

Lokniti Newsletter

(Private Circulation)

8/ November 2005

IN THIS EDITION:

Democracy forever teases us
with the contrast between its
ideals and its realities, between
its heroic possibilities and its
sorry achievements.

-Agnes Repplier

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EDITORIAL

Welcome to the November issue of the Lokniti newsletter.

At the onset, on behalf of the Lokniti team, here is wishing each of you a happy Diwali and Eid mubarak.

It was wonderful to have so many responses and replies to the first issue of the Lokniti newsletter I edited. I hope at least some of you have had the time to ponder on the points of the debates we listed in the newsletter. Let me however remind you again that your responses and critique would be vital to bring about the environment of discussion and debate, we so want the newsletter to create.

We have also just begun the Lokniti e-group and are in the process of putting your e-mails on the group, thus you can soon expect an invitation cum introduction mail from us.

With best wishes,
Lillian D'Costa

‘STATE OF DEMOCRACY IN SOUTH ASIA’

Discussions on the draft report of the SDSA study are in progress. Two discussions have been held in the last month, presentations at which were made by Prof. Peter de Souza and Prof. Yogendra Yadav. There is also a three-day meeting from 7th - 9th November to review the report, which is to be held at CSDS.

Case Studies

A case study on **Jan Sunwai** has been done by Prof. Gopal Guru. In it he explores the Jan Sunwai or Public Hearing as a method of representing grievances by public testimony of groups like Dalits, women, tribals and farmers. The Jan Sunwai has been effectively used as an indigenous method to highlight and conscientise the victim and the spectators on problems mostly rooted in rural contradictions. The Jan Sunwai is gaining popularity as an alternative method of collective expression, as not just the media but also the judiciary has failed in hearing and solving the problems faced by these marginalized groups.

While the Jan Sunwai does not have any public or penal authority it does have the ‘moral power to influence the State and civil society in favour of a democratic spirit’. The Jan Sunwai is also a very empowering process in that, it not only does away with civil society structures that are stacked against the marginalized but also inverts power equations in favour of the marginalized, by making them the center of the discussion. There are no experts and ‘hence no chance of objectification of the victim’ and ‘the victim represents his case without any ones technical assistance’. One of the reasons for the popularity of the Jan Sunwai is that it instills confidence among the marginalized to challenge existing oppressive structures.

Prof. Guru then goes on to argue how the Jan Sunwai subverts the asymmetries of relationships that hide in the framework of procedural democracy and thus creates egalitarian aspirations among the marginalized besides deepening the experience of democracy. The Jan Sunwais ‘collapse the hierarchies based on

time and space' and 'treats everybody without discrepancy, distinction and discrimination'. It does this by using a different language, both verbal and non-verbal that is so unlike the courtrooms. The Jan Sunwai instills a natural confidence in the deposer and this confidence comes from the empowering experience of knowing they have been exploited by the system. Prof. Guru ends his case study with a critique of Jan Sunwai saying that since the Sunwai highlight rural problems they should be held in rural areas. The Jan Sunwai needs to be institutionalized rather than held, as an annual event and the event must be initiated from the bottom up rather than in the presently held top down method.

Projects Undertaken

- As mentioned in the earlier newsletter, Prof Yogendra Yadav and Prof Suhas Palshikar have been invited by the NCERT, to be chief advisors for the writing of the Political Science textbooks from Std IX to XII. As part of the exercise, three workshops were held during this month.

Events

- Prof. Charles Douglas Lummis, the first occupant of the newly constituted Rajni Kothari Chair in Democracy. As part of his attempt to develop the scholarship on political thought, on 18th October '05, he gave a lecture on '**State's Right to Belligerency and Gandhi on non-violence**'. In

his lecture Prof. Lummis attempted to draw a parallel between the philosophies of Gandhi, his expectations for India and the scenario of the country immediately after his death. The right of belligerency of the State is the legitimate right a State claims to go to war and have a standing defense force that can kill, maim and destroy with impunity, said Prof Lummis. In his version of the Indian Constitution, Gandhi had hoped that the land of non-violence would have "the smallest army imaginable", which in effect means no army. He was terribly disappointed when India refused to be a pacifist state. It makes for an interesting analysis to understand the juncture in time when Gandhi was assassinated. 1947. Immediately after independence, the State of India was in political formation, if India needed to move forward in the direction it did, Gandhi simply had to go, said Prof Lummis and so for the man who shielded from being 'The Prince' (Machiavelle) he became the sacrificial son. The irony though was that even while Gandhi actively lobbied for a pacifist state, his funeral preparations and the procession was organized and managed by the defenses, besides his body being carried on a weapons carrier the funeral procession had a strong military presence. Prof Lummis argued that a States claim to belligerency receives sanction from civil society, as civil society fears a defense vacuum - believing that having no army makes the country open to invasion- and yet facts show that the army is used more to repress and kill its own citizens than foreigners. As a State heads towards 'modernization' it only becomes more violent, said Prof Lummis. He then goes on to question the logic of slow disarmament and the concept of 'just war'. A

war, said Prof Lummis is fought to win and not to loose so slow disarmament is useless in that it keeps you armed but not enough to win. There is no choice when it comes to having peace, you are either armed or you are not.

Recent Publications

- Kumar, Sanjay, Gathbandhan va Voton ka pratishat hi Safalta ka Moolmantra, *Prabhat Khabar, (Hindi)* October 10, 2005
- Kumar, Sanjay, Jameene Muddose Kattaa Bihar ka Chunnav, *Prabhat Khabar, (Hindi)* October 16, 2005.
- Kumar, Sanjay, How they all stack up, *The Telegraph*, October 19, 2005

Suggested Reading

C. Douglas Lummis, 96, *Radical Democracy*, Cornell University Press.

Radical Democracy consists of extracts, an introduction and five chapters namely, Radical Democracy, Anti-democracy Development, Anti-democracy Machines, Democracy's Flawed Tradition and The Democratic Virtues followed by the Conclusion. Written in an engaging and lucid style, Prof Lummus 'hope(s) that this book can make a small contribution by lending some theoretical support to "actually existing" democratic movements as well as by offering some criteria by which democrats may evaluate, criticize, and clarify their own aims and methods".

Announcements

- The Bihar election survey is in progress, two workshops were held in Patna and Madhubani in October to train the investigators. The findings will be published in the national dailies, Hindustan Times (English) and the Hindustan (Hindi). The exit poll results will also be telecast on CNBC TV channel on 19th November from 9-10 p.m and on the Hindi Channel, Awaz from 10-11 p.m on the same day.
- The Department of Political Science, University of Allahabad is organizing a **National Seminar on Ethno-political conflict in India: Causes and Consequences** on the 10th-11th of December '05. The seminar welcomes papers on a variety of themes. For more information contact Prof. M.P. Dube, Ph. 0532-2441663, Mobile 941564962 E-mail: dube_mp@yahoo.com
- The Edith Cowan University and the Western Australian Museum is organizing a conference on **Perspectives on Globalization in the Indian and Pacific Oceans**, to be held in Fremantle, Western Australia from 12th-15th December '06. If you would like to present a paper or know more about the conference contact Mark Dupuy e-mail: m.dupuy@ecu.edu.au or visit www.ecu.edu.au/ses/iccs/conference2006/home.html

Debates

1. The second phase of Bihar elections are over and the voter turnout has been a disappointing low of 43% and 46%. What do you think are the reasons for this low turnout?

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NEXT ISSUE

The next issue of the Lokniti newsletter will be issued in December 2005.