

Issues in Urban Governanace of Gaya and Bodh Gaya City: An Analysis

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ABSTRACT

The principal institution of urban administration in Gaya is the Gaya Municipal Corporation, which incorporates a number of departments in it including central administration, accounts, health, tax (including professional and platform taxes), law, engineering, lighting and water supply. Research works have identified four basic elements to frame the basis of my study of the comparison of urban governance between the two cities, Gaya and Bodh Gaya. These elements are responsiveness, accountability, public-private partnerships and transparency. In this research, I have attempted a comparison between these towns on the basis of the above mentioned four elements of urban governance. My attempt is to identify the extent of these four elements and present a comparative analysis of fair urban management and identify the remedial ideas for the enabling of better urban Governance in these cities.

Introduction

The concept of governance is complex and controversial. It is derived from the concept of 'Good Governance' that has gained currency in the 1990s ever since the World Bank initiated this idea as a part of the conditionalities of providing aid. This was based on the perspective that the development processes initiated in the 1950s to the 1980s in many parts of the world were not successful because they were not administered seriously by the national governments, which had a lot of power, but no accountability and also because they did not take the meaning of democratic norms of responsiveness seriously enough to incorporate the views, responses, demands and ideas of people on the ground. While for a student of politics therefore, this concept appears to be more attractively political at first sight, what it actually implied was somewhat different. It indicated very significantly that the overbearing welfare states of the post war era had lost their ability to provide for development and to "deliver services" to its people. Only if it took its people more like consumers, who had the right and opportunity to question or reject their policies, much in the same way that they would products in the market they did not like or those that did not really suit them, were they likely to be more successful in implementing their policies. Hence the argument was that the state should retreat from its old form and take on more characteristics of the market, while also allowing for other players, like the market and other parts of civil society to take up the issues of managing public spaces. This broad conception then has been systematically broken down into constituent parts and meanings by different scholars and practitioners. The specific application of these concepts in the realm of managing urban spaces is known as urban governance. Some see it as essentially concerned with

questions of financial accountability and administrative efficiency. Others are more interested in broader political concerns relating to democracy, human rights and participation. There has been a tendency in the past to see urban governance simply in terms of urban management, i.e., the operation and maintenance of a city's infrastructure and services. It is however a heavily politicized process and not simply a managerial one. Democracy is not the only ingredient of good governance, nor a guarantee that those who are bound by its disciplines will look after the world and the citizens with all due care and attention. Governance itself is a neutral term. It can be tyrannical or benevolent, effective or incompetent. Good governance is about a desired standard of practice for which common values or norms can be identified. Gaya town is a part of Gaya district in Bihar. This district was part of the Behar and Ramgarh district till 1864. It got the status of an independent district in 1865.¹ Of the two maps below, the first shows its location with respect to its neighboring districts and major networks and the second shows a clear picture of Gaya and Bodhgaya town and around.

Statement of problem

There is a need for consolidation of the heritage and tourism sites in and around Gaya town. But because of unplanned growth this has suffered extensively. The Gaya town Urban Agglomeration Area has been facing various problems in the recent years due to rapid urbanization and other reasons. Some of the major problems identified are: the old city in the central part of Gaya Urban Area is congested with narrow lanes, and crucial traffic congestion problems. Substantial parts of the city are unplanned. Drainage is the

¹P.C.Roy Choudhry, op. cit., p .31.

most crucial problem of Gaya and its surrounding areas. It is the root cause of many other physical and environment problems. Poverty and slums are a serious issue in the city. The township has modern latrine services, though the drainage system has made it worse. Some 80 years ago, night soil used to be removed to a trenching ground near Ramshila hill in iron trucks driven by a steam tramway. It was bought from England for Rs. 435-50. The Magadh University campus on the Gaya Dhobi road, about 2 kms west of Bodh Gaya, has come up in last 30 years. It is one of the best complexes developed in recent times in Bihar. Urbanisation in Gaya is spreading mainly to the west and on the east bank of the River Phalgu. Due to these rapid changes in the town, there are lots of new colonies that have come up. These are Nuttannagar, Kateri colony, Magadh colony, Bengali Bigha, Kujapi, Gajadharbigha, Aliganj, Islamganj, Saketpur colony, Chanakyapuri Sanjaynagermohalla, Jankpur, and Manpurmoffuhsil. But the civic amenities continue to be poor in these newly developed areas because of ignorance from local administration.

Study Area

Gaya town is a part of Gaya district in Bihar. This district was part of the Behar and Ramgarh district till 1864. It got the status of an independent district in 1865.² The town is locally divided into two parts. The old town of Gaya is popularly known as Andar Gaya and the new town as Sahibganj. Andar Gaya contains the residence of Gayawals who preside over the Gaya pilgrimage.

This part of the town has narrow streets and alleys. Many of the houses of Andar Gaya are very old and some of them are situated on a much higher level than others.³ The Sahibganj locality today has housing colonies, residences of high government officials, telephone buildings, hospital, public library, Gandhi Maidan, Gaya Club, Red Cross Bhawan, police lines, and office of the senior superintendent of post offices, residence of the Vice-Chancellor of Magadh University, bus stand and some educational institutions. The old Gaya area however has changed little. Only a new road to Vihnapad temple has been laid through Chandchoura. The area has houses of the Gayawal pandas, pilgrim’s rest houses, Tulsibag and burning ghat.

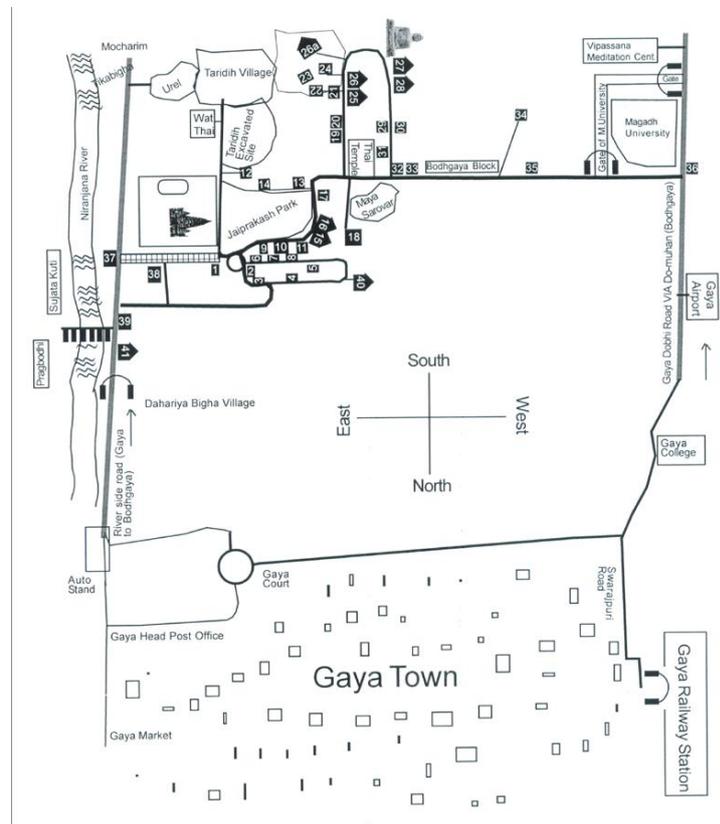
²P.C.Roy Choudhry, op. cit., p .31.

³KamldeoNarain Singh, *Urban Administration in India*, Abhinav Publications, New Delhi1,1978,p.16.



Source: Office of Gaya Regional Development Authority

Fig. 1.1



Source: Maha Bodhi Temple Management Committee, Bodh Gaya

Fig. 1.2.

Responsiveness

Municipal Staff Training to Generate Responsiveness and Efficiency.

According to this indicator local governments not only should have appropriate mechanisms to ascertain people’s need, aspirations and contentment level but also should have personnel, who are trained and skilled to meet their needs. Gaya Municipal Corporation’ most important failing has been in not fulfilling the staff strength. While it needs to be more

than 1100, at present only 350 (approx.) staff are employed. Further, these employees are not getting their salary on time. These vacancies have not been filled in the last 20 years, as is the case with most local urban bodies in Bihar. This state of affairs is bound to generate disinterest amongst present employees, in addition to harming the opportunity of jobs to the younger generation. Because of this, the Gaya Municipal Corporation is facing a crisis of survival and so the issue of effective training strategy to make this body more responsive, is actually worthless. Thus this has resulted in poor urban governance in the town.

In the case of Bodh Gaya Nagar Panchayat the situation is similar to that of the GMC. There too, the staffs are a poor proportion to what is required and what is more, for such an important institution, the main administrator is not a full-time official. As indicated earlier, the Bodh Gaya Block Development officer has additional responsibility for this Nagar Panchayat. These problems then make the requirement or ethic of responsiveness a far cry.

Availability of Mechanisms to address public grievances and views and their effectiveness.

Mechanisms to address public grievances primarily need to be the responsibility of Municipal Officers. But in the case of both towns, it does not seem as if these institutions have any mechanisms to listen to the problems of people, the reason for which can be traced to two reasons. The first is the crisis of the internal order of the institutions themselves. The radical 74th Amendment, which we have discussed in detail earlier, purports to introduce several changes at once, which implies fundamentally, mounting challenges to social hierarchies. It is on one of these grounds that both urban bodies have been struggling – the issue is that of the leadership of these bodies being reserved for Dalit women. The seat of the Chairman of the Bodhgaya Nagar Panchayat is reserved for a scheduled caste woman. Devenshi Devi won this election, but she is poor and illiterate and therefore unable to assert herself in the face of the deeply upper caste, feudal and patriarchal mindset structure of her colleagues, including the Vice-Chairman Ramsewak Singh. They oppose and hinder her performance of duties, including the symbolic ones like hoisting the national flag on Independence Day. Effectively then, the entrenched power structures in society are not allowing a lady to be the Chairman. The situation is similar in Gaya town. The seat of Mayor in the 2002 local bodies' election was reserved for Scheduled Caste Women. Asha Devi was elected the mayor of Gaya town, but faced the same problem, that of opposition by local politicians. In her case, the council went to the extent of terminating her position by passing a resolution by two-thirds majority. This situation carried on for nearly 3 years and it was only after a court intervention that she was restored her legitimate position. So the feudal mindset in the local power structure has further undermined the concept of the city manager, which has been seen to be effective in other cases, as discussed earlier.

These instances show that the focus on institutional reforms to bring into effect better urban governance cannot be satisfactory. It is imperative that these very desirable institutional changes be supported by fundamental interventions in challenging dominant social hierarchies, like women's entry into the public sphere, equal rights and education to the girl child, better employment opportunities to the landless poor and the smashing of caste prejudices and differences. As a student of politics, I would argue that while the subjugated and marginalized need the support of legal and institutional reform, it is ultimately effective politics on the ground that will make them possible. And in turn, it will then be able to influence structures and processes of governance.

The second issue with respect to the availability of mechanisms to address people's grievances is the lack of representation from CBOs/NGOs. In Bodh Gaya town, due to international pressure, as also the very form of the Nagar Panchayat, there is some influence possible, but in Gaya town, it is negligible. In Bodhgaya, civil society organizations are active and have the capacity to actually provide support for better governance, but for their involvement to be truly effective would require active leadership from the Panchayat. This is sadly lacking as the Panchayat is facing a crisis of leadership, whereby the councilors do not see a political vested interest in making sure there is better governance. To my mind, this brings the issue back to that of politics—it is when people understand that they have a vested interest in solving these problems that it makes them more effective politically, that these bodies will take intervention in urban governance issues more seriously.

Adequacy of Budget for and management of basic services

As Gaya and Bodh Gaya are tourist as well as pilgrimage cities, theoretically the possibility to get good budgetary allocations exists. In reality though, of the two only Bodh Gaya manages to get a proper fund because UNESCO has designated the Mahabodhi temple complex her into a World Heritage site. As a result, the Central and state governments as well as other players have started to pay great attention to it. Recently in the year 2005 the city was also selected for the Jawahar Lal Urban Renewal Mission as a mega city and a budget allocation of Rs. 250 crore has been announced.

On the other hand, while Gaya is also a significant place of pilgrimage for Hindus, it is not getting any such budgetary funding on these grounds from either the central or state governments or other agencies. It is interesting that this was the case even when the Central government was dominated by a coalition that had right-wing parties subscribing to the idea of Hindu majoritarianism. As such, it could have been expected that they would have promoted this town, as many other Hindu towns, considering one of their main platforms for mobilization had been through an ancient Hindu town, Ayodhya. What needs to be cited her however, is that at that very time, the Rashtriya Janata Dal, with a very aggressive anti-Hindu majoritarianism ideology was in office in the State

government of Bihar and so it would have been unlikely that they would have allowed any promotion of Hindu cities on the grounds of their being Hindu. So here too, the political agenda of those in power and the extent to which they match federal and provincial levels plays a very important role in determining the fate of local governance issues.

That stated however, it would be important to point out that specific religious affiliations apart, the very nature of pilgrim towns lends themselves to be oriented as tourist and other pilgrim centers and a focus simply on these issues actually has great benefits economically for all sections of the society if channelized and utilized properly. This requires a kind of leadership and vision however, that requires people to be treated as citizens that deserve a better life and opportunities to expand their capabilities and freedoms, which is not the case currently in either town. Also, a very important factor has been rampant corruption in both towns in the urban local bodies, indeed everywhere. Hence, even in the town that has better budgetary allocation, it is unable to utilize it properly because of this factor.

Quality of Municipal Roads and City Transport in the City

As observed in several other respects, there are big differences on this indicator as well between Gaya and Bodh Gaya. The reality is that the transport system of Bodh Gaya town is quite good because of its international importance while that of Gaya town situation is very bad. This explains why Gaya town is not attracting more pilgrims even if it is famous place for Hinduism worldwide. It raises a fundamental issue of investment in the city to the policy makers. Yet, the two towns need not be dealt with separately on this issue at least. Given they are part of the same district, close to each other and need to be connected because of the nature of the railways system, it makes perfect sense to have an integrated development of transportation systems for both of them. But this requires that institutions of both areas are able to come together to collaborate and share resources. Given the severe limitations of the above components and the nature of the functioning of the local bodies, this seems an unlikely possibility in the near future.

The final indicators relate to the Municipal programmes for women and children and youth. In the case of Gaya and Bodh Gaya the response of city administration on these sensitive issues is negligible only private and other civil society organizations are addressing them. As we analysed earlier, in Gaya Town NGOs like The People Foundation Of India, Poorest Areas Civil Society are taking care of the same, while in Bodh Gaya town, NGOs like Nari Jagran Manch, Peoples First Educational Charitable Trust, and international NGOs like MaitriCharitable Trust programmes and the Kirwin International Relief Foundation are dealing with them.

After applying the above indicators to analyse responsiveness in both towns, it is clear that it is well below expectations. There are lessons that can be learnt by both towns by the success stories of Karnataka Bhoomi (Land),

Himachal Pradesh: Lok Mitra (people's friends) and Haryana Rewari district pilot project of computerization of land records.

Public Private Partnerships

If the role of the state in the new conceptions of governance is to be one of a facilitator, this automatically suggests the need for enhanced participation by different stakeholders in the urban development process. On this aspect, it is quite interesting to see the different indicators and characteristics at work in practical respects in both towns.

Implementation of incentive schemes to encourage private sector to participate in development Gaya town has so far not accepted the policy of private participation in the development process. Even it has not maintained its dignity in public sphere where community market center was planned by the municipal corporation of Gaya has so far not materialized, so how one expects from local administration to give space to private sector. On the other hand, Bodh Gaya has lost one of its best and biggest opportunities by the shifting of Maitriya Project, the building of the world's largest Buddhist statute to Sarnath in Uttar Pradesh, because it was a more amenable site of Buddhist tourism. The reasons for losing this project were discouragement by the state government as well as the local administration towards this project.

Presence of business sector initiative to improve efficiency of local government bureaucracy

In this context Gaya town and Bodh Gaya town have some difference. Gaya town so far does not have any business sector organization that consolidates or represents their interests and initiatives. The Gaya Chamber of Commerce takes care of some of the issues of local business, but it has to yet mature into a body that is active to initiate action in civic issues. In Bodh Gaya town however, due to the influence of JNNURM and World Heritage List, there are technology improvement programmes, in which the involvement of the Body Gaya Temple Management Committee is common these days.

Joint involvement of public and private sector in planning funding and implementation of programs

In this context Gaya is again lacking the above indicators. With this example of it can be understood that the water supply project of Rs. 11.3 crores for Gaya town have not been utilized on the ground because of the lack of coordination with other departments. So, the town continues to face a severe water crisis specially in the summer months. There has been some initiative in Bodh Gaya in this respect, though on the part of the Samvedansheel Nagrik Manch, a civil society organization and not the institutions of the state. This demonstrates both the potential that exists and the great deal of work of mobilization that remains to be done in these towns in order for this aspect of governance to make an appearance. Again, it needs to be pointed out however, that this would be

possible only when civic consciousness is linked to political consciousness of people, enough to generate public opinion and then public action on these counts.

Privatization of local government services

In this aspect, urban systems in both towns are far behind in privatization of local services. As it is, due to the lack of budget the local services are in bad condition and they are just about managing salaries from different tax sources of the GMC and BNP. The project of Sulabh Sanitary system for both the towns has yet to be finalized. Not that this needs to be a priority in our opinion—because the literature on and experience of privatization world-wise is not an unblemished one. Yet as this is considered an indicator of PPP in the popular imagination, it is important to understand where these bodies stand. In this respect, the examples of Exonerate for solid waste management and the SakuSurhall arena and Alundur project can provide good lessons for these towns, if at all they would take this up.

Accountability

Accountability simply is about the extent to which local authorities realize they are accountable for what they do?

Indicators

Regularity in the fiscal transactions and faithful compliance/adherence to legal requirements and administrative policies.

In both the town's urban administrative structure, these indicators have not effectively followed the norms of physical transaction. There are many instances of irregularity and corruption in the GMC as well as the BMC and this has created problems in the way of improving administrative policies. In this particular contest the GMC has not able to formalize the administrative policies because the counsellorship of different wards have not they an understand the physical and monetary policy of a municipal corporation. In comparison, the situation in the BNP is also similar because the representatives are not much more concerned about being faithful to the features of the 74th amendment act and even the structures of the State Finance Commission are unknown to the local administration.

Efficient and economical use of funds, property, manpower and other resources.

Participatory and decentralized activities in the planning and implementation of programs / projects - In this context efficiency and accountability are lacking due to the reason of the non-transparent system. Additionally, the existing political structure creates problem for micro level development.

Systems in place which ensure that goals are clearly communicated to the constituents

Different agencies of development of both towns have not fixed their duties towards people and even people are not

aware to their right for each. The role of GRDA and GMC for the development of Gaya and Bodh Gaya, in not finalize the master plan of Gaya town and Bodh Gaya town until after inclusion of Mahabodhi Temple in World Heritage site, International pressure forced the draft master plan of Bodh Gaya town, shows how irresponsible both administrative institutions have been. The administrative responsibility of Municipal officers and Nagar Panchayat Officers and also local leaders towards their duties can never be effectively criticized because in Bihar the allocation of power continues to be determine by caste structure. This is why the very notion of accountability is continuously undermined in both the urban spheres.

Transparency

This is also an important element of urban governments where it has deep relation with accountability because the way both towns are functioning indicates clearly that lack of transparency in every layer has created problem for smooth governance in both the places. The indicators of this component can be examined as follows:

Transparency of budget formulation, revenue collection and expenditure:

In this particular context Gaya and Bodh Gaya have problems in terms of budgeting and formulation of taxes for different ventures for eg. in Gaya Town every year Pitrapaksha fair held annually and people from different parts of the world comes to this place at large level and they donate good amount of money but this money is not managed properly by lodging house committee as well as GMC. While in context of Bodh Gaya the problem is same there lots of resources to generate fund but existing Nagar Panchayat are not able to make a proper audit of these all collections.

Transparency of municipal actions such as staff selection and promotion and the award of contracts

Transparency is a dream for the local administration in both places because the Gaya Municipal Corporation and Bodh Gaya Nagar Panchayat have problems of staff selection, promotion and award of contracts. Lax and corrupt, deserving people neither get into good positions in government or are awarded the best contracts. The best solution to this problem comes from an NGO in Bangalore Janaagraha, and its initiative with respect to the Bangalore Municipal Corporation. They have enabled transparency in this corporation has proved that how transparency and good work can prove better urban governance.

Issues in Urban Governance

Problems for Tourism

There is a need for consolidation of the heritage and tourism sites in and around Gaya town. But because of unplanned growth this has suffered extensively. The Gaya town Urban Agglomeration Area has been facing various

problems in the recent years due to rapid urbanization and other reasons. Some of the major problems identified are: The old city, which is in the central part of Gaya Urban Area, is congested, with narrow lanes, and has crucial traffic congestion problems. Substantial parts of the city are unplanned. Drainage is the most crucial problem of Gaya and its surrounding areas. It is the root cause of many other physical and environment problems. Poverty and slums are a serious issue in the city.

Institutional Crisis

Non implementation of 74th CAA in spirit - GMC does not have Financial/taxation powers; budget is to be approved from Department of Local Self Government. Infrastructure Development in GMC area is with PWD, PHED, and Maintenance Tax collection is by GMC. GRDA entrusts functions to GMC against the spirit of 74th CAA Overlapping of jurisdiction between GRDA and GMC. GRDA, PHED, exercise control over major parts of GMC Area.

Environmental Issue

Typically, pilgrim towns in India had been small towns situated in pristine environments to provide solace to the pilgrims seeking spiritual help away from worldly matters. Today, many pilgrim towns have shown signs of rapid urbanization, like for Puri, Mohanty (1999) 'the process of modernization, improvement in transport infrastructure and communication has turned the city of pilgrimage to a place of modern tourism'⁴. Problems in pilgrim towns have become more complex that changed from issues purely related to pilgrimage (with religious motivation) as 'occasional| events' to problems of regular visitation of floating population. The carrying capacities of such towns have been stressed by influx of visitors over a longer duration, leading to degradation of the very source of natural and religious environment that generated the activity of pilgrimage⁵. The sheer volume of visitors makes such places vulnerable for severe environmental impact seen in increased problems of disposal of solid waste and surface water, high levels of pollution (air, water and noise), constrained water supply, overcrowding, etc with rampant deforestation for provision of more amenities and facilities⁶. Many of the issues associated with pilgrimage are similar to those arising out of mass tourism. While the impacts from pilgrimage are inevitable and inseparable from local activities, it is important to look at how they are responded to, managed and minimized. A common belief is that the deity (God) will take care of all the problems and 'He does'⁷. Thus, the presence of religious institutions in such places renders high potential to realize their role in environmental management as they are a key player in the religious activity of pilgrimage. The town of Gaya is also

replete with such instances where movements from outside has added to the owes to the town.

Conclusion

Between the two towns, the town of Bodh Gaya appears to show a lot of resilience at the level of transparency and accountability on account of enrolment of external sources, funding agencies and the non-formal sector being better. But even here, the local urban bodies have failed to deliver. Gaya town faces a similar problem, the support that it acquires from external sources are limited as compared to the Bodh Gaya Town.

Governance and development are interrelated process. Governance affects development in a number of ways and development is understood to influence governance broadly in two ways. First, it releases more resources for expenditure on governance: there is a positive correlation between the level of development and resource availability for governance. Second, governance is supposed to be more difficult under conditions of low development and in a less developed society. Gaya town appears to be caught in a dual process of low level of governance and development that has a mutually reinforcing character. For example, if policing has been affected by low road density and its poor quality, an indicator of low development; then development, say, private and foreign investment has been affected by the poor law and order. Similarly, the revenue mobilization capacity of the town has been constrained by its heavy dependence on agriculture sector, a low revenue generator; then due to low level of revenue generation, the town has been unable to make heavy investment in other fields. Haphazard development of cities and the inability of the municipal bodies to maintain civic facilities have stolen the attraction of Gaya's city life.

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