not happen under the aegis of the development agencies, consultancy firms, apolitical or corporate NGOs, corrupt or misguided bureaucrats or politicians peddling frivolous issues or playing identity politics. In other words it will not come from those who currently exercise policy-making, political power in these areas.

If genuine reform is to happen it is most likely to come through sustained political pressure by people. This of course has to be directed through the government, as the provider of services and so on. But popular pressure is the fuel that can keep genuine reform moving and also the regulator with which to keep the government accountable. This is a difficult, laborious, uphill struggle and it is difficult to see any of the fundamental needs of life – water, basic amenities, land – being addressed successfully in isolation as a single-issue cause. It involves people in the global north stopping their governmental representatives funding companies to subvert these rights or sanctioning the unaccountable influence of the transnational development industry.

The thesis investigates good governance reforms from the perspective of the complex power and political dynamics embedded in it and the opportunities and restrictions that it offers for the deepening of democracy and the realization of rights especially by the poor. By employing a combined approach of critical ethnography and anthropology of public policy of urban water reforms in Karnataka, I have been able to illustrate the contradictions that exist between the promises and the outcomes of the good governance discourse. This thesis shows how in the fifteen years that the policy prescriptions of good governance has transformed water sector

utilities in Karnataka, the mechanism of reforms has gone against the central ideals of democratic politics: facilitating active political involvement of the citizenry, expansion of human rights, forging political consensus through dialogue, and devising and implementing public policies that promote equity and social justice. In fact, good governance has gone against its own promises of universalizing access to basic services, empowering the poor to make water service utilities accountable, transparent and responsive governance and a strengthened political voice of the civil society. Offering a critical challenge to the contemporary hegemonic development discourse, this thesis has also exposed how despite the assertion of good governance, the deepening of democracy and the realization of human rights are not congruent with market oriented reforms.

Contemporary water sector reforms in Karnataka based on the dominant development discourse of good governance with its policy prescription that with the right alignment of institutions, and capitalist economic growth, human rights, and democracy will flourish, is undermining the deepening of democracy and is a serious threat to the expansion of social justice and human right to water in the state.

By exposing the under belly of good governance based water reforms, this thesis shows how the politics of water reforms of doing good, while seemingly neutral, is politically charged. It critically reflects on knowledge processes and professional cultures that mediate the policy direction in international development to create regimes of truth that go around the world as travelling rationalities.

As we progress, all the necessary requirements for providing a comprehensive water supply already exist in many areas around the world and certainly in Karnataka. The necessary will to use all of the money and technical expertise to do that does not exist. Perceiving and treating water supply first and foremost as the right of all people must be the fundamental cornerstone of any discussions about how to actually design and run that supply. The pressure to make it so has to come from

the citizens for whom that supply is intended. Now that sounds like it could be reform.