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**PANCHAYAT JAMABANDHI  
IN KARNATAKA:  
A CASE OF TRANSPARENCY  
AND ACCOUNTABILITY  
IN GOOD GOVERNANCE**

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# **Panchayat Jamabandhi in Karnataka: A Case of Transparency and Accountability in Good Governance<sup>1</sup>**

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## ***Abstract***

*The "Panchayat Jamabandhi" is an innovative administrative mechanism to bring in transparency and accountability in administration at the Grama Panchayat level. Under this new mechanism, citizens are given an opportunity to access documents and files of the grama Panchayats thereby making the process all-inclusive, participatory, transparent and accountable. This paper takes a close look at the implementation process of the programme and its implication for promoting good governance at the local level of the federal polity.*

## **Introduction**

In recent decades, the responsibilities of governments have increased many-fold. The democratic framework in which most modern governments work has also placed upon them an additional responsibility, the social responsibility of being accountable to their clientele, whom they serve and work for. This social responsibility can best be understood and also measured in terms of what is popularly known as "social auditing" or "social accounting" (Zadek and Raynard 1995). Social auditing is a way of measuring the social and ethical performance of an organisation, be it a non-profit organisation or a corporate body (Public Affairs Centre 1998). It measures social performance in order to achieve improvement as well as to report accurately on what has been done. This measuring process aims to enable organisations to be more accountable to their stakeholders by involving the latter through dialogue and discussions. Hence, this process is all-inclusive, participatory, transparent and accountable.

Seen in the above context, the panchayat raj system, a third-level polity in India's federal political system and regarded as "Institution of Local Self-Government" as per Article 243G of the 73rd Amendment Act, provides political space for citizens to participate in the decision-

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making process through institutional mechanisms like the Grama Sabha (an electoral college comprising all the voters of the village). Further, panchayats hold the mandate of ensuring both economic development and social justice by formulating and implementing various rural development programmes. To translate these programmes into reality, panchayats have been entrusted with the necessary powers, functions and resources. All the State Panchayat Acts, including that of the State of Karnataka, have incorporated the functions as specified in the Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution as the main responsibilities of their panchayats constituted at the district, taluk (intermediate level) and village levels.<sup>2</sup>

However, the related issues to be discussed are the issues of accountability (Paul 1992, Inbanathan 2002), and transparency (Blair 2000; Heller 2001) seen mainly in terms of utilising and spending the resources available for promoting 'good governance' (Villadsen 1999; Leftwich 1993). The present paper makes an attempt to address these issues in the context of panchayats in Karnataka, which are brought under public scrutiny through a programme called Jamabandhi. This arrangement is to enable these grassroots-level bodies to ensure for themselves both accountability and transparency, and effective delivery of services and to reach the benefits to the needy regions and persons; more importantly, for assessing the extent of utilisation of grants, funds and other tax resources assigned to these institutions. All of this is notwithstanding the fact that the accounts of the panchayats are verified, scrutinised and audited by officers authorised by the Controller of State Accounts every year. However, this is not directly accessible to general public and they are not aware of audit reports and other documents. In order to make these reports and documents open to public the Karnataka Government has introduced Jamabandhi.

### **Panchayat Jamabandhi**

The Government of Karnataka recently initiated an innovative administrative mechanism, popularly called Jamabandhi, a kind of social auditing, to examine the working of grama panchayats in the State (RDPR 2000). The panchayat jamabandhi, as practiced in Karnataka, is expected to be an annual public inspection of accounts and registers of the gram panchayats, the lower tier of the Panchayat Raj system. As an experiment, this has been done only at the grama panchayat level. It was clarified to us that the gram panchayat provides the right forum for people to assemble, participate and interact with their representatives and officials. More importantly, the local people are quite aware of activities carried out by their panchayats and it would be an opportunity for them to take a

close look at such activities. However, to hold such meetings either at the taluk panchayat level or at the zilla panchayat level may not be viable in terms of space, time and purpose. Under this new mechanism, the functioning of grama panchayats is placed under public scrutiny once a year. The citizens are given an opportunity to take a close look at the working of their grama panchayats. Through this mechanism, citizens have an access to grama panchayat's records, registers, budget documents, accounts (approximately 40 in number), and they can even question the processes followed by the grama panchayat in the selection of beneficiaries, development projects etc.

As a concept and an idea, Jamabandhi has been in practice in the State for long. This has been very well applied and practiced in the Department of Revenue, where the revenue officer, called the Tahasildar or Magistrate of the taluk, conducts Jamabandhi in revenue circles by examining the annual collection of land revenue and other taxes collected by the village accountants and revenue inspectors. Taking note of this, the Department of Rural Development and Panchayat Raj (RDPR) has introduced jamabandhi for examining the working of grama panchayats in the State. However, this is being done in a different spirit when compared to the way it was practiced in the Revenue Department. The jamabandhi in panchayats is carried out in the presence of citizens, whereas in the Revenue Department it is purely an administrative routine activity involving only the concerned officials and the staff. The rationale behind this policy move of the RDPR Department has been to assess the performance of grama panchayats, as against their objectives and the expectations of the stakeholders. Further, this would facilitate the grama panchayats to:

- ♦ have an introspective look at their strong and weak areas of functioning;
- ♦ respond to the demands, wishes and aspirations of their stakeholders;
- ♦ ensure effective delivery of services; and
- ♦ promote accountability and transparency in the overall governance.

### **Objectives**

The prime objective of the present paper is to examine to what extent the jamabandhi programme was able to generate enthusiasm and interest among the public to participate in the programme, and to evaluate its impact on the overall functioning of the grama panchayats. More particularly the objectives of the present paper are:

- ◆ to examine the process of the implementation of Jamabandhi;
- ◆ to examine the extent of participation of the stakeholders in the programme;
- ◆ to assess the impact of Jamabandhi in ensuring transparency and accountability in the panchayat governance; and
- ◆ to suggest measures to strengthen the mechanism and offer corrective steps if there are any gaps in its implementation.

### **Methodology**

Keeping these four-fold objectives in view, a detailed study was conducted in 16 grama panchayats by covering four administrative divisions of the State. In the first stage, one district in each of the four administrative divisions was selected on a random basis. In the second stage, two taluks, based on developmental levels — one a developed taluk and the other a backward one — were selected. In the final stage, two grama panchayats in each of the selected taluks - one close to the taluk headquarters and the other in an interior region were selected. Thus, there were four districts, eight taluks and 16 grama panchayats in the sample study. The analysis is based on both quantitative and qualitative information: the former is based on secondary and primary sources of information and the latter on the observations and discussions held with the officials, panchayat members and the citizens. Secondary sources of information, such as guidelines and follow-up measures initiated were collected from the concerned zilla panchayats, taluk panchayats and grama panchayats. The primary information was gathered from all the selected grama panchayats by canvassing a structured interview schedule among the citizens, including both participants and non-participants, and panchayat members. The purposive sampling method was adopted as far as participant citizens and members were concerned, whereas a random sampling method was adopted in the case of non-participants. Altogether, 117 participant citizens, 88 elected GP members and 400 non-participant citizens were contacted. As part of the study, we developed two case studies of two grama panchayats, of which one was reasonably successful and the other was not so successful, for a deeper understanding of the process and impact of implementation of the jamabandhi programme.

This paper comprises four sections including the section on introduction: Section II analyses the process evaluation of jamabandhi programme; Section III examines two case studies; and Section IV presents summary and policy recommendations.

## **Jamabandhi Programme: A Process Evaluation**

The Jamabandhi programme was implemented in the hope that there would be visible transparency and accountability in the activities performed by the GPs. In order to learn the way in which Jamabandhi was understood and implemented by the functionaries, we looked into all the available records and documents. An analysis is presented below.

The RDPR Department in its order, dated 21 July 2000, issued necessary guidelines to all the GPs in the State with the instruction that the jamabandhi should be conducted by adhering to them. Process evaluation was done based on the records and documents provided to us and also on the discussions that we had with the panchayat functionaries and citizens in the selected areas. The guidelines, which are in a way an agenda set for the grama panchayats, are as follows:

- To treat panchayat jamabandhi as an annual public inspection of the accounts and registers of the GPs preferably between August 15 and September 15.
- The jamabandhi team is to be headed by a taluk level officer and is to be assisted by two other officials/assistants.
- The Executive Officer of the Taluk Panchayat(TP) is to put up the timetable for Jamabandhi meetings, preferably in the months of August and September and the same has to be communicated to GPs 15 days in advance.
- The GP Secretary has to make necessary arrangements for holding the Jamabandhi meeting. The Junior Engineer of the TP should be present at the meeting.
- Enough publicity is to be given through local newspapers. Varta patrike, visual media and by distribution of handbills/pamphlets.
- 'Jamabandhi kit' containing camera, measurement tape, notebook, pen, copies of the Karnataka Panchayat Raj Act and Accounts rules book to be supplied to jamabandhi officers. The Executive Officer of the TP is entrusted with this responsibility.
- The assistants assisting the officer are to visit the GP 2 days in advance to conduct a detailed verification of panchayat records/registers.
- On the day of the meeting the Jamabandhi officer should inspect

the account registers in the presence of the public, who should be given ready access to the information or details sought by them.

- The jamabandhi officer and his/her team should inspect the work-spots in the presence of the public or the persons, who have given complaint about the selected/completed works, in the afternoon.
- The officers of the ZP, the Chief Executive Officer, Deputy Secretary, Assistant Secretary, etc. should conduct jamabandhi at least in two GPs in a taluk.
- The GPs have to prepare a one-page handout containing the details of previous years action plan and income and expenditure of the GP, which should be kept for sale to the public on the day of the Jamabandhi meeting.
- The team should prepare a detailed report with its findings and submit it to the Executive Officer, TP. The report should contain details of procedural irregularities, financial misappropriation and substandard works, if any.
- The Executive Officer is entrusted with the responsibilities of maintaining a register to communicate the minutes of the findings to the concerned GP and to the Chief Executive Officer of the ZP.
- The secretary of the GP has to present the report in the ensuing grama sabha meeting and the Executive Officer should present the same in the monthly review meeting of the secretaries and also to publish in the Varta Patrike.
- The GPs have to display the action plan and the budget details of the previous year on the walls of their buildings.

The above guidelines are binding both on the TPs and GPs since it is the responsibility of the nodal officer and his/her team to see to what extent the GP has been able to keep to these guidelines. If they were not, what have been the follow-up actions taken? A close examination of these operational aspects was conducted at all the selected 16 GPs and the findings are presented below.

First, in order to make the process systematic, the ZP arranged for a 2-day orientation to the officers deputed to conduct Jamabandhi meetings. As per the information, ZPs did arrange the orientation but,

unfortunately, it was not taken seriously either by the authorities (the officers of both the ZP and TP) or by the nodal officers. As observed by some of the nodal officers: "the orientation was not properly organised, both in terms of structure and content. The module prepared for orientation emphasised more on general themes than on technical themes like maintenance of accounts, accounts rules, auditing and measurement techniques. Because of this lacunae, we could not do much justice to the entrusted work". Added to this, as commented on by the Executive Officers, "some of the nodal officers themselves had insufficient knowledge about the working of the GPs". Hence, in many panchayats, the process was taken as a routine administrative activity. In this context, we also came to know that no training/ orientation was provided to secretaries and presidents of the GPs. Some of the presidents and secretaries interviewed felt that they should have been imparted with the necessary orientation, particularly on guidelines.

Second, as per the guidelines, the concerned TPs had to provide a 'tool kit' to all the nodal officers-in-charge of conducting Jamabandhi in the GPs. However it was surprising to note that a majority of the TPs did not purchase the tool kits and, hence, the nodal officers did not have them when they conducted the meetings. The main reason as pointed out by the authorities of the TPs was that "Although we had received a communication from the ZPs to provide tool kits to the nodal officers, there was no reference as to which head of account the cost should be charged". This, in fact, created some confusion among the TP officers, which in turn prevented the purchase of the kits by them. However, this was not an obstacle for some nodal officers, and who carried their own cameras and other equipment; some GPs had hired the local photographers. Similarly, the junior engineers present in the meetings provided measurement tapes when the nodal officers made spot inspections. All these instances did, in fact, affect the smooth and effective conduct of the meetings.

Third, since the success of any activity depends to a great extent on the publicity given to it, both the TPs and GPs had the responsibility of giving widely publicising the holding of Jamabandhi meeting. Field level information shows that the GPs adopted various methods, such as tom tom (beating of drums), distributing pamphlets, publishing in newspapers etc., to inform the public about the meeting and call for their participation. As per the guidelines, the information was to be given one week in advance in every village and if need arose, it had to be repeated. Discussions with the citizens revealed that GPs used the method of beating the drum<sup>9</sup> and the other (Case-II: Shiradi Grama Panchayat) with below-average performance in implementing the programme. This enables us to know what factors/constraints came in the way of the panchayats carrying out the programme successfully.

**Case-I: Bejjora Grama Panchayat:** Bejjora GP is situated in Muddebihal Taluk of Bijapur District. Bejjora village, which is about 25 km from the taluk headquarters, is also the panchayat headquarters and is surrounded by eight villages. Like any other GP, this panchayat also conducted the jamabandhi meeting in the month of October 2000. It is important to note that the modalities for holding the meeting were discussed and finalised in one of the general body meetings of the GP. It was also decided at the meeting to give enough publicity to inform the public so that the latter would be encouraged and motivated to participate in the activities of the jamabandhi meeting.



(Tom Tom), which was, by and large, carried out only at the GP headquarters. The second most important method adopted by the GPs to reach the public was through distribution of pamphlets. These were of two types: the printed and the handwritten. In addition to these methods, one GP had used a mike system to reach the public. However, no GP published anything about the programme in the local newspapers.

Fourth, as per the attendance registers, attendance by the public at the meetings was very discouraging in most of the GPs under study. In addition, in some GPs, signatures of the participants were not taken and in some GPs it was taken towards end of the meeting. As a consequence, we did not get correct information with regard to attendance and participation of citizens in the jamabandhi meetings.

Fifth, as referred to earlier, the GPs had to make necessary arrangements to take photos of the proceedings of the meeting and also at the time of inspecting the project sites. Information obtained on this reveals that the photos were taken only in a few GPs. As cameras were not provided by a majority of TPs owing to administrative reasons, photos were not taken in most of the GPs. However, the photos that were taken in a way were self-explanatory about the attendance and the sites inspected.

Sixth, the GPs were expected to display the details of the action plan as well as income and expenditure of the current year on the walls of their buildings. However, there was no uniformity among the selected GPs in this regard. As observed in the field, some GPs made attempts to display the information on the walls, whereas the remaining GPs did not make any such efforts.

Seventh, the GPs had to prepare a one -page handout containing the details of the previous years' action plan and income and expenditure of the GP. Photocopies of the handout were to be kept for sale, on the day of the Jamabandhi meeting to the public at a nominal price of Rs. 1. However, other than one GP, no GP had prepared the handout and kept it for sale to the public.

### **Case Studies of Two Grama Panchayats**

As referred to, the Jamabandhi was first conducted in the year 2000 in almost all the grama panchayats in the State. In this section, we have made an attempt to present in detail the case of two panchayats: one that has performed reasonably well (Case-I: Bejjora Grama Panchayat)

and the other (Case-II: Shiradi Grama Panchayat) with below-average performance in implementing the programme. This enables us to know what factors/constraints came in the way of the panchayats carrying out the programme successfully.

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In order to publicise the meeting, the panchayat followed different methods. One such method was that every member of the panchayat was expected to inform his/her fellow persons, belonging to the respective constituency/ward, about the purpose and importance of their participation in the meeting. The second method followed was the tom-tom (beating the drums), which had one designated person going around the village by beating the drum and thereby making an announcement about the meeting, its venue and time. This invited the attention of almost every one in the village. In fact, this was found to be the easiest and most effective mechanism of reaching the public. The panchayat arranged for this in all the villages. The third method followed was to distribute pamphlets and to paste them at all important public places like school buildings, public health centres, ration shops and the GP office. Besides all these methods, information about the meeting was also communicated through the public address system in each of the villages of the GP. For carrying out this task, both officials, especially the Secretary, and non-officials, including the Adhyaksha, Upadhyaksha and members, played an important role. As a result, the meeting was well attended by the public (estimated at 300), drawn both from the main and the neighbouring villages.

In order to make the meeting an all-important activity of the Panchayat, the authorities made all necessary arrangements/facilities.

The meeting was arranged in front of the GP office and a pandal was erected to provide shelter to participants, as also chairs to sit on comfortably. To make the deliberations open, transparent and interactive,

a mike was used. The panchayat had also arranged refreshments for all the participants. However, a point to be noted here is that although the number of people who attended was around 300, incidentally the number of signatories was very small. This was mainly because, as observed by the Secretary, the attendance was taken at the closing stage of the meeting, by when most of the public had left the venue. The people who participated were not only from the panchayat headquarters but also from the nearby villages. It is significant to note that women also attended in good number.

As regards adherence of the panchayat to the guidelines specified, the panchayat was able to follow them both at the time of public scrutiny and at the time of field inspection. The jamabandhi meeting was conducted and co-ordinated by the Executive Officer in-charge of the Muddebihal Taluk Panchayat, who was on deputation from the ZP Engineering Division (Assistant Executive Engineer) heading Muddebihal Sub-Division. The interview with the officer revealed that as per the guidelines, prior to his visit he had sent two assistants to the Bejjora GP for preparing the ground for the meeting and they had checked all the papers, records and documents related to various activities of the panchayat. More importantly, he was equipped with a camera to take photos of the meeting and also of the field-sites.

Discussions with the public showed that the Executive Officer had explained the purpose of conducting the jamabandhi and its importance for ensuring accountability and transparency in the Panchayat administration. He had read out all the records and documents for the benefit of the public which helped them know, for the first time, more about their panchayat activities. Discussions with the officer indicated that in the course of deliberations, some knowledgeable citizens had questions about the quality of works pertaining particularly to drainage and construction of houses. They had demanded that the officer make a spot inspection of these works. In fact, one of the guidelines expects the officer to make spot inspection of the works in the afternoon, after verifying the records and documents. As reported by the public, the officer had inspected the spot along with the aggrieved persons and the Junior Engineer. However, some of the works like mini-water supply, road repairs and construction of Anganawadi building, executed by the panchayat, were appreciated by the officer, who was a civil engineer by profession. The officer had taken photos of the meeting and of the projects implemented. In his remarks, the officer expressed his satisfaction about the way in which the panchayat was able to organise the meeting

successfully. His report was discussed in one of the meetings of the panchayat and also in the grama sabha meeting.

As a case of transparency, the panchayat made arrangements to display details pertaining to the budget, and action plan of JGSY (Jawahar Grameena Samruddhi Yojana) and other information on the walls of the Panchayat building for the benefit of the common man. In fact, this was expected to be one of the fall-outs of the jamabandhi programme. Out of the nine guidelines, applicable at the GP and nodal officer level, the GP sincerely followed almost eight of them.

Discussions with the elected representatives and citizens of the Bejjora and neighbouring villages reveal that although the jamabandhi meeting was new to them, they were now aware of many happenings about their panchayat. They observed that the meeting gave them an opportunity not only to know about the activities undertaken but also about the allocation made across different projects/schemes. More importantly, they were able to question the authorities about the quality of the works executed by their panchayat. The public expressed satisfaction about their Secretary, who incidentally resides in one of the rooms of the panchayat office building. As a result, the local people have access to him and they approach him for their day-to-day problems. The Secretary was very sincere and people-friendly. The entire process, termed a kind of social auditing, was able to ensure transparency, accountability and people's participation, which are the hallmarks of 'good governance'.

**Case-II: Shiradi Grama Panchayat:** Shiradi Grama Panchayat, situated in Puttur Taluk of Dakshina Kannada District, is located on the Bangalore—Mangalore national highway. It is a small panchayat with scattered villages/hamlets. The panchayat has seven members including the President and Vice-President. At the time of the jamabandhi programme, the panchayat had an in-charge Secretary. The jamabandhi meeting was conducted in the month of September 2000 at Shiradi, the panchayat headquarters. The meeting was presided over by the Adhyaksha of the GP and the jamabandhi meeting was conducted and co-ordinated by the Assistant Executive Engineer of ZP, Puttur Division.

Discussions with the office bearers of panchayat revealed that prior arrangements like informing the public and necessary arrangements at the venue were not properly done, as the notice of information about holding the jamabandhi meeting reached the panchayat quite late. As a result, the panchayat had little time to make any arrangements keeping the guidelines in view. Publicity was given only through a few printed

pamphlets. The pamphlets were distributed to the public through the members of the panchayat. No other means of communicating the information about the meeting to the general public were followed. This, in turn, had an effect on the attendance of the public in the meeting. As per the available records, only eight citizens attended the meeting (that too at intervals) along with two panchayat members and the President. The meeting was conducted inside the panchayat office building. Pre-arrangements like shamiyana, mikes, refreshments etc., were not organised, which otherwise would have drawn the attention of the public, and ensured better attendance.

As per the requirement of the guidelines, two assistants had come from the taluk level departments to prepare the ground for the jamabandhi officer to conduct the meeting by arranging all records, files and documents in order. As it happened in other panchayats elsewhere, here also the officer did not carry a camera, measurement tape and other inputs with him. In fact, these materials were supposed to have been provided by the TP. The officer conducted the meeting in the absence of all these essential materials,. As recollected by one of the participants, the jamabandhi officer spoke about the government's interest in organising jamabandhi meetings for ensuring direct participation of the people by scrutinising all the records and documents of the panchayat. However, as there were only a few members present, hardly any discussion took place at the meeting. As there were no queries or comments from the citizens, the meeting was over much before the scheduled time. Further, there was no visit to the project-sites in the afternoon to check the quality, technical aspects and utility of the works executed. The jamabandhi officer commented that as none of the interested members were present in the afternoon, he did not feel the necessity to conduct the work inspection. Nevertheless, he visited one or two sites in Shiradi village and recorded his comments. He expressed his dissatisfaction over the quality of the works executed.

One of the requirements of the programme was that the panchayat should make necessary arrangements to display the details of the budget and action plan on the walls of the panchayat building. However, this panchayat had made no such arrangements as the functionaries were ignorant about this. This clearly shows that both the Secretary and the Adhyaksha had not gone through the guidelines of the programme. Moreover, the panchayat had not made any arrangements to sell the booklet (costing Rs. 1 each) containing information on the budget and action plan for the benefit of the public.

Discussions with the villagers reveal that they had no information about the programme. In fact, they came to know about panchayat jamabandhi from our field staff during their visit. Easy methods like the tom-tom was also not used by the panchayat to inform the public. The citizens were kept in the dark as regards the programme. Hence, there was low turn out at the meeting. As a consequence, the jamabandhi did not produce the expected impact on this panchayat. All the above factors contributed to the poor performance of this panchayat in implementing the jamabandhi programme as per the specified guidelines. It is surprising to note that this GP unlike Bejjora GP had followed only two out of the nine guidelines.

### **Summary and Policy Recommendations**

The prime objective of the jamabandhi is to bring the working of GPs under the scrutiny of the public and enable the latter to have access to records and documents of the former. It is a way of taking the GP administration to the door step of the people and, more importantly, to motivate them to take active part in panchayat activities and administration. Owing to this people-friendly mechanism, the citizens should be able to have immediate access to information, which in turn should be able to ensure transparency and accountability in the day-to-day functioning of the village panchyats. However, the question is, whether this has been achieved? The present section intends to examine this question.

(1) As revealed from the above analysis, the guidelines about communicating the holding of the jamabandhi meeting to the public through certain specified methods were not followed by the authorities, and there were observed lapses on their part in implementing them. In fact, this went against the spirit of the jamabandhi programme of enabling the public to have access to the governance process. Thus, there is need to streamline the methods of communication by effectively using the services of local organisations such as youth clubs, and mahila mandals, and of anganawadi and health workers.

(2) The authorities did not take capacity building seriously in terms of giving orientation to personnel involved in the programme. In addition, the training module was not properly structured to the extent that even topics like accounts rules and procedures were not included. There were complaints from the presidents of various GPs that they were not given any orientation about the jamabandhi programme. As a consequence, they were at a loss to comment on the nuances of the jamabandhi

guidelines. All this makes a strong case, in future, for initiating capacity-building measures for up-grading the knowledge and necessary skills of the functionaries involved in programmes like jamabandhi.

(3) Discussions with the officials revealed that in spite of the ZPs directing the TPs to supply tool kits to all nodal officers, they were not made available to them. The non-use of materials provided in the kit did go against the letter and spirit of the programme. A need was felt among the officials and members of the panchayats to create a separate head of account in the office of the ZP to purchase and distribute items like the tool kit.

(4) The main motive behind the introduction of jamabandhi programme was to bring transparency and accountability in the panchayat governance. For this purpose, the citizens were given an opportunity to scrutinise the documents of the panchayats and accompany the officers to project sites to examine the quality of works executed. However, neither public scrutiny nor spot-inspection was taken seriously, as this was a low-key affair. But wherever field inspections were conducted, the officers had made serious remarks, particularly about the quality of materials used for constructing anganawadi and school buildings, drainage structures and houses constructed under various housing schemes. The field inspections were found useful by the public because of the fact that in the majority of cases the panchayat members had acted as contractors and executed works under benami names with the active support of officials. Such practices had, in fact, led to misappropriation and misuse of resources to a great extent. Jamabandhi programme was intended to check this menace and to ensure quality in the execution of development works.

(5) One of the requirements of the post-jamabandhi phase is to initiate action against those who have committed irregularities while carrying out panchayat activities. As per the information available from the 16 sample GPs, only in one or two cases the Executive Officers of TPs initiated actions against GP officials, who misused public money. However, in many cases, the secretaries were given oral warnings, which is treated as a routine matter or exercise. Furthermore, as such there were no instances of seeking explanation from the Adhyakshas/ Upadhyakshas and members of the GPs.

(6) During the jamabandhi period (August to September 2000), some GPs did not have full-time Secretaries. The secretaries in-charge, who had to look after two or more GPs, found it difficult not only to maintain and provide all the necessary documents but also to make arrangements

for the smooth conduct of jamabandhi meetings. As a consequence, there were instances of disorder observed during the deliberations of the meetings. As pointed out by the jamabandhi officers: "In GPs where there were no regular secretaries we had difficulties in arranging materials for the meeting. As a result, we did not have direct access to some important documents like audit reports and in some cases we were unable to clarify the doubts raised by the citizens in the meeting." This demands immediate action by the State government to fill the vacant positions of secretaries, whose services are very essential for effective and efficient functioning of the GPs. It would be worthwhile to mention here that the Secretary is the sole recognised government officer in charge of a GP's administration and development.

(7) As revealed from the case studies, successful implementation of promotional programme like Jamabandhi depends on flow of information to the public, resulting in the latter's active participation, adherence to guidelines and necessary arrangements made thereof. Otherwise, both the programme and its implementation tend to lose their very purpose. This emphasises the fact that the norms and guidelines are *sine qua non* for any programme to be effective and sustainable.

(8) People are allowed to participate in the grama sabha meetings held once in 6 months. Experiences reveal that the process that takes place in such a meeting has no significant bearing on the functioning of the GP and, moreover, the public have no control over such an incongruous meeting. As a consequence, grama sabha meetings have been regarded as farcical ones. Seen in this regard, the jamabandhi meetings were found to be different, both in terms of theme and application. But this does not mean that we should do away with the grama sabhas. As people's institutions, grama sabhas have a different role to play given their constitutional status. There is a subtle difference between a grama sabha and a jamabandhi, specially in terms of their objectives and the manner in which they function. The grama sabhas play a promotive and facilitative role, whereas the jamabandhi has a stocktaking and monitoring role. The meetings of the grama sabha are held four times a year and of the jamabandhi once a year. The jamabandhi meetings give substantial political space to the people to participate in the decision-making process, provided the latter effectively use the forum. This aspect of jamabandhi is certainly a radical feature, which is in favour of the strong and sustainable participatory democracy one dreams of. However, this aspect is not strongly evident from the study as the jamabandhi as an idea, a concept and a mechanism is yet to take root in the minds of the citizens.



(9) A close look at the two cases presented above gives scope for some important points to be noted. One such point is to take care of dissemination of the information to the public and make them to understand the purpose and implications of the programme better. Since the jamabandhi programme is specially meant for motivating the public to participate in their panchayat activities, it becomes necessary that they should be taken into confidence first; otherwise, a well-intentioned programme like jamabandhi, as we have seen in Case-II, will tend to lose its very purpose. Second, the corresponding adherence to designed guidelines becomes very essential and also a pre-requisite. The immediate results of this can be seen in Case-I, where the panchayat had made almost all the arrangements to hold the meeting and it was able to mobilise the public in large number. The guidelines, in fact, are the 'guiding force' to make the event a success.

(10) However, merely following guidelines may not always produce the expected results, such as ensuring people's participation in the jamabandhi meetings. For this purpose, the concerned authorities have to make necessary arrangements like organising awareness camps for the public and orientation programmes to functionaries of the organisation. In both cases, as the study reveals, this aspect was not taken seriously by the authorities. As a consequence, the proceedings of the meetings were routine in nature thereby leaving no scope for ensuring transparency and accountability in the governance, of course, with a few exceptions here and there.

In conclusion, the foregoing analysis of the jamabandhi programme reveals more negative aspects than positive ones. However, this is not to draw the inference that the jamabandhi programme, initiated as an innovative administrative mechanism, has failed to achieve the desired objectives. In fact, it has created a substantial impact among the citizens, the people's representatives and the officials. The citizens who participated in the programme have expressed the view that the jamabandhi is definitely a very useful programme since it gave them an opportunity to know the activities of their panchayats in detail. They were appreciative of this new mechanism as this enabled them to have open access to records and documents, which were hitherto kept under lock and key. This, of course, ensured openness and transparency in the governance. While reiterating their positive views on the programme, the citizens strongly felt that the government should initiate necessary measures to educate the people about the new programmes and new mechanisms by arranging specially designed awareness camps.

Discussions with the officials of the ZPs, TPs and GPs indicated that the programme could ensure both vertical and horizontal accountability, particularly among the officials. Further, the process could make the secretaries of the GPs be more responsive and accountable with respect to their scheduled tasks and responsibilities. This, indeed, is clear evidence of the fact that the jamabandhi has, to some extent, ensured the accountability of the functionaries of the panchayats to the concerned citizens.

On the whole, although the jamabandhi programme has many slips here and there, which can be seen as initial jolts, in the final analysis, the programme has been giving positive signals by ensuring transparency and accountability in the working of the grama panchayats. As a support measure for making jamabandhi more meaningful, accountable and sustainable, there is need to legislate **mandatory guidelines** for conducting jamabandhi meetings. The success of this programme at the GP level, in course of time, may lead to its replication at the two higher level panchayats too.

## End Notes

- <sup>1</sup> This paper is a product of a larger study conducted at the Institute. The authors are grateful to the Department of Rural Development & Panchayati Raj, Government of Karnataka, for financial support and to the Institute for providing necessary support. The authors also acknowledge the useful comments of the anonymous referees
- <sup>2</sup> The Karnataka Panchayat Raj Act, 1993 (Government of Karnataka, 1993) provides a three-tier system of Panchayat Raj along with grama sabhas, which are expected to act as the 'watchdogs' of the system. There are three schedules in the Act dealing with the functions of panchayats: Schedule I with GPs; Schedule II with TPs; and Schedule III with ZPs (Government of Karnataka 1993). These functions have been allocated keeping in view the cardinal principle that what is appropriate at a given level of the three-tier system should be done at that level and not necessarily at the higher level. As regard resources, the panchayats receive annual grants, plan and non-plan grants both from the State and Centre. Both zilla and taluk panchayats depend heavily on State and Central Government grants, whereas grama panchayats are endowed with powers of taxation in addition to receiving annual grants from the State and Central Government (Sivanna 1998). At present, each GP receives an annual grant of Rs. 5 lakhs from the State Government and an average of Rs. 2.5 lakh from the Centre and

Rs. 70,000 on the recommendation of the Eleventh Finance Commission. The State Government grants have to be utilised for the provision of basic amenities such as drinking water, streetlights, drainage and sanitation, roads etc. The central grants are utilised for the implementation of central wage employment programmes like SGRY and the finance commission grants for the creation of infrastructure such as roads, buildings, community halls etc.

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