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Decentralised Governance and Citizen-Centric Administration: A Study of Duare Sarkar Prokolpo in Murshidabad District of West Bengal

¹ Hamim Ashik, ² Dr. Sachchidananda Roy

¹ Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, Bankura University, India

² Associate Professor of Political Science, Bankura Christian College, India

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Corresponding Author: **Hamim Ashik**

Abstract

This paper examines the concept of decentralised governance and citizen-centric administration in the context of West Bengal, focusing on the Duare Sarkar Prokolpo. Decentralized governance refers to the transfer of administrative power and decision-making authority, from the central authority to local levels of government. It aims to make governance more participatory, transparent, and accountable. On the other hand, Citizen-centric administration highlights delivering public services according to the needs of the people, ensuring availability, efficiency, and inclusiveness. Together, these concepts promote good governance at the grassroots level.

The study analyses the Duare Sarkar initiative launched by the Government of West Bengal to provide government services at the doorstep to the citizens. The basic objective of the prokolpo is to reduce administrative barriers and

make welfare schemes easily accessible. Key services include assistance related to social security schemes, health schemes, caste certificates, land records, and financial inclusion programs. The initiative aims to bridge the gap between the administration and the common people, especially in rural areas.

The research adopts a qualitative methodology. Data were collected through semi-structured questionnaire interviews with 150 respondents from Raninagar I Block of Murshidabad district. The respondents included beneficiaries and residents who participated in Duare Sarkar camps. The study focuses on their experiences, satisfaction levels, and challenges faced during their visit to the camp. The findings indicate that Duare Sarkar has significantly improved access to welfare schemes and reduced delays in service delivery.

Keywords: Decentralised Governance, Citizen-Centric Administration, Duare Sarkar Prokolpo, Grassroots Governance

Introduction

Governance is an important concept in political science and public administration. It refers to the process through which decisions are made and implemented for the welfare of society as a whole. In modern democratic systems, the idea of governance has shifted from centralised government control to a more participatory nature. According to R. A. W. Rhodes (1996)^[3], governance refers to the new processes of governing that involve interactions between the state and society rather than only hierarchical control. This shift stresses accountability, participation, and cooperation between government institutions at all levels and citizens.

The concept of decentralised governance gained importance, particularly after administrative reforms in the late twentieth century. Decentralisation means the transfer of power, authority, and responsibility from higher levels of government to lower or local levels. James Manor (1999)^[2] argues that democratic decentralisation improves transparency, responsiveness, and public participation in governance. In India, decentralisation was constitutionally recognised and strengthened through the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts, which empowered Panchayati Raj Institutions and urban local bodies to function as grassroots democratic units.

Another related concept is citizen-centric administration, which focuses on delivering public services according to the needs and expectations of citizens. This idea became popular with the rise of New Public Management reforms. Christopher Hood (1991)^[1] explains that public administration should be efficient, result-oriented, and service-driven. Citizen-centric governance ensures accessibility, transparency, and inclusiveness, especially for marginalised and rural populations.

In this context, the Government of West Bengal introduced the Duare Sarkar Prokolpo (Government at the Doorstep). The

initiative aims to provide various welfare schemes and government services directly to citizens through camps organized at the local level. The program seeks to reduce administrative barriers, minimize delays, and increase awareness about social security, health, financial assistance, caste certification, and land-related services.

Therefore, Duare Sarkar can be seen as a practical example of decentralised and citizen-centric governance. This study examines its effectiveness and challenges in strengthening public service delivery at the grassroots level, particularly in Raninagar I Block of Murshidabad district.

Statement of the Problem

In recent years, governments have tried to improve public service delivery by adopting decentralised and citizen-centric models of governance. In India, despite constitutional decentralisation through Panchayati Raj Institutions, many rural citizens still face problems in accessing government schemes. Administrative delays, lack of awareness, bureaucratic complexity, corruption, and distance from government offices often prevent people, especially the poor and marginalized, from receiving benefits on time.

To address these issues, the Government of West Bengal announced the Duare Sarkar Prokolpo to deliver welfare services directly to people through camps organised at the mass level. The initiative aims to reduce the gap between the government and citizens and ensure faster and easier access to services.

However, an important question is whether Duare Sarkar successfully strengthened decentralised governance and citizen-centric administration in practice? While the scheme appears innovative, its actual effectiveness at the local level needs systematic evaluation. There may still be challenges such as limited awareness, administrative pressure, overcrowding at camps, political influence, etc.

Therefore, the main theme of this study is to examine whether Duare Sarkar has truly improved public service delivery and promoted grassroots governance in Raninagar I Block of Murshidabad district, and to identify the practical issues faced during its implementation.

Rationale of the Study

Good governance is essential for social and economic development. In a democratic country like India, government schemes are designed to support poor and marginalised people. However, many citizens, especially in rural areas, frequently face difficulties in accessing these benefits due to a lack of awareness, distance from offices, complex procedures, and administrative delays.

The Duare Sarkar Prokolpo was introduced as an innovative step to bring government services directly to the people. It aims to strengthen decentralised governance and promote citizen-centric administration by organizing camps at the grassroots level. Since this initiative is directly connected with public service delivery and welfare access, it is important to study its real impact at the local level.

This study is significant because there are lack of field-based studies that examine how Duare Sarkar functions in rural blocks like Raninagar I of Murshidabad district. By collecting primary data from beneficiaries, the research helps to understand whether the scheme has improved transparency, efficiency, and accessibility. It also identifies the challenges faced during implementation. Therefore, the

study is necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of Duare Sarkar and to contribute to the broader discussion on decentralised and citizen-centric governance in West Bengal.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the basic functioning of the Duare Sarkar Prokolpo in Murshidabad, West Bengal.
2. To assess the effectiveness of Duare Sarkar in improving access to government welfare schemes in Raninagar I Block of Murshidabad district.
3. To analyse the experiences and satisfaction level of beneficiaries who participated in Duare Sarkar camps.
4. To identify the major challenges and implementation issues faced during the execution of the scheme at the grassroots level.

Research Questions

1. How does Duare Sarkar Prokolpo promote decentralised governance and citizen-centric administration at the grassroots level?
2. To what extent has Duare Sarkar improved access to government welfare schemes for the people of Raninagar I Block in Murshidabad district?
3. What are the major challenges and limitations faced during the implementation of Duare Sarkar camps at the local level?

Research Methodology

This study adopts a mainly qualitative research approach to assess the impact of the Duare Sarkar Prokolpo on decentralised and citizen-centric governance. The research was conducted in Raninagar I Block of Murshidabad district. A total of 150 respondents who participated in Duare Sarkar camps were selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using semi-structured questionnaire interviews, which included both objective-type questions and open-ended questions to understand beneficiaries' experiences and opinions.

The collected data were analysed through simple descriptive and thematic methods to identify key findings related to accessibility, effectiveness, and implementation challenges of the programme.

Findings and Discussion

1) The study revealed a significant level of awareness about the Duare Sarkar programme among the citizens. Around 93% of the respondents reported familiarity with the initiative. Many respondents mentioned that information was circulated through local government outreach efforts, especially miking campaigns conducted by the concerned Panchayat office from village to village. Word-of-mouth communication also played an important role, and social media helped spread awareness of the programme.

2) The study found that over 95% of the respondents stated that they were able to easily access and enroll in the Lakshmir Bhandar scheme through the Duare Sarkar camp. Most beneficiaries mentioned that the camp system simplified the application process and reduced the need to visit multiple government offices. They reported that officials were present at the camp to guide them in filling out forms and submitting necessary documents. As a result, the process became quicker, more convenient, and less costly in terms of time and travel expenses. This indicates

that Duare Sarkar has played a significant role in improving access to social welfare schemes at the grassroots level.

3) The study shows that over 60% of the respondents claimed that getting an electricity connection became easier through the Duare Sarkar camp. They mentioned that earlier the process was time-consuming and required multiple visits to the electricity office. However, through the camp, they were able to submit their applications and required documents in one place. Many respondents also reported that after submitting the application at the camp, the process of providing the electricity connection started within seven days. This indicates that the camp system helped in reducing delays and making basic services more accessible to rural households.

4) The study reveals that around 85% of the respondents stated that they were able to receive benefits under the Krishak Bandhu Prakalpa through the Duare Sarkar camp. The respondents mentioned that the camp made the registration process easier for farmers. Officials at the camp assisted them in filling out forms, verifying land-related documents, and completing necessary formalities. As a result, farmers could access financial assistance and social security benefits more smoothly and without significant administrative difficulties. This shows that Duare Sarkar has helped in strengthening agricultural welfare support at the grassroots level.

5) The study shows that around 52% of the respondents reported enrolling in the Bangla Shasya Bima Yojana (crop insurance scheme) through the Duare Sarkar camp. The respondents mentioned that the camp helped them understand the importance of crop insurance and the application procedure. Officials provided guidance regarding required documents and eligibility criteria. However, compared to other schemes, the participation rate was relatively lower, which may be due to a lack of awareness, limited land ownership, or confusion about insurance procedures. This indicates that while Duare Sarkar has improved access to agricultural insurance, more awareness and information campaigns are still needed to increase coverage.

6) The study reveals that over 74% of the respondents reported receiving benefits under the Bardhakya Bhata (Old Age Pension) scheme through the Duare Sarkar camp. Elderly beneficiaries mentioned that the camp system made the application and verification process much easier compared to earlier procedures. They did not need to repeatedly visit government offices, and officials at the camp helped them complete the required formalities. As a result, many senior citizens were able to access their pension benefits more smoothly and without significant delay. This reflects the positive role of Duare Sarkar in strengthening social security support for the elderly population at the grassroots level.

7) The study found that new registration under the Khadya Sathi scheme, as well as name correction and address change, became easier through the Duare Sarkar camp. Many respondents mentioned that earlier, they had to visit government offices multiple times for such corrections. However, through the camp, they were able to submit applications, update details, and complete necessary formalities in a single visit. Officials present at the camp assisted them in the verification process and document submission. This reduced both time and travel costs for the

beneficiaries and improved the overall efficiency of the public distribution system services.

The study shows that the overall satisfaction level of the respondents regarding the Duare Sarkar camp was generally high. Most beneficiaries expressed positive opinions about the initiative because it brought government services closer to their homes. They felt that the camp system reduced unnecessary delays, travel expenses, and repeated visits to government offices.

A large number of respondents mentioned that the behaviour of government officials at the camps was cooperative and helpful. They appreciated the guidance provided during form-filling and document verification. Many respondents were satisfied with the speed of service delivery, especially in schemes like Lakshmir Bhandar, old age pension, electricity connection, and Krishak Bandhu.

However, some respondents also pointed out certain problems. A few mentioned overcrowding at camps, long waiting hours, and lack of proper seating arrangements. Some people felt that more awareness is needed about schemes like crop insurance. Despite these minor issues, the majority of respondents believed that Duare Sarkar has made access to government services easier and more transparent.

Overall, the findings indicate that the satisfaction level among beneficiaries is high, and the programme has positively contributed to citizen-centric and decentralized governance at the grassroots level.

Major Challenges and Limitations in the Implementation of Duare Sarkar Camps

Although Duare Sarkar has brought government services closer to the people, several challenges and limitations are observed in its implementation at the local level.

First, overcrowding and heavy public turnout remain major issues. Since many beneficiaries attend the camps on fixed dates, large gatherings often create long lines and waiting hours. Elderly persons, women, and persons with disabilities sometimes face physical discomfort due to inadequate seating arrangements, lack of shade, or insufficient drinking water facilities.

Second, there are manpower and logistical limitations. In some camps, the number of officials is not sufficient compared to the number of applicants. This increases workload and may slow down service delivery. Technical problems such as poor internet connectivity, server failure, or a shortage of digital equipment can also delay data entry and verification processes.

Third, documentation and eligibility-related problems frequently arise. Many rural citizens do not possess updated documents, such as Aadhaar linkage to their phone number or to the bank account, land records, caste certificates, or income certificates. As a result, their applications may remain pending or get rejected. This creates dissatisfaction among some applicants.

Fourth, there is still partial awareness and information gaps. While people are generally aware of popular schemes like Lakshmir Bhandar or old age pension, awareness about schemes such as crop insurance or certain specialised benefits is comparatively low. Some beneficiaries are also unclear about eligibility conditions and the required documents before attending the camp.

Recommendations and Possible Solutions

As per this study the possible solution to overcome the challenges faced in the implementation of the Duare Sarkar camps, the following recommendations can be suggested.

First, better planning and crowd management should be ensured. Camps can be organized for more days or divided into panchayat and village-wise to reduce overcrowding. A token system or time-slot system may help in managing long lines and reducing waiting time.

Second, increasing administrative staff and training can improve efficiency. Additional officials and volunteers may be appointed during camps. Regular training should be provided to staff to ensure the quick processing of applications and polite behavior toward citizens.

Third, improving infrastructure and logistics is essential. Adequate seating arrangements, drinking water, shade, and proper help desks should be arranged at camp sites. Ensuring stable internet connectivity and sufficient digital equipment will reduce technical delays.

Fourth, awareness campaigns should be strengthened. Along with miking campaigns by Panchayat offices, leaflets, local meetings, and social media awareness programs can help people understand eligibility criteria and required documents before attending the camp.

Fifth, improving documentation support is important. Help desks can assist applicants in correcting documents such as Aadhaar linkage, caste certificates, and land records before final submission.

Conclusion

The above study highlights that the Duare Sarkar initiative represents an important step toward decentralized governance and citizen-centric administration in West Bengal. By organizing camps at the grassroots level, the government has made various welfare schemes more accessible to rural citizens. The findings from the study area, i.e., Raninagar I Block of Murshidabad district, show a high level of awareness and satisfaction among beneficiaries. Schemes such as Lakshmir Bhandar, old age pension, Krishak Bandhu, electricity connection, and Khadya Sathi have become easier to access through the camp system.

However, the study also identifies certain challenges, including overcrowding, administrative pressure, technical issues, documentation problems, and coordination gaps. These limitations indicate that while the initiative is effective, it requires continuous monitoring and improvement.

Overall, Duare Sarkar has strengthened the connection between the government and citizens and reduced barriers in public service delivery. With better planning, improved infrastructure, and stronger awareness efforts, the programme can further enhance grassroots governance and promote inclusive development in West Bengal.

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