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Democracy at the Grassroots: A Survey to Understand the Awareness of the  
People in Rural Uttar PradeshDEMOCRACY AT THE GRASSROOTS: A SURVEY TO UNDERSTAND THE AWARENESS OF THE  
PEOPLE IN RURAL UTTAR PRADESH

by

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ABSTRACT

*The neoliberal concept of governance as a minimal state conveys a preference for less government intervention in the affairs of governance. There is a debate about whether there has been a shift from government to governance at the local level. There is another debate about whether this shift is a top-down process or a response to bottom-up demands<sup>1</sup>. In order to understand the participation of citizens in the local affairs of governance with least interference from the government machinery, the citizen must be informed about the institutions and practices of governance. The present study is a simple effort to understand the awareness on the part of people regarding institutions and the processes of governance. A survey of the ten districts of Uttar Pradesh was done with an intention to include the different institutions, functionaries and various developmental plans of the government. The aim of the present article is to generate the perspective of understanding on the part of people regarding various institutions, projects and plans of development.*



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Keywords: Gram Sabha, Gram Pradhan, Decentralization, Panchayati Raj

I.

'Decentralization of political, fiscal, and administrative power may change incentive structures for political participation and the ability of previously powerless groups to participate, thus creating conditions for bargaining which are more conducive to efficiency.' The idea of decentralization also found fertile ground in the on going debates among activists and academics on poverty, economic inequality, urban bias, and the need to empower the economically and socially disadvantaged. Decentralization was seen as a way of correcting 'the multiple failures of the bureaucratic and centralized apparatus of the Indian development state'<sup>2</sup>.

An important strand in the decentralization debate about equity and voice for local communities is closely intertwined with the idea of 'participation'. Indeed participation was a key concept in the argument favouring administrative decentralization, although it was evoked in other contexts as well (Agarwal: 67). Participation requires a precondition of awareness regarding the institutions and the processes involved therein. For instance the citizenry to be more participative at the grassroots requires an awareness regarding the representatives, the bureaucracy and other institutional features involved in the affairs of the village. Democratic decentralization can help mobilize what some theorists call social capital: interpersonal relations and community

networks. These networks can significantly reduce the transaction costs of collective action and economic exchange and, when appropriately linked to state interventions, can generate significant synergies. Not all forms of trust or social networking are conducive to promoting developmental objectives. Democratic decentralization however has the potential for nurturing useful state-civil society synergies<sup>3</sup>.

Uttar Pradesh brought in Panchayati Raj immediately after independence through the enactment of the UP Panchayat Raj Act, 1947. Following the recommendations of Balwant Rai Mehta Committee a three-tier system of panchayats was established through the enactment of the U.P. Kshetra Samitis and Zilla Parishads Act, 1961 (now, renamed as UP Kshetra Panchayats



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and Zilla Panchayats Adhiniyam, 1961). Following the Constitution (73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment) Act, 1992 in order to bring about conformity with the provisions of the Constitution, the Government of U.P. amended the two Acts named above, through the Uttar Pradesh Panchayat Laws (Amendment) Act, 1994.<sup>4</sup>

The present work is based on the field-work done in the ten districts of central Uttar Pradesh. In order to generate a response group, sampling was done. The researcher depended upon non—probability sampling method. The sampling has been done in phases in the sense that, first, the representative districts were selected for the study. The selection of the representative district was purposive as only the districts of central Uttar Pradesh has been given representation with the exception of one or two districts. During this process the following ten districts were chosen: Lucknow, Kanpur Nagar, Rai-Bareilly, Sitapur, Hardoi, Unnao, Pilibhit, Lakhimpur, Bahraich and Barabanki.

The second phase of sample was initiated with the selection of the representative Gram Panchayats from these ten districts. The selection of the Gram Panchayat was also purposive. The fieldworkers who were assigned the task of data collection taking into consideration the available resources and time, decided and selected the Gram Panchayats which they can reach easily and collect data efficiently. So, in this way the representative Gram Panchayats were selected. In the third phase of the sampling process all the households of the Gram Panchayats were targeted.

One adult member of each household was taken for the survey and a set of questions were asked to them. A household survey of 1390 household was done to ascertain the awareness regarding the local administration and development. The intention was also there to understand the impact of various provisions of Constitution 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act.

## II.

### DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

#### AGE

The division of the overall sample on the basis of age suggests that the age group 31-40 years was represented by 28.42 % followed by age group 41-50 years which constitutes 24.89 % of the total sample and 21-30 years of age group which constitutes of 22.66 % of the sample. This trend is visible more or the less in all the ten districts. This suggests that the respondents belong mostly to the age group 21-60 years, the age group of 31-40 is represented



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more followed by age group 41-50 and 51-60 years. Very small percentage of the respondents is from age group 71-100 years. This suggests that the respondents are young and they are more interested in sharing the information with the researcher.

#### EDUCATION

The overall data suggests that education, as far as rural India is concerned, is in very bad shape. The illiteracy of 44.17 % suggests that the literacy rate of the sample is 55.83 % which is less than national literacy rate (Rural) of 67.80% and U.P. literacy rate (Rural) of 65.50%. This suggests to the fact that universe indicates toward a domination of backward region and sample reflects this.

#### RELIGION/CASTE

The division on the basis of religion suggests that 83.31% of the household and respondents belong to Hinduism followed by 15.68% Muslim, 0.58% Buddhism, 0.36 % Sikh and 0.7% others. The trend is visible in almost all the districts of the sample. Only in district Lucknow the Muslims constitutes of 35.20%, otherwise the representation of Muslims is less than 20% except district Lakhimpur where it is 22.78%.

#### OCCUPATION AND SIZE OF THE FAMILY

The division of sample on the basis of occupation suggests that 41.22 % of the respondents are occupied in agricultural activities as labourer, followed by 37.34 % respondents who are involved in agriculture only, 12.37 % are engaged in their own business, 7.41 % are involved in service sector and 1.65 % did not share the information with the interviewer. The overall picture is more or the less conforms to the micro level reality as except in one district Kanpur where business group percentage is equal to agriculture and labour group, in other district the reality is more the less same.

The division of the sample on the basis of size of the family suggests that 46.83 % of the household have 1-5 members in the family, 45.61 % have 6-10 members, whereas 6.19 % households have 11-15 members. 1.01 % and 0.36 % households respectively have 16-20 and 21-15 members. The trend at the macro level is in conformity with the micro level that is the average size of the household is same in nearly all the ten districts with some minor variations. The trend that is visible here is the small size of the family and the household in the rural area. This suggests to the fact that the change in the pattern in the occupation is creating change in the size or due to the migration of population to the cities also, the size of the family is changing.



#### FAMILY INCOME

The division of sample on the basis of income (monthly) suggests that 69.49 % of the respondents did not provide any information regarding their income, the reason may be assigned to the fact that the trust the respondents put in interviewer is not enough to get the correct situation. The respondents are not in a position to assess the income frame of their household. One important reason may be the fact that the respondents fear that when they are revealing their income, they may be denied certain benefits they are getting from the government programmes. In the sample, 10.50 % of the respondents come in the category of income range Rs. 1501-3000, 7.27 % come in the range of Rs. 3001-5000 and 5.03 % comes in the range of Rs. 5001-10000. However, a small percentage of respondents that is 1.29 % and 0.22 %

come in the range of Rs. 20001-50000 and more than Rs. 50000 incomes per month category. This suggest to the fact that those respondents who revealed the status of family income are very less. However the trend they show suggests that as far as income is concern, households from all the segment has been represented in the sample.

### III.

#### AWARENESS REGARDING DEVELOPMENT

Social and economic development is very important for any area and correspondingly the awareness of the various institutions and individuals responsible for this. An understanding is required regarding the awareness of the people on various issues. One of the important issues is with reference to the social, legal and developmental affair.

##### RESPONSIBILITY OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE VILLAGE

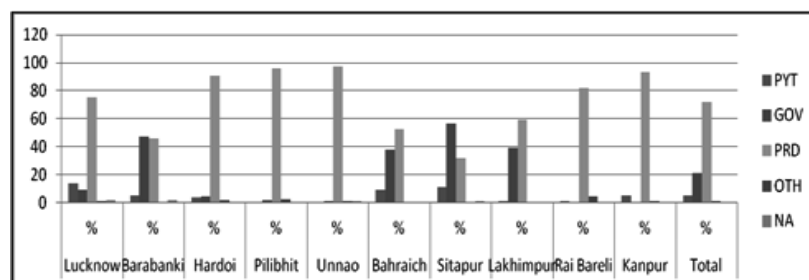
When a question was asked as to who is responsible for the development of the village, 72.23% of the respondents were of the opinion that it is the responsibility of the Pradhan, whereas 21.08 % held government responsible for this. Only 5.04 % held panchayat responsible for development.

The result suggests that panchayat irrespective of having many members is dominated by the head; meaning thereby institutional setup is dominated by a particular individual and sometime it seems that institutional setup is subordinate to the individual. One important individual of the village that is Pradhan is determining the way and direction of development.



The concept of direct democracy and small constituencies in the form of wards creates an ideal impression of democratic functioning but the reality is that this experiment of direct democracy is dictated by one individual that is Gram Pradhan, who is also the executive head of the panchayat. Meaning thereby, the particular institution is subordinate to an individual. The individual centric decision making process as understood by the people subordinates the institutional setup.

Graph-1



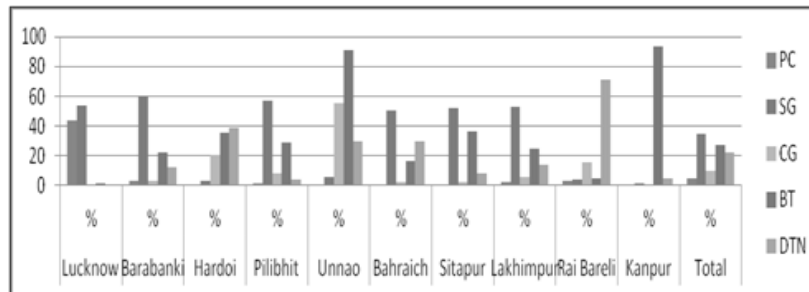
PYT=Panchayat, GOV=Government, PRD=Pradhan, OTH=Other, NA= No Answer

#### THE FINANCE OF THE DEVELOPMENT PLAN

On the question of where from the finance come for the various development plan, 35.11 % are of the opinion that it comes from state government, for 27.05 % it is both central and state government whereas 10.29 % said it is from central government, however 22.37% respondents are unaware of where from the funds are coming. More or the less the similar results are reported from different district with slight variations.



Graph-2



PC = Planning Commission, SG = State Government, CG = Central Government,  
BT=Both, DTN = Don't Know

#### MANAGEMENT OF EXPENDITURE

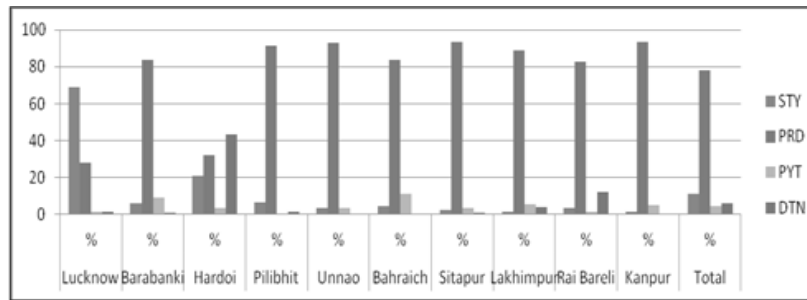
In response to the question that at the village level who spends the money, 78.27 % said it is Pradhan who spends the money, 11.01 % are of the opinion that it is the Secretary who spends money, and 5.97 % respondents are unaware whereas 4.75 % are of the opinion that it is Panchayat which spends money on development at the village level.

The results at the district level are same except for the district Hardoi and Lucknow. In Hardoi 43.48 % of the respondents are unaware of the fact as who spend money in the village and only 32.17 % respondents consider Pradhan as the responsible individual to spend money. In Lucknow district the 68.80 % respondents are of the opinion that money is spent by Secretary followed by 28 % respondents who said it is Pradhan who is responsible for spending the money.

The results are in consonance with the previous results where, it is individual Pradhan, the bureaucrat Secretary is more important than the democratic institution of the Panchayat. If the management of expenditure has to be done by the individuals holding important positions as is the perception on the part of respondents, what is the rationale of democratic decentralization and direct democracy at the grassroots.



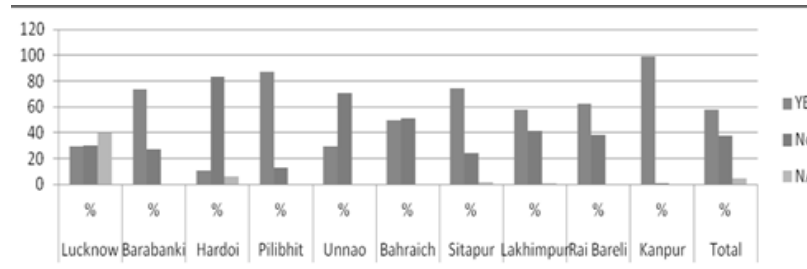
Graph-3



STY=Secretary, PRD= Pradhan, PYT= Panchayat, DTN = Don't Know  
**DEVELOPMENTAL WORK DONE BY PANCHAYATS**

On the question regarding awareness of the developmental work done by Panchayat and Pradhan, 57.99 % are aware of the different works whereas 37.69 % of the respondents said they are unaware of any such work done by the Panchayats and Pradhans. 4.32 % of the respondents did not answer the question. The responses at the district level are also in consonance with the final responses except district Hardoi, Unnao and Lucknow where a majority of respondents are not aware of the development work done by the Panchayats.

Graph-4



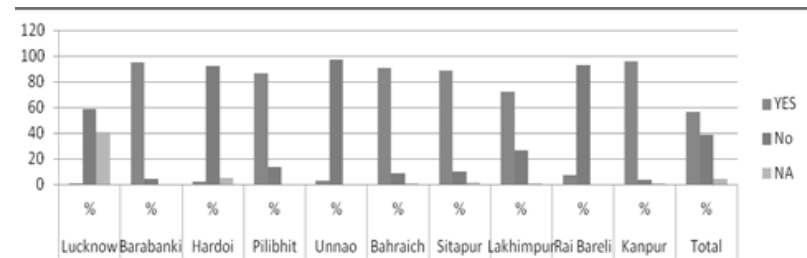
NA= No Answer



**AWARENESS REGARDING VARIOUS PLANS AND PROGRAMS**

56.91 % of the respondents are aware of the different governmental plans and programmes going on in the village, whereas 38.56 % respondents are unaware of the different programmes. 4.53 % respondents did not respond to the question. The Hardoi, Unnao, Lucknow and RaiBareli do not conform with the total result.

Graph-5



NA= No Answer  
IV.

#### AWARENESS REGARDING THE AFFAIRS OF GRAM PANCHAYAT

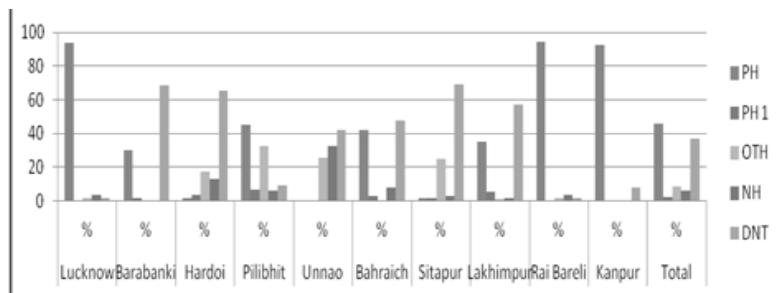
The healthy democracy at the grassroots requires on the part of citizen an awareness about the affairs of the Gram Panchayat. Since it is mandatory to convene minimum two meetings of the Gram Sabha, it is important that the people are aware of such meetings.

#### THE MEETING OF GRAM SABHA

When the respondents are asked about where the meetings of Gram Sabha is held, 45.76 % respondents are of the opinion that it occurs at panchayat house, 36.98 % are not aware of any such meetings. Whereas 8.78 % said meetings are held at any public place and 2.23 % said it is held at Pradhan's place. This suggests to the fact that at least Panchayat Bhavan (House) has become a centre for meeting.



Graph-6



PH= Panchayat House, PH 1= Pradhan House, OTH=Other, NH= Not held, DNT= Don't Know

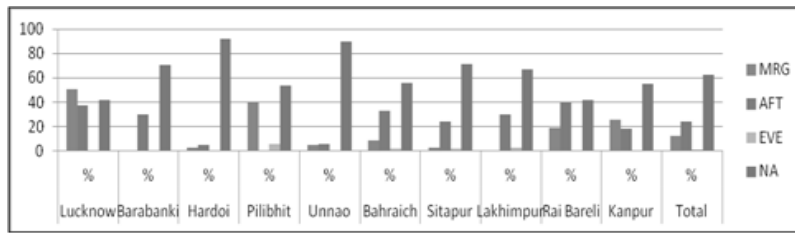
#### TIME OF THE MEETING

When a supplementary question was asked regarding the timing of the Gram sabha meeting 62.66 % respondents are unaware of the timings of the meetings whereas 12.09 % said it is in the morning that meetings are held, 23.88% said it is in the afternoon and 1.37% said it is in the evening.

The majority respondent's unawareness regarding meetings of Gram Sabha as well as timings of the same once again creates a suspicion regarding the authenticity of the institution of panchayat as a democratic system.

Meaning thereby the legal frame well within which these institutions are created either they are not properly contextualized or the legality and legitimacy of the institution is in crisis.

Graph-7



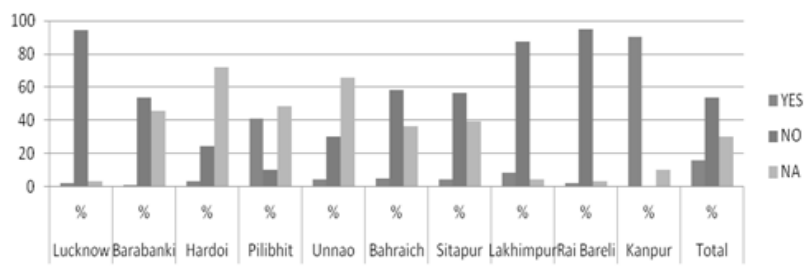
MRG=Morning, AFT= Afternoon, EVE=Evening, NA=No Answer



### VENUE OF THE MEETINGS

On the question of whether the meetings are held at the place of specific caste or class group, the 15.97 % said yes, whereas 53.74 % said no, meaning thereby the meeting are held at a place meant for this. 30.29 % of respondents do not respond to the question, more or less similar results are available from different districts.

Graph-8

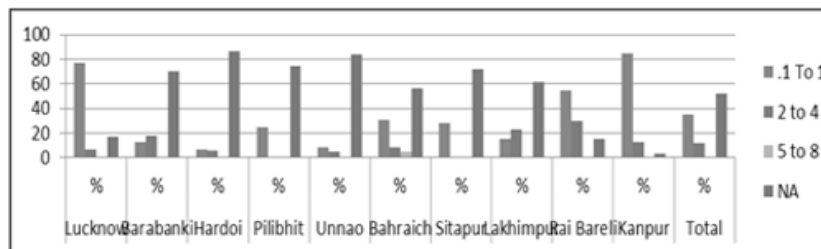


NA= No Answer

### DISTANCE BETWEEN VENUE OF MEETING AND RESIDENCE

The distance between the meeting place and the residence of the respondents in 34.89 % of the cases is between 0.1 to 01 Km whereas for 11.87 % this distance is between 1-5 Kms, 52.45 % respondents do not answer the question.

Graph-9



NA= No Answer





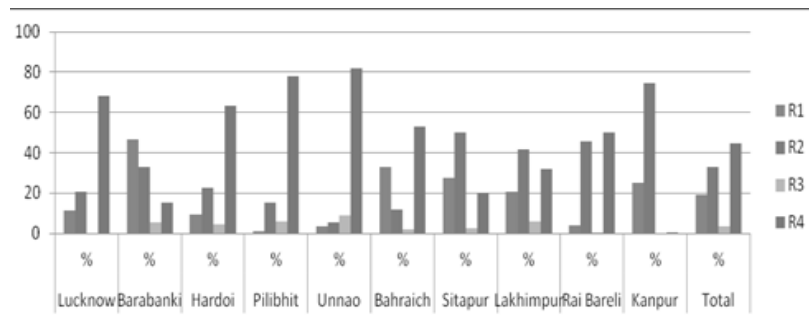
V.

The process of solving the problems at the community level with the help of Panchayat is an important domain in the life of the village population. The awareness on their part regarding the tools available and their aspirations as what is needed to be done for the proper management of the affairs of the village, some questions were asked to them.

**SETTLEMENT OF SMALL FEUDS**

When a question was asked as to how the small feuds are settled in the village, 44.82 % of the respondents are of the opinion that police is the important institution to settle these disputes, whereas 32.66 % of the respondents are of the opinion that these feuds are resolved with the intervention of the pradhan. 19.06 % are of the opinion that due to mediation of the village residents the matter is resolved. The strangest result was with respect to the role of the village panchayat in resolving the feuds. Only 3.45 % respondents are of the opinion that small feuds are settled due to the intervention of the panchayat.

Graph-10



R1 = Mediation of any individual, R2 = Mediation of pradhan, R3 = Mediation of panchayats, R4 = Help of police

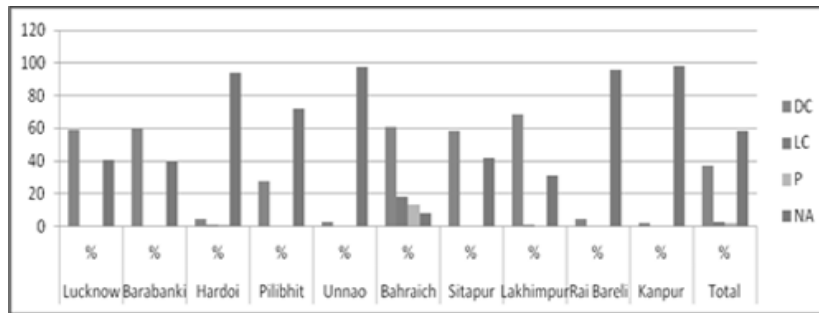
**INSTITUTION RESPONSIBLE FOR JUSTICE**

When a question was asked regarding where they first go to seek justice, there was no clear understanding on their part as 36.91 % respondents said district court followed by 2.66 % for lower court and 1.87% to police. Whereas 58.56 % did not opt for any of the above category; suggesting that the first place or institution where they get justice is not the formal institution but it



is the informal or individual setting. As far as their knowledge about justice system is concern, they are not aware of the strata of formal justice delivery system.

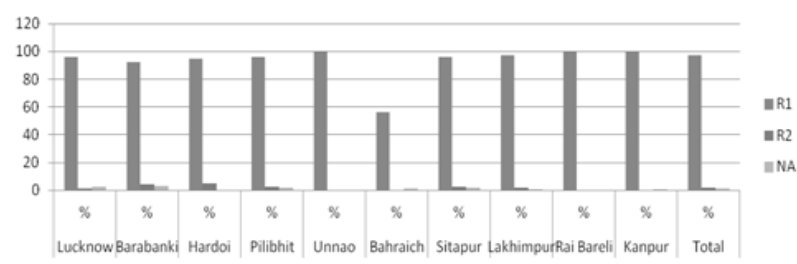
Graph-11



DC= District court, LC= Lower Court, P= Police, NA= No Answer  
**A COURT IN THE VILLAGE**

With a background information regarding Gram Nyayalayas, when a question was asked regarding the establishment of the courts in the village, 97.12 % of the respondents answered in positive whereas only 1.73% of the respondents said it is not proper. This suggests that the villagers do not want to go outside for justice and if the formal judicial institution is available to them, they will be more satisfied.

Graph-12



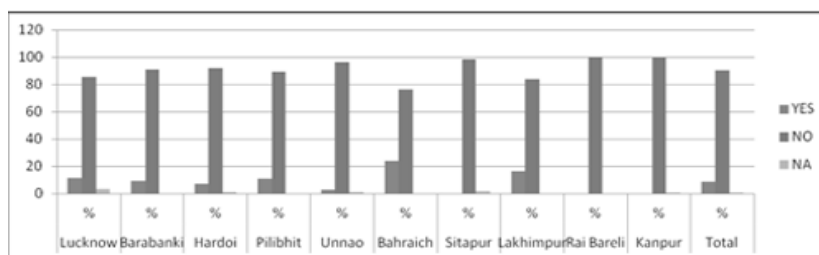
R1 = Proper, R2= Not proper, NA= No Answer



**AWARENESS REGARDING GRAM NYALAYA**

When a supplementary question was asked whether you are aware of the concept of the Gram Nayayalaya, 90.43 % of the respondents said that they are not aware of this whereas 8.92 % of the respondents did not respond. 0.65% respondents said they are aware of this concept. The results are more or the less same at the district level also.

Graph-13

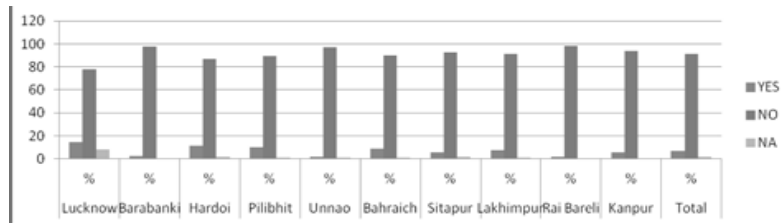


NA= No Answer

**AWARENESS REGARDING LOK ADALAT**

Awareness regarding LokAdalat is also very low among the respondents. 91.51 % of the respondents show their inability regarding awareness with reference to LokAdalat whereas only 6.98 % of the respondents are aware of the LokAdalat. 1.51 % of the respondents did not answer the question. This once again reinforces the statement that awareness regarding justice delivery institution is very low on the part of the respondents.

Graph-14



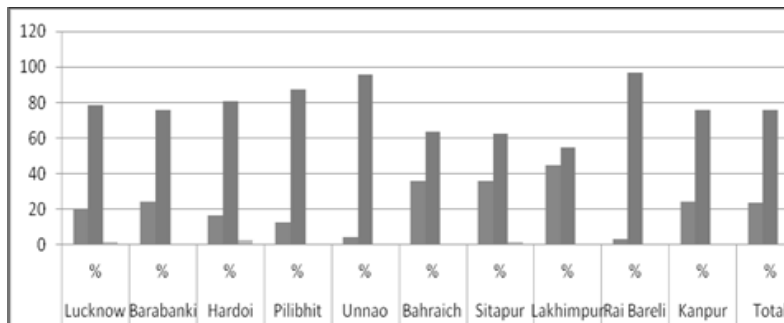
NA= No Answer



#### AWARENESS REGARDING RIGHT TO INFORMATION ACT

When a similar question was asked regarding 'Right To Information' only 23.59 % of the respondents are aware of this, whereas 75.83 % of the respondents are not aware of this act. This suggest to the fact that the legal enactments which are there for the welfare of the people, they are not aware of this. Meaning thereby the law exists in theory but law in practice is not very emphatic as people are not aware of the law, forget about their practice.

Graph-15



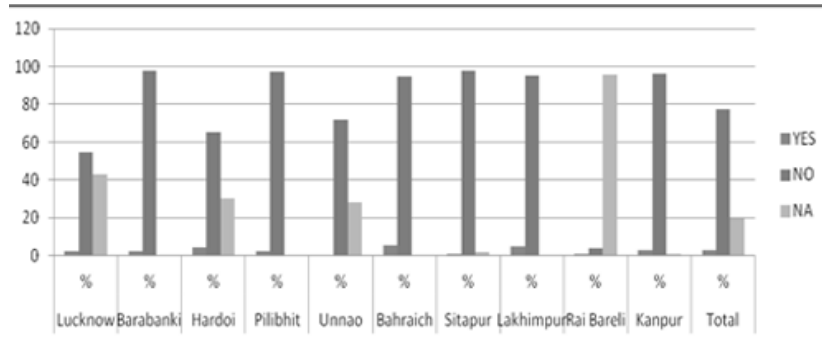
NA= No Answer

#### HAVE YOU EVER USED RTI

When a supplementary question was asked whether they have used RTI, only 2.81 % of the respondents said yes, whereas majority said no. Since the people are not aware of the law, they are not in a position to use this.



Graph-15



NA= No Answer

VI.

### CONCLUSION

The sample is young as far as the age frame is concern. The majority of the respondents were young and they were interested in sharing the information with the researcher. Their enthusiasm has a limitation in the sense that 44.17% of the respondents are illiterate that is a major section of the sample is not having exposure to educational institutes. The overall literacy rate of the sample is 55.83% is less than the literacy rate of the State of Uttar Pradesh that is 65.50% and 67.80% literacy rate of India. This clearly indicates toward the fact that the sample represents the backward area of the state of U.P.

The views regarding village development is important in the sense that majority of the respondents are of the opinion that village Pradhan is responsible for the village development. This orientation of the respondents is contrary to the fact, where the Panchayati Raj Act provides major thrust to the Gram Panchayat and Gram Sabha. The Act emphasizes upon both these bodies to play important role but these two institutions are subordinated by the individual position of Gram Pradhan and Village Secretary. The majority of the respondents are not aware of the fact where from the finances for the village development come from but they are of the opinion that Pradhan spends the money. This once again emphasizes the importance of individual in comparison to institution. More than 50% of the respondents are aware of the developmental work done by panchayats and they are aware of the developmental



work done by the Panchayat and they are also aware of the various plans and programs going on in the village.

Majority of the respondents are aware of the meetings of the Gram Sabha and the place for such meetings but a section is unaware of any such kind of meetings. Not only this, they are also not aware of the timings of meetings. The meeting place is within the reach of the respondents. The very important aspect is that the meetings are held at a place which is neutral that is the meetings are not held at a place of caste specific group. Majority is unaware of social audit but it is encouraging that the issue they raise, Panchayat provides serious attention to such questions.

Majority of the respondents are aware of the fundamental right of equality with respect to caste, class and religious group before the rule of law. The role of the institution of police and individual Pradhan is very important in solving the feuds that

arise in the village. Meaning thereby the individual Pradhan dominates the institution of Gram Panchayat. The informal domain is still working in delivering justice and when the things do not work there, they go for formal institution like police and courts. The majority is of the opinion that justice delivery system should be available at their doorsteps but they are not aware of the concept of Gram Nyayalayas introduced by the government. The villagers are now more closely integrated into larger economic and political system and the awareness on their part relating to development and affairs of the village is more concrete.

Local government may be perceived in terms of formal institutions where clear hierarchy imposes and promotes a proper check and balance, however, in the common perception, the formal institutional setup at the grassroots level seems to be subordinated by an individual who is heading the village council. This perception is getting strength because the legal and policy institutional setup is not asserting in the same way as it is expected at the grassroots domain.

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<sup>2</sup> Agarwal Bina (2011) Gender and Green Governance, Oxford University press, New Delhi, p. 67.

<sup>3</sup> Issac Thomas T.M. & Richard W. Franke (2001) Local Democracy and Development, Left Word Books, New Delhi, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.nrddp.org/file\\_upload/Status%20of%20Panchayati%20Raj,%20Uttar%20Pradesh.pdf](http://www.nrddp.org/file_upload/Status%20of%20Panchayati%20Raj,%20Uttar%20Pradesh.pdf).