



ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES FELLOWSHIP COHORT 3 - MUMBAI

REPORT 2019-20



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FELLOWS

ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES FELLOWSHIP COHORT 3 - MUMBAI 2019-20



Akshay Girhe



Arman Khan



Geethu Pillai



Harshita Magroria



Jay Bhanushali



Jaya Gotkhindi



Kavisha Khanna



Manas Gubbi



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Yashashree Rane



ABOUT THE FELLOWSHIP

Among Praja Foundation's several efforts towards better governance in the city of Mumbai, the Elected Representatives Fellowship Program has always been one of the highlights. The program was designed to increase awareness in the participating fellows about the ground realities of urban governance and the powers and functions of elected representatives while working alongside them. It focuses on building the capacities of fellows to turn them into educated and skilled future political and social leaders.

In this fellowship program 17 students were selected through a structured selection process. The 17 fellows were then divided into pairs of two and each pair was allotted specific wards to work with local elected representatives for a period of 10 months. They were given thorough orientation at the start of this fellowship program on various topics so that they are better equipped to understand the ERs' needs and deliver on them. These fellows through the journey of their fellowship invested 13,543 hours of research assistance to the councillors and conducted 1,146 meetings with them. Fellows on several occasions approached councillors with Praja's data on various key issues in Mumbai. Councillors in Mumbai have benefited immensely from this fellowship program as they would get regular assistance from these fellows.

The global corona virus pandemic raged across India, but it did not stop the fellowship program. The regular activities of fellowship were to some extent affected, but Praja broadened the parameters of the program and new activities were introduced under the ambit of the fellowship. Fellows also contributed in the immediate response and relief measures of COVID-19 delivered by Praja Foundation. They were also instrumental in reaching out to the councillors both from Mumbai and Delhi in understanding the ground reality in the face of COVID-19. Outreach of white papers which were released virtually was also done by the fellows. In keeping with the changing circumstances, the earlier version of scheduling appointments were modified into e-appointments, wherein

fellows were engaging with councillors via video-conferencing or phone calls to discuss issues with them. They assisted in research activities of budget analysis and carried out an extensive study of Development plan of the city. The fellows were also actively involved in organising various webinars conducted by Praja.

Capacity building constitutes an important factor of the fellowship program. Our fellows have participated in various training programs imparted by the experts in the respective fields. An example of which is the KILA training, highlighting upon best practices implemented by the state government of Kerala in controlling the initial wave of COVID-19. Various webinars on “Local governance in Disaster Management Act”, Epidemic Diseases Act”, “Judicial backlog in India”, and the like were also conducted. The webinar on “Parliament in Democracy and the Role of Individual Parliamentarian” was useful for fellows to draw parallels with functions and functionaries at the municipal level. Apart from that, a team of fellows also collaborated with a COVID-19 Localisation modelling group based in the United Kingdom. Under their guidance fellows built a Case Study of L ward in Mumbai, expressing what is happening in L ward and what is likely to happen next with respect to COVID-19, and thereby suggesting policy measures to be implemented at local levels.

The fellows had an enriching experience throughout this fellowship program. They have gained invaluable experience which they will carry forward in projects they take up in the near future. This fellowship has helped them to grow professionally as well as personally. They have become sentient citizens of Mumbai.

As this journey comes to an end, the fellows share their experience of their time in Praja’s fellowship program, a testament to the labour of love put in by the organisation.

***"Good Governance is
a way of measuring
how public
institutions conduct
public affairs and
manage public
resources in public
interest."***

AKSHAY GIRHE 26

MA, University of Mumbai



As a student of political science and a civil services aspirant, I was really enthused to know how elected representatives and administration work hand in hand to solve public grievances and make Mumbai a better and happy place to live in. The ER fellowship programme gave me an opportunity to understand my city, ward, constituency as well as their working, ground level problems, difficulties and policy formations, implementation and monitoring.

Praja's white paper has given me an in-depth analysis of multiple issues in Mumbai like water sanitation, health, education, crime, civic as well as various informative sessions and webinars taken by experts like RTI, budget, development plan, 74th Amendment Act, urban development, GBM visit, CCRS/1916 helpline, press conference etc. This has given me an unbiased and broad analytical view on various topics.

Working as Praja's fellow I was able to work with elected representatives and raise collective voices of our citizens through constitutional and democratic means. My co-fellows and I had the opportunity to have various healthy discussions with the councillors, which motivated and inspired me to work hard for my city.

As a strong believer of Gandhian methods, I have learned many things from this fellowship, some of which include- how to focus on your path, reporting on a daily basis, timely follow-ups, unbiased thinking, type of reforms we want, increase citizens' participation in local area management committee and ward committees.

Prajatantra, a festival celebrating democracy, organised by Praja Foundation, gave us an idea of how despite having different opinions, multiple languages and belief of thoughts we can unitedly celebrate our democracy and rejoice our rich and diverse cultures.

The fellowship programme gave me numerous memories to cherish in future. While engaging with the councillors during the COVID-19 food distribution drive of Praja, we gained the confidence of our councillors and were able to discuss a wide range of issues with them thereafter.

During my time at Praja, I have considerably enhanced my communication skills and acquired confidence in public speaking. Further, I learnt about the implications of budgeting while drafting a budget speech for one of our councillors. I am better aware about existing grievance redressal mechanisms and have gained first-hand information of functions and powers of the administration.

I will bring a unique perspective to my future endeavours, and I will take the technical and theoretical knowledge from Praja Foundation back with me to further my career goals as a practitioner of good governance and community development.

“लोकतंत्र तभी मजबूत हो सकता है जब जनता अपनी नागरिक जिम्मेदारियों को समझते हुए सरकार व प्रशासन से सवाल करे जिससे प्रशासन में पारदर्शिता और जवाबदेही की भावना का निर्माण हो।”

ARMAN KHAN

21

TY, Shah and Anchor Kutchhi Polytechnic and Engineering College



मैं

अपनालय में युवा कार्यकर्ता के तौर पर कार्य कर रहा हूँ। अपनालय की एक मीटिंग के दौरान प्रजा की तरफ से कुछ लोग हमसे मिलने आये और उन्होंने हमें प्रजा और शहरी शासन के बारे में जानकारी दी, साथ ही उन्होंने प्रजा निर्वाचित प्रतिनिधि फ़ेलोशिप के बारे में भी बताया। मैंने व मेरे कुछ साथियों ने साथ में मिलकर फ़ेलोशिप के लिए आवेदन किया तथा हमें इंटरव्यू के लिए भी बुलाया गया। जब मुझे फ़ेलो के तौर पर चुने जाने की जानकारी दी गयी तब मुझे व अपनालय में सभी लोगों को बहुत खुशी हुई क्योंकि यह फ़ेलोशिप मेरे लिए शासन को समझने के लिए एक अच्छा अवसर था।

शहरी प्रशासन के प्रति मेरी समझ थोड़ी कम थी। फ़ेलोशिप के शुरुआत में प्रजा द्वारा आयोजित करवाई गयी वर्कशॉप से मुझे काम स्पष्ट रूप से समझ आने लगा। इस फ़ेलोशिप में मुझे एम/ईस्ट और एम/वेस्ट वार्ड दिए गए थे। जैसा कि मैं गोवंडी एरिया में ही रहता हूँ तो यह मेरे लिए एक अच्छा अवसर था क्योंकि मैं मेरे वार्ड के पार्श्वों के साथ ही काम करने वाला था।


इस फ़ेलोशिप से जुड़ने से पहले मेरी जो पार्श्वों को लेकर राय थी जैसे कि वह काम नहीं करना चाहते हैं, जनता की समस्याओं की अनदेखी करते हैं, वह अब बिल्कुल बदल चुकी है। प्रजा के साथ काम करते हुए मुझे यह समझ आया कि पार्श्व केवल अपने लिए काम न करके बल्कि जनता की परेशानियों को समझते भी है और दिन का अधिकतर समय अपने वार्ड के समस्याओं को सुलझाने में लगे रहते हैं। जब मैं पार्श्वों के साथ मेरे एरिया से सम्बंधित परेशानियों व समस्याओं पर बात करता तो मुझे हमेशा यह उम्मीद रहती कि मेरे एरिया में सभी समस्याओं का समाधान मुश्किल नहीं है, केवल जरूरत है अपनी बात को सही माध्यम से प्रशासन तक पहुँचाना। अपने एरिया में रहकर अपने एरिया के लिए काम करना यह मेरे लिए खुशी का अवसर था।

इस फ़ेलोशिप के माध्यम से मैंने पार्श्वों के साथ उनके एरिया के नागरिक मुद्दों, स्वास्थ्य से जुड़ी समस्याओं व शिक्षा के क्षेत्र की कमियों को प्रजा के डाटा के साथ जोड़कर चर्चा की। इन विषयों से संबंधित मुद्दों पर जैसे कि शौचालय की समस्या, ठोस अपशिष्ट प्रबंधन की समस्या पर प्रश्न बना कर पार्श्वों को दिए ताकि वह अपनी वार्ड की समस्याओं को महानगरपालिका अधिनियम के नियम के तहत सर्वसाधारण सभा, प्रभाग समिति, व सम्बंधित समितियों में रख सके।

इस फ़ेलोशिप ने मुझे कोविड 19 के दौरान लोगों के बीच में रहकर काम करने का अवसर प्रदान किया। जिस समय पूरे देश में सम्पूर्ण लॉकडाउन घोषित कर दिया गया था उस समय देश के कुछ तबकों के लिए खाने के लिए राशन भी उपलब्ध नहीं था। उस समय मैंने प्रजा फाउंडेशन के साथ मिलकर मुंबई के कई इलाकों में राशन वितरण का काम किया जिसमें मैंने पार्श्वों व पुलिस अधिकारियों के साथ मिलकर सही तरीके से सही समय पर जरूरतमंद लोगों तक राशन पहुँचाया। सुबह छह बजे से रात के बारह बजे तक मैं राशन वितरण के लिए काम करता रहा। इस विपत्ति के समय मैंने लोगों की तकलीफ को समझकर एक जिम्मेदार नागरिक होने के नाते अपने सभी कर्तव्यों को पूरा किया। इन कामों के बाद मेरे एरिया के लोग मुझे पहचानने लगे व लोगों की मुझसे उम्मीदें भी जुड़ने लगीं। लोग मेरे घर पर अपनी समस्याओं को लेकर आते जो मुझमें यह आत्मविश्वास जगाता कि मैं उनके लिए कुछ कर सकता हूँ। यह मेरे लिए बहुत अलग और एक बिल्कुल नया अनुभव था। अब सभी मुझे जानने लगे हैं व पार्श्वों व पुलिस अधिकारियों के सामने भी मेरी एक अलग पहचान है।

प्रजा फ़ेलोशिप मेरे जीवन के लिए एक नयी शुरुआत है इस फ़ेलोशिप के माध्यम से मेरा आत्म विश्वास बहुत बढ़ा है व मेरी संवाद कौशल में सुधार हुआ है जिससे मैं अपनी बात को सही तरीके से व तर्क के साथ किसी के भी सामने रख सकता हूँ। पहले मुझे लोगों से बात करने में जो हिचकिचाहट व डर था वह अब पूरी तरह से खत्म हो गया है।

अंत में, मैं यही कहना चाहूंगा कि प्रजा निर्वाचित प्रतिनिधि फ़ेलोशिप ने मुझे अपने शहर और समाज के छोटे मुद्दों से जुड़ने का अवसर प्रदान किया जिनसे मैं अनभिज्ञ था।

A portrait of a young woman with long, dark, wavy hair, smiling slightly. She is wearing a black and white vertically striped shirt. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with tree branches and green leaves.

"Good Governance is when the Government focuses on the 'Governance' aspect, addresses the grievances of the citizens and comes up with appropriate and adequate solutions."

GEETHU PILLAI 20

TYBA, SIES College of Arts, Science and Commerce



I believe that 'Education is incomplete without implementation'. Thus, I felt this fellowship was a perfect opportunity for me to not only learn many new things but also to contribute towards better implementation of the knowledge. "Local Governance" and "Making Democracy work" were the keywords which fashioned an interest within me to be a part of this beautiful venture.

Prior to joining Praja, I had notions about mismanagement in Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai (MCGM), undue use of power and so on, but during the course of fellowship I realised the powers, functions and restrictions faced by the elected representatives. Various white papers released (covering all the major aspects of a city- Health, Education, Civic and Crime) by Praja helped me to understand the state of infrastructure in Mumbai better. The weekly and monthly meetings conducted will always be a memorable experience to cherish. Sharing and listening to the experiences of each fellow has also helped to a great extent. We got to know how to approach various councillors and which topic to be discussed with them. The friendly environment created by the staff has always been so comfortable for the fellows to perform better. My co-fellow and I had drafted questions regarding increasing timing of the dispensaries. When one of the councillors from F/N ward sent us details about extended timings, I was happier than ever!

During the pandemic I tried my best to correlate the white paper data with the pandemic situation so that it would help me to garner the interest of the councillors and this worked to a great extent. I was also occupied in understanding the SWM situation in Mumbai which certainly enhanced my sphere of knowledge.

The fellowship has turned me into a more conscious and responsible citizen of our nation. I learned about minute details which have to be looked at regarding the 'Local government body' especially in Mumbai which otherwise is not given much focus neither by the media nor by citizens. It has helped me to change my perspective towards 'Urban Governance'. It made me realise how important it is that the administration and elected representatives work together to make Mumbai a better city. I would definitely share my knowledge which I have learnt during the journey of Praja's fellowship with as many people as I can, so that the knowledge gained can help in bringing an affirmative change in the society at large.

The entire journey of fellowship was a learning experience for me wherein I was better equipped to express by opinions without hurting those of others, communicate with various groups leaving behind the fear of not being heard and also know my city well with respect to its transportation and municipal corporation. I would always remember and cherish my learnings at Praja.



"Good Governance is a mechanism to ensure accountability, transparency, efficient service delivery and efficacious grievance redressal to the citizens."

HARSHITA MAGRORIA

19

TYBA, Ramnarain Ruia Autonomous College



In the midst of my Semester IV exams, I came for the ER Fellowship interview with my friends specifically as an opportunity to visit Marine drive. I little knew about how Praja Foundation in future was going to impact my rationality. The selection call was a joyous moment for an undergraduate student. Being a zealous appreciator of the Indian constitution, decentralised government was known to me but Praja ignited my consciousness about grass root democracy and on ground implementation of constitutional and legal provisions.

By coordinating and cooperating with the elected representatives, I refined my skills to analyse and interpret local problems and their potential solutions, co-relate statistical data with real time concerns and endeavour to mobilise the municipal authorities to attain sustainable resolution. The fellowship proved to be an effective tool to nurture in me the aptitude of communicating with diverse individuals having various notions of governance. From studying the MCGM Act, 1888 to scrutinising the legislation in working at a local level, I got insight about the administrative bottlenecks, ill-suited delusion of funds, lack of community awareness, undersupply of skilled manpower and untrained elected representatives.

The white papers published by Praja acquainted me to the fractured town planning, crippling health infrastructure and inadequate educational provisions in Mumbai. Further, it assisted me to explore data, deliberate upon the areas of concern and suggest cost effective answers involving participation of community, elected representatives and administration. From being an attendee to the GBM sessions, ER meetings to reading research work by Praja, the fellowship made me aware about the benefits of judicious data examination and calibrated discussions, which certainly are tools of benevolent strategy formulation.

In addition to this, at Praja, I also got a chance to conduct sessions with regards to the structure of urban governance for diverse and knowledgeable groups. Such an exposure was a boost to my confidence and oratory skills. When the questions framed by me were tabled in the education committee, I felt being like a part of MCGM and not merely as a citizen but someone capable of reinforcing policy changes.

The pandemic is merely a speed breaker in the global politico-economic structures although our fellowship continued to be a worthwhile experience. I got involved in building localised COVID-19 models, studying the trends of TB infections in Mumbai and learning about global best practices to tackle the epidemic. Further, I studied the Delhi Municipal Corporation Act, 1957 and communicated with the Municipal Corporation of Delhi elected representatives. Even during the pandemic, our interaction with the councillors never witnessed a halt may it be Mumbai or Delhi and it was extremely enriching. At Praja, I learnt the dynamism held within the society- in terms of opinions, institutions, powers, functions- deviating from static textbook information. The elected representatives taught me the prowess to observe and interpret while Praja taught me to inspect and find the remedy.

"Good governance is the timely delivery of services to the people, by the administration, followed by elected representatives, and with the active participation of people, in a transparent manner and under the ambit of law."

JAY BHANUSHALI 20

TYBMM, KJ Somaiya College of Arts and Commerce



I came to know about the Praja Foundation from a poster on my college noticeboard. After that, I started following their twitter handle and it intrigued me that an organisation is working towards making city governance strong and capable. So, when I learnt about the ER Fellowship, I decided to give it a shot.

This fellowship was an enriching experience, I got to know about urban governance, functioning of municipalities, the budgetary provisions, the powers of the councillors and different subjects ranging from Solid Waste Management (SWM), city health infrastructure, Complaint Redressal System (CRS) to water supply and education system.

After the pandemic broke out, mostly all councillors were busy in delivering on ground services, so at that time, contacting them and explaining the Civic white paper details became a bit difficult. I continued to explore ways to keep the interaction going and so, I started making short explanatory videos on topics, which they could watch and in little span of time know about our research at Praja. Everyone appreciated my efforts and it certainly was a boost for me. While drafting questions for the councillor in Marathi, I often took help of my colleagues to overcome the language barrier.

Further, I got an opportunity to work with the Delhi elected representatives. Learning about the Delhi Municipal Corporation, the act, the powers and functions of the councillors. It expanded my understanding of urban governance. To specifically mention, I learnt the difference between the workings of councillors of Mumbai and Delhi. The former being more powerful and in a better position to argue and the latter struggling to get more functions in hand.

The most memorable moment of the fellowship was the field visit, attending the GBM wherein I was amused by the entire setting of the building. Praja's weekly meetings were very informative and we shared our experiences and learnt from those of others. Being at Praja, I learnt about on ground conditions and was better equipped to understand and interpret the problems presented to me by the elected representatives. Certainly, I have become a more aware citizen now.

Before my selection for the fellowship, I was an intern at Praja and was well aware of their work culture and area of focus. Work on diverse subjects was assigned to me and I must say it was a great learning experience wherein I was exposed to the basics of every subject may it be RTI, data entry. The biggest learning was to be pragmatic while meeting the councillors and not to get disheartened if rejected for a meet. The staff was very supportive, they helped in resolving all of my doubts regarding the white paper. I remember working on my birthday and enjoying chai with the employees at Praja. I share a great bond with them and will continue to cherish my learnings and memories from Praja.

***"When the citizens
and the government
listen to each other
and perform their
duties well and
everybody's needs
are met, that is
good governance."***

JAYA GOTKHINDI 19

SYBA, S.S. & L.S. Patkar College of Arts and Science



I had come to Mumbai to pursue a Bachelor in Arts degree. Back in my village it was a bizarre move for many. In the beginning of my first semester I came to know about Praja Foundation. Until then I thought the only way to participate in the democratic process is to vote! Earlier segregating waste was my highest contribution to society and I hardly knew about concepts like accountability and follow-up.

I went for the interview with positive thoughts and negligible confidence although it went pretty well. That was the first job interview of my life. And surprisingly I got selected! For me it was a big leap from Gram Panchayat to Municipal Corporation. Through the sessions and workshops that Praja held I learnt about urban governance in great detail. We got to visit various ward offices, collect RTI data, and attend GBMs. The overall Victorian, Gothic infrastructure caught my sight. We also communicated with the secretary of the Ward office and learned about the administrative provisions in great detail.

The work of the fellows was mainly focused around capacity building of the ERs. We drafted questions for the councillors in the R/Central ward and our issue of increasing the timings of the dispensary was actually implemented. It was challenging to initially communicate with the ER because of the generational gap between us. Although we were successful in building trust and later, sustaining it. We had weekly meetings and monthly meetings at Praja where all the fellows would present their experiences. I felt like we had our own ward committee meetings and GBMs at Praja's office.

While meeting the councillors we got to know about the on-ground situation of the constituencies. Communicating with them, we understood how cumbersome it is to be a councillor. I always feel happy when citizens approach the ERs directly and get their problems solved. I encountered diverse groups of people in this process but noticed that their core issues and expectations from the municipal corporation were the same. The elected representatives are allowed to ask questions in both ward committees and the GBM, helping them to raise their concerns well. Now I understand the concept of democratic decentralisation like never before.

By the end of this fellowship I have learnt to be accountable in whatever work I am entrusted with, to be responsible for my own actions and try to be more patient. I'm able to express my opinions well with minimal anxiety, make presentations, communicate with people and understand my rights and duties. I thoroughly enjoyed the whole experience of the fellowship. It is a utopian dream to think of an apt governance system and there will always be problems arising for which the citizens and the government will have to cooperate to find a solution. I was glad to be a small part of Balwantrai Mehta's vision for democratic decentralisation.

A portrait of Kavisha Khanna, a young woman with dark hair, smiling slightly. She is wearing a white collared shirt. The background is dark and textured.

"Good governance is honesty, transparency and accountability. It's about public participation and inclusivity, it's a governance that is actively pro people, effective and sustainable."

KAVISHA KHANNA 20

TYBLS.LLB, Pravin Gandhi College of Law



The fact that Praja gave us the opportunity for on-ground real time experiences of interacting with councillors and a chance to try and contribute to the betterment of our city is what motivated me most to apply to Praja's fellowship.

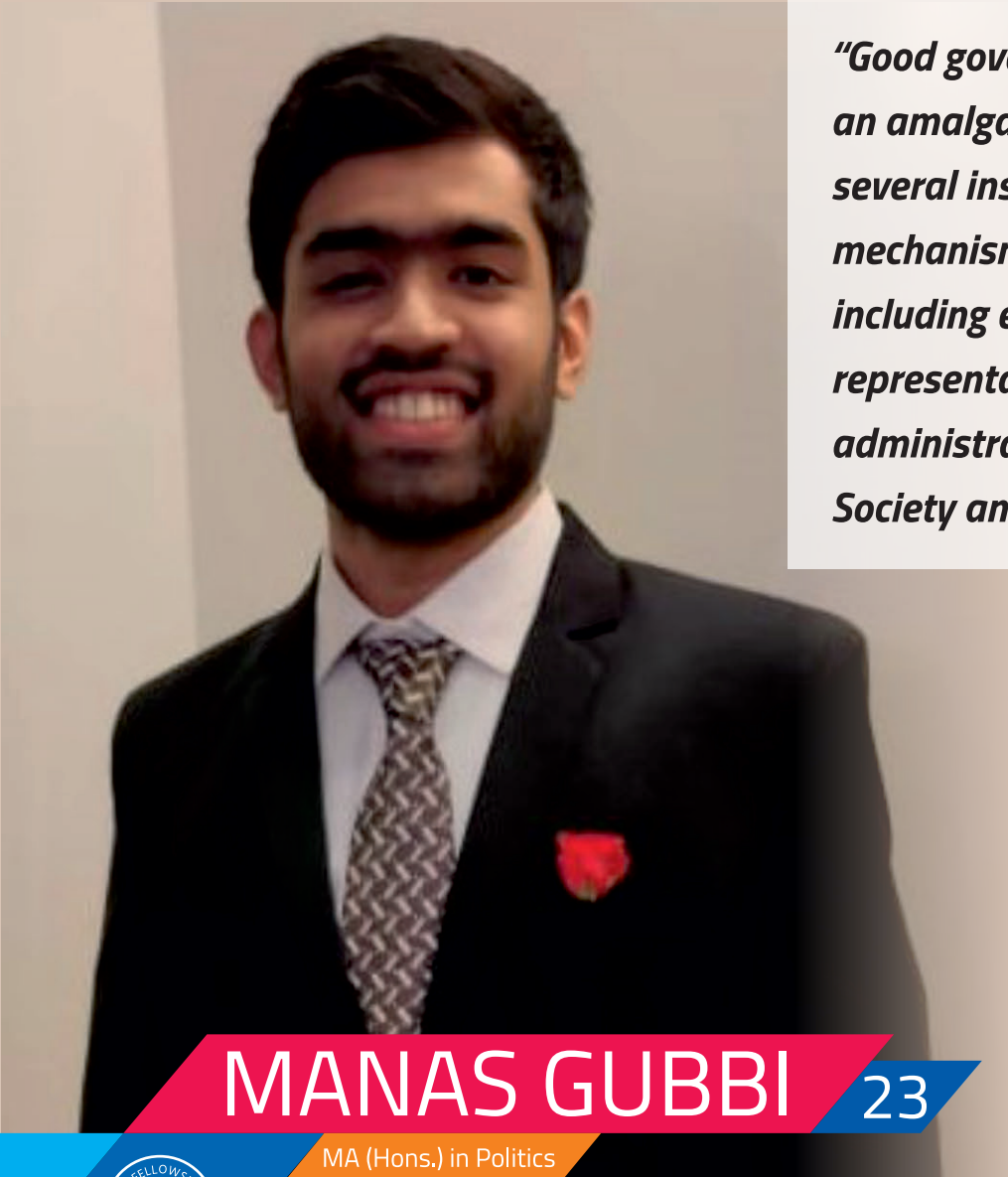
The entire experience of working for Praja has been one of learning. Right from the very beginning, Praja taught us and helped us gather experience on topics that we would have seldom touched upon during our academic sessions, be it theoretical and practical knowledge about the functioning of local governments, filing RTIs, training for interactions with elected representatives or helping us learn how read and understanding government plans and procedures. Furthermore, the fellows selected for the Praja fellowship were from diverse backgrounds, and Praja facilitated and provided a place for healthy discussions and debates during our weekly and monthly meetings. Also, the various sessions/ webinars conducted by Praja during monthly meetings were always interactive and highly informative!

One of the toughest challenges during the fellowship was interacting with councillors regarding topics they weren't keen on discussing. For example, we had councillors who would not want to focus on issues such as Education or Health, even if they were on those respective committees, but linking that data with the amounts of complaints raised by people in their constituency, and/or how those issues directly impact their constituency always helped grab their attention.

Praja noticed my interest in the study of Development plan 2034 and gave me a key part in the study. I facilitated all the fellows and interns in their data collection and queries. Further, I was given the opportunity to oversee the project and lay down its methodology. This was the first policy research project I ever did and hopefully not the last one. It was an enriching experience and I cannot thank Praja enough for it.

I think the most important takeaway for me from this fellowship would be my actual interaction with the councillors. The fellowship helped me break past the stereotypical understanding of the common apathetic and indifferent politician. It helped me realise that while the stereotype may be true in some cases, there are actual politicians who want to, and are working for, the betterment of this city and its people. The fellowship also taught me about the workings of participative democracy and communication between elected representatives and their constituents.

As a probable future advocate, I think one of the things this fellowship has helped me most with, is the awareness regarding the key elements of engaging in dialogue and communicating with government officials, which will probably help me out in many years to come. And I do believe that Praja has opened up avenues for us to become an informed part of the political process currently, and even in the foreseeable future.

A portrait of Manas Gubbi, a young man with dark hair and a beard, smiling. He is wearing a dark suit, a white shirt, and a patterned tie. A red flower is pinned to his lapel.

***"Good governance is
an amalgamation of
several institutional
mechanisms
including elected
representatives,
administration, Civil
Society and citizens."***

MANAS GUBBI 23

MA (Hons.) in Politics



As a student of politics, I always made an attempt to engage with the political class and civil society in order to attain practical knowhow and implement table policies. Applying for the ER fellowship, I thought Praja would help me utilise my bookish knowledge in a better and systematic way as Praja believes in working with citizens and their elected representatives who are facing the brunt of civic issues and is trying to make an attempt to bring about policy changes at a concentrated local level.


I began my interactions with councillors with a motive to explain the difficult research done by Praja and convince them to focus on particular issues which are important for their own constituencies. I think the platform and legitimacy that Praja provided to us was very important that bridged the gap between our learnings as a student and on ground implementations of our understandings. ER interactions enhanced my sphere of knowledge and allowed me to explore local communities and understand attached concerns.

Praja's end goals are to improve governance of Mumbai although there seems to be a lack of political pragmatism in the sense of interactions with the elected representatives. To fill-in the communication vacuum it is pivotal to build open relations between all stakeholders in developing Mumbai city. Such an environment would have given my prior knowledge of local politics and Praja's research to play a better role and contribute much better in overall governance of Mumbai. It is good to see how Praja considers the expert opinions hailing from diverse groups and continues to improve their programs.

Furthermore, because everything that is researched at Praja is evidence based, in the long term, it is always beneficial to stay very objective and consult the administrators and elected representatives in a non-partisan manner. The white papers continue to provide a lucid picture of the state of service delivery in health, education and civic amenities to the residents of Mumbai.

Praja's National Consultation on urban governance was an experience for me to explore the workings of various governmental organs. It validated my thought that in order for decentralised systems to work, it is important for elected representatives, administration, civil society and academia to work together. Further, the consultation also had participants from all over the country. It was a platform to understand how several cities have varied systems of urban governance in terms of functions. One of my most important learnings was the fact that I could communicate with all kinds of stakeholders throughout the country in the period of two to three months. I also think that advocacy and dialogue is pivotal given the complexity of India's federal structure.

Lastly, I feel Praja gave me an opportunity to implement my understanding of urban governance, as a student of Social Science, on the ground and it was certainly an enriching experience. These learnings have broadened my knowledge base and assisted me in understanding governance in Mumbai city better.



“ Good governance, according to me, is the conduction of public activities, such as education, health, civic amenities, etc. for the benefit of diverse groups of citizens, along with their active participation, in a transparent, responsible and organised manner such that accountability can be traced.”

MANDAKINI JATHAVETHAN

28

BA, LLB (Hons.)



As a law graduate with a keen interest in India's social sciences, Praja's fellowship was a way for me to immerse myself in the reality and nuances of urban governance in India. The fact that it was located in Mumbai was a bonus because of its pre-existing systems of a strong third tier democracy. The fellowship requires a fellow to research on the policies of the city of Mumbai and to effect changes in a democratic manner. A chance to work closely with the policymakers of the city was my biggest motivator in applying for the Fellowship. Praja's focus on data also made its studies most reliable and unbiased. I relished the opportunity to work with Praja on many issues.

Praja Foundation builds the capacities of not just elected representatives and the officials of the administration, but also its fellows. I got the opportunity to participate in many events such as budget workshops, sessions on town planning and development plans, hear from many urban governance experts and even to take sessions for students of colleges on urban governance. This helped me become a much more confident person in other aspects of my life. I also had the unique opportunity to help Praja hold a consultation in Delhi on its study of urban governance across 21 Indian states. I assisted the team with the last looks of the reports being presented. I had the privilege of hearing from, as well as interacting with, stalwarts in the political, academic and research field.

Even with the relentless attacks of COVID-19 across India, Praja did not give up on democracy and has been pushing for better governance in Mumbai constantly throughout the lockdown phase. Its knowledge of the city is tremendous. I wish to narrate a story from our orientation sessions in October 2019. Fellows were asked what, according to them, was the biggest challenge faced by Mumbai. Some fellows were quick to respond that the annual floods were the result of mismanagement. Some fellows answered that terrorist attacks are a threat to Mumbai. Praja's answer that a simple cough or sneeze in a crowded local train was enough to cause a serious outbreak of Tuberculosis which is, in reality, a persistent threat to Mumbai shocked me.

The local knowledge of the city held by Praja is deep and diverse. Fellows greatly benefit from such knowledgeable officials at Praja, who are always ready to take time out of their busy schedule to indulge in a healthy discussion on issues. It is a great opportunity for students or graduates to be involved with issues pertaining to Mumbai. Personally, I am better aware of the workings of democracy, urban governance, policies, and data having completed the fellowship. The lessons of interpersonal communication, patience, research, and knowledge of local systems will be useful for my professional career as a development lawyer as well.

“जेव्हा शासन, प्रशासन आणि नागरिक आपल्या हक्कांप्रमाणे कर्तव्याला महत्त्व देतील त्यावेळी सुशासन निर्माण झाले असे म्हणता येईल.”

PAVAN PATIL 20

TYBA, Ramnarain Ruia Autonomous College



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बईत आल्यापासूनच मुंबई आणि मुंबई महानगरपालिकेबद्दल खूप कुतूहल वाटत होतं. असे केवळ ऐकून होतो की मुंबई महानगरपालिका ही भारतातील सर्वात श्रीमंत महानगरपालिका आहे. त्यामुळे मुंबई महानगरपालिकेचा कारभार चालतो तरी कसा? एवढ्या मोठ्या लोकसंख्या असलेल्या शहराचे नियोजन नक्की केले तरी कसे जाते? असे अनेक प्रश्न मनात होते. त्याचवेळी कॉलेजमध्ये झालेल्या एका लेक्चरमध्ये मला प्रजा फाउंडेशन विषयी माहिती मिळाली.

राज्यशास्त्र या विषयात मुळातच खूप आवड असल्यामुळे प्रजा फाउंडेशनची लोकप्रतिनिधी फेलोशिप जॉईन केली. फेलोशिपच्या सुरवातीला माझ्या मनात जराशी भीती निर्माण झाली होती. कारण माझ्यासाठी हे सर्व नवीन होत. परंतु प्रजाच्या टीमने केलेल्या सहकार्यामुळे ही सर्व भीती मनातून निघून गेली होती. सुरवातीला आम्हाला प्रजा फाउंडेशन विषयी पूर्ण माहिती दिली गेली. त्यानंतर आम्हाला कम्प्युटरचे बेसिक नॉलेज आणि प्रजामध्ये काम करताना त्याचा वापर कसा करावा याची माहिती देण्यात आली. श्वेतपत्रिकेची ओळख, मुंबईतील वॉर्ड ऑफिसची माहिती व त्यांना भेट देऊन तिथे चाललेल्या कामाची पाहणी, R.T.I बद्दल माहिती याचे सर्व प्रशिक्षण आम्हाला देण्यात आले. तसेच मुंबई महानगरपालिका कायदा व अर्थसंकल्प याचे प्रशिक्षण देण्यात आले. त्यानंतर नगरसेवकांबरोबर कसे बोलावे, त्यांच्यासाठी कसे प्रश्न तयार करावेत, त्यांना श्वेतपत्रिकेतील माहिती कशी सादर करावी याचे प्रात्यक्षिकही देण्यात आले. या प्रशिक्षणानंतर आम्हाला प्रत्यक्षात नगरसेवकांबरोबर काम करण्याची संधी मिळाली.

जी/ उत्तर व जी/ दक्षिण हे वॉर्ड मला कामासाठी सोपवले होते. या वॉर्ड मधील नगरसेवकांबरोबर काम करताना खूप काही शिकायला मिळालं. एका नगरसेवकाच काम काय असते, त्यांना कोणत्या प्रश्नांना सामोरे जावे लागते, त्यांची आव्हाने काय असतात याचा जवळून अभ्यास करता आला. मुंबई महानगरपालिकेच्या होणाऱ्या सर्वसाधारण सभेला उपस्थित राहण्याची संधी मिळाली. त्यामुळे सभेचे कामकाज कसे चालते हे पाहण्यास व अनुभवण्यास मिळाले. प्रजामध्ये होणाऱ्या कार्यशाळेद्वारे शहरी शासनाच्या विविध अंगांचा अभ्यास झाला. प्रजातंत्र (लोकशाही सप्ताह) सारख्या कार्यक्रमांमुळे टीमवर्क कसे केले जाते याचा प्रत्यक्ष अनुभव आला. शिवाय शासन आणि प्रशासन क्षेत्रात काम करणाऱ्या व्यक्तींबरोबर काम करण्याची संधी मिळाली.

प्रजामधील सर्वात मोठे आव्हान होते ते म्हणजे लॉकडाऊनच्या काळात नगरसेवकांबरोबर होणाऱ्या कामाच्या स्वरूपातील बदल. आता त्यांना प्रत्यक्ष न भेटता, कॉल किंवा ऑनलाईन मीटिंगद्वारे त्यांच्यासोबत काम करावे लागणार होते. त्यातच माझ्याबरोबर काम करणारा फेलो, हा नेटवर्क प्रॉब्लेममुळे माझ्यासोबत काम करू शकत नव्हता. त्यावेळी संपूर्ण जी/ उत्तर व जी/ दक्षिण या दोन्ही वॉर्ड मधील नगरसेवकांसोबत काम करण्याची जबाबदारी माझ्यावर आली होती. परंतु सुरवातीला केलेल्या कामाच्या अनुभवामुळे आणि त्यातून निर्माण झालेल्या आत्मविश्वासामुळे, आणि अर्थातच प्रजाच्या संपूर्ण टीममुळे हे काम मी यशस्वीरीत्या पूर्ण करू शकलो. याच काळात कोविड-१९ मॉडेल वर काम करताना मुंबईतील कोविडच्या परिस्थितीचा जवळून अभ्यास करण्यास मिळाला.

या फेलोशिप मधून मिळालेला अनुभव हा माझा भविष्याच्या वाट्यालीसाठी खूप महत्वाचा ठरणार आहे. या फेलोशिपमुळे माझा आत्मविश्वास वाढवण्यासाठी मला खूप मदत झाली आहे. अनेक अनुभवी नगरसेवकांबरोबर काम करत असताना नवनवीन गोष्टी शिकण्यास मिळाल्या. वेळेच्या नियोजनाची सवय लागली. मुंबई महानगरपालिकेचा व मुंबईतील समस्या यांचा खूप जवळून अभ्यास करता आला. सर्वात महत्वाचं म्हणजे आपल्या शहराच्या विकासाची जबाबदारी ही फक्त महानगरपालिकेची नसून ती प्रत्येक नागरिकाची आहे याची जाणीव या फेलोशिप मधून झाली.

“लोकशाही पद्धतीने लोकांचा
विचार करून त्यांना सेवा
पुरवणे म्हणजे सुशासन होय.”

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कॉ

लेजमध्ये प्रजाच्या फेलोशिपबद्दल माहिती मिळाली होती. शिवाय, गेल्यावर्षीच्या फेलोकडून या फेलोशिपबाबत खूप ऐकलं होतं. राज्यशास्त्र विषयाचा विद्यार्थी असल्याने, लोकशाहीपद्धतीने काम करण्यात खूप रस होता. म्हणूनच महानगरपालिकेचा अभ्यास व्हावा, तसेच शहरी व्यवस्थापन, त्यातील त्रुटी, येणारी आव्हाने हे सर्व प्रत्यक्षात जाणून घेण्यासाठी मी ही फेलोशिप जॉईन केली.

संपूर्ण फेलोशिपचा अनुभव खूपच छान होता. सुरवातीला गेल्यावर्षीचे फेलो आमच्यासोबत नगरसेवकांकडे आमची ओळख करून देण्याकरिता येत. परंतु नंतर आम्ही नगरसेवकांबरोबर स्वतंत्र मीटिंग करू लागलो. आरोग्य, शिक्षण, तसेच विभागातील इतर अनेक समस्यांवर आम्ही त्यांच्याशी चर्चा करायचो. त्यातून माझ्या माहितीत देखील भर पडली. प्रजाद्वारे घेतल्या जाणाऱ्या कार्यशाळेमुळे मला लातूर-जळगावच्या नगरपालिकेला भेट देण्याची संधी मिळाली होती. यामुळे मला तेथील नगरपालिकेचा अभ्यास झाला. शिवाय, मुंबई महानगरपालिका ही इतर नगरपालिकांपेक्षा कितीतरीपटीने वरचढ आहे याची जाणीव झाली. प्रजातंत्रसारख्या इव्हेंटमुळे टिमवर्कचे महत्त्व पटले. प्रजामध्ये आमच्या कामाचा आढावा घेण्यासाठी दर आठवड्याला मीटिंग घेतली जायची. ही मीटिंग म्हणजे माझ्यासाठी एक प्रकारची संजीवनीच होती. नगरसेवकांना एखादा मुद्दा कसा समजावून सांगायचा, त्यावर प्रश्न कसे व कोणत्या पद्धतीचे बनवायचे हे सर्व आम्हाला पद्धतशीरपणे सांगितलं जायचं. प्रजाने आमच्याकरिता शहरी विकास आराखडा, RTI, शहरी व्यवस्थापन, महानगरपालिकेचे अर्थसंकल्प अशा अनेकविध विषयांवर कार्यशाळा देखील आयोजित केल्या होत्या. त्यातून बरीचशी माहिती मिळत गेली. तसेच कोविडच्या काळात प्रजाने गरजवंतांसाठी राशन कीट वाटले, त्यात मला देखील हातभार लावण्याची संधी मिळाली. धारावी, शिवाजीनगर, गोवंडी, मालाड आणि मुंबईतील इतर भागात जवळजवळ १ लाख कुटुंबांपर्यंत मला गरजेच्या वस्तू पोहोचविता आल्या. यानिमित्ताने प्रजासारख्याच दुसऱ्या संस्थांबाबत देखील माहिती मिळाली. हा अनुभव खरच खूप वेगळा होता, ज्यामुळे मला लोकांच्या परिस्थितीची जाणीव झाली.

या फेलोशिपमध्ये आम्हाला बरीच आव्हाने आली. सुरवातीला आम्हाला नगरसेवकांचा वेळ मिळणं थोडं कठीण जात होतं. परंतु एक-दोन भेटीतच आमचं त्यांच्यासोबत छान ट्युनिंग जमून आलं. त्यानंतर मग आम्हालाच वेळ कमी पडू लागला. दिवसाला ३-४ नगरसेवकांना भेटत होतो, त्यांना प्रजाच्या श्वेतपत्रिकेतील माहिती समजावून सांगत होतो. आम्ही शक्य तेवढ्या जास्तीत जास्त मीटिंग घेऊन त्यांना प्रश्न बनवून द्यायचो. परंतु, या सर्वांचा फॉलोअप करणे सर्वात आव्हानात्मक काम होते. तसेच या कोविडच्या काळात नगरसेवकांसोबत प्रत्यक्ष भेटून संवाद साधणे शक्य नव्हते, तेव्हा आम्ही व्हिडीओ कॉन्फरन्सद्वारे किंवा फोनवर सतत त्यांच्याशी प्रत्यक्ष घडामोडींचा आढावा घेत राहिलो. यामुळे आम्हाला कोविडच्या परिस्थितीत नगरसेवकांना येणाऱ्या अडी-अडचणी समजल्या.

या फेलोशिपमधून खूप काही शिकायला मिळाले. महानगरपालिकेचे कामकाज कसे चालते, नगरसेवकांची कामे काय असतात याची माहिती मिळाली. टीमवर्कचे महत्त्व समजले. मी स्वतः नगरसेवकांना अर्थसंकल्पाचे भाषण लिहिण्यास मदत केली होती, त्यामुळे आणि अर्थातच प्रजामध्ये नियमित रिपोर्ट लिहून द्यावा लागत असल्याने माझ्या लिखाणाच्या पद्धतीत खूप सुधारणा झाली. तसेच अधिकृत मीटिंगमध्ये मध्ये कसे बोलावे व कसे वागावे याचे ज्ञान मिळाले. भविष्यात लोकांसाठी काम करताना व एकंदरीतच समाजात वावरताना या सर्व अनुभवाचा फायदा मला नक्कीच होणार आहे.

A portrait of a young man with dark hair and a light beard, looking directly at the camera. He is wearing a dark blue t-shirt. The background is a dense, green, leafy plant.

***"Good governance
is the symbiosis of
administration,
elected
representatives
and responsible
citizens who ask
regular questions
to the government,
working together."***

SAMIP KEDARE 20

TYBA, Ramnarain Ruia Autonomous College



It all started around a year back. One of the staff from Praja visited our college and briefed us about the fellowship programme. It really motivated me because it was going to give me first-hand knowledge about governance and opportunity to witness its functioning. As I am aspiring for the civil service examination, I am keen to know the workings of various government offices. So, I applied for this fellowship and eventually got selected. The interview at Praja was the first interview in my life. It gave me immense pleasure when I came to know that I have been selected for this fellowship.


The orientation session was held where all the 20 fellows were given an idea of the work to be undertaken by us. Also, a detailed explanation of budget, BMC rules, and BMC laws was very informative and also interesting. This entire fellowship taught me the various administrative methods of functioning, how to use our basic rights in order to avail benefits and so on. Also, various workshops and visiting interactions with BMC officers were very informative.

The most important experience of this fellowship was to attend the house and attend sessions which really gave me a clear picture of the house and its functioning. Furthermore, the fellowship provided an opportunity to have direct interactions with the elected representatives. The councillors shared their experience and challenges with us; which helped to know their side as well and understand the system as a whole.

In this entire course we visited various ward offices. At the beginning of the fellowship, it was very difficult to schedule meetings with ERs. But later when we started interacting with councillors our meetings increased automatically. Meetings really gave us a clearer picture of how the elected representatives work, what their ideas are and also how they sometimes think about issues keeping the dynamics of politics in mind.

Our doubts were solved and various sessions conducted by ex BMC officers at Praja through workshops on budget and session on the rules of MCGM. What I observed in this entire fellowship is that the councillors take the Praja ER Report very seriously and it is a buzz amongst them. It often happened that councillors would tell us 'your data does not help us' but in the end they always asked for a solution from us. Praja's data is unbiased and even councillors are aware of this fact. So, no matter how much they criticize it they continue to ask for the data.

Working at Praja Foundation has been an enriching experience for me. The fellowship made me believe that the way of presenting our ideas can change someone's view or attitude. The most important thing I learnt is time management and how we should strike a balance between our studies and work together. I gained a lot of knowledge about urban issues, duties of councillors, of administration and various committees and their role. 'Facts always win' was my biggest learning from this entire fellowship programme.

A portrait of a young woman with dark hair, wearing a white shawl, standing outdoors in front of a tree and green foliage. The image is the background for the entire page.

"Good governance is not a dreamwork; it's a teamwork where citizens, administration and elected representatives work together."

SONAM MASKE 21

MA, Idol Mumbai University



From being a chemistry graduate and ending up with a master's degree in political science, I always wanted to discover new fields of study and was curious about the impact of governance in our lives. So, this platform was best suited for me to learn more about urban governance and politics.

My experience throughout the fellowship was quite exciting. Every new word taught me something different, every learning is important and you don't require qualifications to gain knowledge. If we want to learn something new, we must be ready to learn them. Urban governance will work effectively when the administration will listen to the views of elected representatives and take them into consideration while planning. Weekly meetings at Praja were relaxing and fun because everyone would patiently listen to how we were dealing with tough situations and later we would receive suggestions for improving the quality of discussion with councillors. It was quite motivating. To improve governance of Mumbai, we discussed various topics with the councillors such as the Status of education in MCGM with the education committee members and asked them to raise questions which would change the future course of policy making.

The most challenging times were to interrupt the busy schedules of the councillors and explain our points to them. But I must say, they cooperated very well. One female councillor, towards the beginning of the fellowship had said, don't call me again, I am busy and can't interact with NGOs quite often. Later, we met her at the ward office, continuous interactions built our relationship and now she is warm and welcoming. A budget workshop was arranged in the K/E ward where Pisolkar sir explained to the ERs about the budgetary provisions.

Also, I got to know about policy making which is very interesting. I learnt real life applications of terms like Biochemical oxygen demand, Sewage Treatment Plant (STP), coliform test and BIS standard. All of this was quite exciting to me and I will definitely think of more good ideas to bring good governance in Mumbai. The GBM sessions were interesting and had the feel of a mini Parliament.

In my opinion becoming a politician, engaging in policy formation, in civil services or in mass movements is secondary but being an aware citizen first is more important. I am sure I will be one of them. Praja developed my analytical skills, gave me a right perspective to look at urban issues and helped me in trying to find their solutions.

The fellowship helped me to be a responsible citizen. It taught me that we don't have to wait for an alarm to wake up but instead we must wake up and get things done. I would frequently get asked why I was doing this fellowship, do I want to go into politics? I would say that we are living in a democratic country and we must know what is happening around us and to know that we don't have to be politicians at all. The fellowship has also helped with my communication skills a lot.

***“Cooperation between
elected representatives
and administration can
guarantee good
governance and timely
service delivery.”***



SOURABH DABI 22

M.A.(Hons.) in politics, University of Mumbai



saw posters of Praja's ER fellowship and heard about it from my friends who were fellows the past year. They shared their experience about working with councillors which motivated me to apply for the fellowship.

In the beginning, I was not aware about the theoretical part of urban governance i.e. how MCGM works, what are its functions? I just assumed that councillors are not doing their work properly but later as the fellowship proceeded, I realised that it is not an easy task to be a councillor and there are many challenges which they face and sometimes it does not have any concrete solution. Praja arranged various sessions and workshops such as sessions on Development Plan, launch of white papers etc through which my understanding regarding urban governance developed. My co-fellow and I discussed data on the health white paper with one of the councillors and he raised the question which was recommended by us. After that the timing of the dispensary was changed in five hospitals. This was through the efforts of all the fellows, as all the fellows pushed this to their respective councillors.

In the initial period we were given a list of councillors by the 2nd cohort to start meetings. Some of the councillors initially would not give us appointments but we continued our efforts and finally got appointments from the councillors. Another challenge was faced during the lockdown period as we were not able to meet personally and discuss data. But we adapted to the situation and started discussing white papers and constituency issues over phone calls. We tried our best to keep the engagement going with the councillors and get a good response. I was also assigned to work on the Development plan wherein I understood in great detail about the relevance of town planning and the associated process for Mumbai. Later, I was part of the Solid Waste Management Study and had a healthy interaction with the councillors from the Delhi Municipal Corporation.

The fellowship has definitely helped me become an alert citizen. Now, I am more aware about the importance of RTI and the power of data and facts. During the course of the fellowship my language skills grew considerably, I speak Marathi better than ever. The importance of time management, apt communication skills and method of presentation were great learnings in the fellowship for me. In future if I am able to serve the people, whether as a leader, or as a public officer, I will use my capabilities to best serve the people as I have understood how administration and elected representatives work together with people's participation, towards good governance.

A portrait of Sukhada Gole, a young woman with dark, wavy hair, smiling. She is wearing a light blue patterned top and gold earrings. The background is a blurred green plant.

"An equitable society where the government institutions are rendering services with accountability and transparency by ensuring people's participation is good governance".

SUKHADA GOLE 23

MA (Hons.), University of Mumbai



I saw a poster in my department saying “Are you interested in running your city?” and it immediately caught my attention. How can I be a part of city governance? So, getting an opportunity to work with the councillors of MCGM was my sole motive behind applying for this fellowship.

The two days of extensive orientation helped me to understand the structure of city governance which ultimately worked as a guide when I was working on the field. Within those two days of orientation, I realised that there is no dearth of opportunity to learn if we are observant enough to look around ourselves. Before joining Praja, I had learnt the theoretical part of urban governance, but this fellowship gave me thorough knowledge of ground realities of city governance and taught me how democracy actually works.

Initially, some councillors were hesitant to give us an appointment. But, at the end of the fellowship they have turned into the most responsive ones. Weekly meetings and monthly meetings were the platforms wherein we used to share our experiences of meeting with ERs, discussing their issues, and arriving at solutions to solve their problems. Learning from each other’s experiences was an interesting part of the fellowship. To mention a success story, one of our councillors had raised a point of order regarding the timings of dispensaries in Mumbai. It was approved in the GBM and accordingly the timings of some of the dispensaries increased on a pilot basis. It was a huge success. The amount of happiness for contributing to the greater good is something which cannot be described in words.

The early days of the COVID-19 pandemic had created a kind of uncertainty in our minds about the fellowship programme. But, Praja encouraged us to continue with our discussions with the councillors via conference call, e-appointments, etc. It was a tough time for them as well through which a tussle between the administrative wing and the deliberative wing came to the forefront. During this period, I got an opportunity to work with a UK based organisation. Under their guidance, we learnt localising the COVID-19 model and tried to build a case study on L ward. It was altogether an amazing experience.

Before joining Praja, I had a negative connotation about ERs. But, through this fellowship I got acquainted with the challenges and hardships faced by the councillors and it changed my perspective of the work they do. Explaining to them the whitepapers on Health, Education and of issues of key civic importance, discussing their ward specific problems helped me to understand the ground realities and know the gaps in the process of governance.

This fellowship has helped me to grow both professionally and personally. I’m well versed with communication skills may it be in person, by the means of drafting letters or telephonic conversations. Further, I got an opportunity to moderate the sessions on ‘urban governance’ that certainly helped me build my presentation skills. The fellowship at Praja Foundation has transformed me into a better version of myself. This fruitful experience will surely help me in my future career prospects.

"For me good governance is nothing but the fact of owning up to individual responsibility; be it an administrative officer, policy maker or most importantly the citizen of this country."

VIRAJ SHENDE 20

TYBA, SIES College of Arts, Science and Commerce



I want to be a civil servant in the ensuing future. Hence the fellowship offered by Praja was something that caught my attention as it gave me a one-of-a-kind opportunity to work closely with governance institutions.

Before joining Praja, I had learnt about governance only through books and newspaper articles. This was my chance to gain practical experience which surely has helped me understand how the municipal corporation of Mumbai functions and what are its responsibilities. The real catch has been that no textbooks could have helped me gain insights as much as I did while establishing dialogue with the elected representatives of Mumbai. I do recollect the orientation in which we had a session comparing the Municipal Corporations across India. It was really insightful to see the functioning of various cities that I had just heard about. The session concluded by stating that the legislative power of the MCGM is somewhat limited; causing a hindrance in the functioning of the government machinery.

Information shared with my co-fellows during weekly and monthly meetings helped us understand the different challenges the city faces hailing from the fields of education, civic amenities, health and sanitation. Getting to know how an actual RTI is filed was intriguing in itself. The white papers were the soul of the fellowship, where we got the opportunity to work on the data analysis part. Whilst we visited the ward offices allocated to us, we got to meet various officers such as the Secretary of the ward office. Upon conversing with them I got to know the bureaucratic side of public issues. In our daily meetings with the councillors we gained insights about the same issues from a political standpoint. These helped me create a neutral stance which is of utmost importance in civil services.

The most difficult part of the fellowship was to maintain contact with the councillors in the initial days. At times I was not taken seriously because of my age. Also, I lacked a bit in confidence while explaining the data points to councillors. Eventually I had a discussion about this with my co-fellows and project officers and kept on deliberating through regular calling and appointments. Gradually I grew in confidence and this could be seen when councillors started marking down important points of whatever I tried to explain. In the course of the Prajatantra event, I learnt the skill of coordination, maintaining accounts, framing proposals for events and most importantly time management.

One of our councillors implemented the Health White paper suggestion to increase the timings of the dispensaries after we drafted a question for him regarding the same. This made me feel that I too in some way contributed to 'good governance'. Another memory at Praja would be the Calendar distribution at GBM, all of the councillors from our wards, i.e., F/N and F/S were familiar with us. This made me feel capable of making a mark amongst so many people.

My dilemma about whether to address the councillors or the administration regarding my problems is more or less resolved in this entire journey. I am aware of my responsibilities and rights as a citizen better than ever. Overall, this fellowship has been a one-of-a-kind experience for me, improving my prospect to become a better citizen of this beautiful country.

"Good governance mechanism is based on an effective, innovative and responsible way of working for both ERs and Administration, with proper checks and balances to ensure betterment of people."

YASHASHREE RANE

19

TYBA, PTVA's Sathaye College



Being a political science student, I was always interested in public policy and administration. So, I was enthusiastic to work with the city government, and Praja gave me this opportunity through the ER Fellowship Programme. We were taught about urban governance and local administrative bodies in great detail. Through Praja we closely observed the working of the administration and the elected representatives.

We went through an orientation which taught us Praja's role in urban governance, the white papers and RTI data collection. We were provided with first-hand knowledge about the RTI process, broadening our sphere of understanding. It was interesting for us to assist councillors with their work and discuss their ward level problems relating to civic, health, and education related issues. In this fellowship programme, I assisted 28 councillors from P/N and P/S ward. Their way of working, approach towards local issues and efficiency motivated me.

I studied the MCGM Budget of P/N – P/S wards and worked on the Development Plan of P/N ward. For me it was exciting to know the way councillors raise issues with the administration during the GBM meetings. I was involved in drafting the budget speech for one of our councillors and it was an enlightening experience. Through the weekly and monthly meetings, workshops and sessions I learnt about urban governance, mechanism of local administration, town planning, civic concerns and the 1916 mechanism.

During Prajatantra 2020 we were exposed to event preparation and councillor meetings. This taught me time management and setting up priorities. Here, I learned the art of convincing people and was successfully able to book an appointment from our Chief Guest for the event. In the COVID-19 pandemic period the biggest challenge was to convince councillors for virtual meetings. We tried our best and were ultimately successful in conducting interactive video calls with the councillors. Praja gave us opportunities to work with different organisations such as the Rangoonwala community.




I am now better aware about the MCGM acts, 74th amendment, participatory democracy, complaint management system, role of various departments, ward committees and the GBM. Certainly, it is enlightening to be a part of a fellowship programme. Praja helped me develop my personality, frame perspectives, enhance my communication and presentation skills. I came to know the difference between policy formulation and policy implementation as well, during the tenure of the fellowship. The insights gained at Praja guide me through academic courses, deviating my focus from textual understanding to co-relating them with on ground realities. The skills gained will continue to be on my side at any interview I appear for in the near future; also the spirit of cooperation learnt will nurture a good leader in me.

Glimpse of ER Fellowship Cohort-3





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