

Abstract. The objective of this thesis is to study the dynamics of organizational memory and forgetting in Village Panchayat, the lowest tier of India's three-tier rural local government and to examine the phenomena of managing memory and forgetting in this public organization. In particular, the thesis aims to explore the locations and constituents of organizational memory, modes of organizational forgetting, and the role of politics in construction and erasing of memories in local governments. The existing body of scholarship on Village Panchayats is strong and has justifiably attracted scholars who analyzed people's participation, women empowerment, service delivery and its politicization. But an analysis of Village Panchayat as a rich site for memory studies remains uncharted.

Village Panchayats work in close proximity with citizen's needs, where people's participation is encouraged so that local needs get reflected in policy outcomes. In West Bengal, panchayats have played a crucial role since their inception in 1978 in delivery of pro-poor programs such as land reform, disaster relief and poverty alleviation schemes. This makes panchayats possible reservoirs of local knowledge on policy implementation and service delivery. Local politics, too, plays a major role in the functioning of panchayats. As a result, these organizations have a memory of politics and politicization of its functions and functionaries. Village Panchayats in West Bengal supposedly hold four decades of memory of implementation of development schemes and local experience of party politics. Such uniqueness embellishes Village Panchayats of West Bengal as sites noteworthy for memory studies. The present context of the State is crucial for studying memory since it has undergone political changeover after the state assembly elections of 2011 when Trinamool Congress came to power with a massive mandate that effectively put an end to 34 years of ruling by the Left Front Government. The victory of Trinamool congress along with the downfall of the Left Front regime continued in 2013 panchayat elections and again in the 2016 state assembly elections. Such political changeover provides us with an opportunity to analyzing how Village Panchayats work their pasts and how their members represent the past to suit the present or to influence the future.

This thesis is based on an ethnographic study, in which we delve into two Village Panchayats from two districts of West Bengal. The finding, first, identifies five possible storage locations of organizational memory in panchayats, which include the minds of its members, social network of the officials, register books and files, oral narratives, and the

party-panchayat team. We argue that the memory of the Village Panchayat has faded out as a result of the party-society interface; however, this memory could be very well located beyond formal repositories of organizational memory.

Second, we show that through the formation of a party-panchayat team, the Village Panchayat maintains a mechanically produced spurious memory inside the organization. In addition, we also examine the limitations of existing frameworks for analyzing constituents of organizational memory and suggest possible extensions.

Third, we identify four modes of organizational forgetting (e.g., memory decay, failure to capture, unlearning, and aborted learning) that occurs in Village Panchayats. Memory decay takes place due to lack of infrastructure for preserving memories. Failure to capture happens when panchayats fail to consolidate the skills and networks of expert members. We show how unlearning becomes formalized to hide the failure and ethical lapses of local politicians, and ‘aborted learning’ gets endorsed to cease the flow of knowledge between politicians and common electorates.

Finally, we argue that organizational forgetting is often a political strategy used by local politicians. They have enough control over the memory system, and they purposefully decide what needs to be remembered and what should not be remembered. They use forgetting strategically to channelizing resources available at the grassroots for ensuring personal and political advantages.

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