

Lokniti Newsletter

(for Private Circulation)

19/ April 2006

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What difference does it make to the dead, the orphans and the homeless, whether the mad destruction is wrought under the name of totalitarianism or the holy name of liberty or democracy?

--- Mahatma Gandhi

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EDITORIAL

Dear Friends of the Lokniti Network,

Welcome to the April issue of the Lokniti newsletter.

In the world's largest democracy, democracy gets challenged ever so often. As the temperatures in Delhi begin to soar, so do the numbers of peoples movements, gravitating to the capital to voice their protests.

The Narmada Bachao Andolan and the Bhopal Gas Tragedy protestors are sitting opposite each other in the capital city demanding they get justice for their twenty year long battles.

The Naxalites protest against the State on the other hand, is also making headlines, although they have chosen a violent way of drawing attention to their cause. Those studying the movement however point to the fact that it is precisely the unheeding attitude of the State that has pushed groups like the Naxalites to a violent means of getting their issues addressed.

In light of these events, violence could be the new challenge for the Indian State and democracy in the coming years.

Four state and one union territory is going to the polls starting from April 3rd. Lokniti, has been studying every major state and parliamentary election since 1996, and it will be keenly observing the elections in Assam, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Details regarding the survey and the televised programme to follow are already up on our website.

For quite a while now Lokniti has drawn resources from the University of Michigan. In March this year, we had the Director of Studies of the American National Election Studies, Mr. David A. Howell visiting the Delhi office to assist in professionalizing

our invaluable statistical data and making it available on the web. We also had the pleasure of having a lengthy meeting with Prof. Ira Katznelson, President of the American Political Science Association. Seeking to locate common interests and share sustainable ways of engagement between India and America, Prof. Katznelson was indeed impressed by the size of the sample and the rigor in methodology adopted by Lokniti for each of its surveys.

Activity on the SDSA Project is heating up, it is only a matter of days before an extensive website will be launched and we would appreciate the assistance of each one of you to make the visual archives on democracy to be hosted on this site, an insightful and vibrant one.

As I mention ever so often, it is your feedback that keeps us at Lokniti ticking, so do keep writing in to us.

Warmly
Lillian D'Costa

'STATE OF DEMOCRACY IN SOUTH ASIA'

Because we believe a picture is worth a thousand words, the SDSA project is planning to develop a visual archive on the following themes

1. Social and Political Movements
2. Struggles for Rights
3. New forms of protest
4. Relationships between State and Democracy
5. Constitutionalism and Rule of Law

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6. Marginal Citizens such as women, indigenous people and displaced communities.
7. Identity Politics
8. Elections and Parties
9. Political Conflict and Violence of the State and Groups
10. Any other theme you think will be interesting

We are therefore inviting you to send us pictures, both digital and hard copy, on democracy, which are free of copyright and with no IPR constraints. The photographs will be hosted on our site with photographer duly credited.

We request you to share with us your stories of triumph and failure, of achievement and suppression, of innovation and constraint, on the struggle for democracy, and let us grow together.

Send your photographs to the Lokniti address or e-mail them to pallavi_rks@yahoo.com or pallavi@lokniti.org

Case Study

Below is a brief synopsis of the seventh case study done for the SDSA project.

In a state of statelessness: a case study of the citizens without citizenship in Nepal

By Prof. Hari Prasad Bhattarai

This case study is about the Tarai region of Nepal, which is home to the Madhesi people. The Madhesis live on the Nepal side of the Nepal-India border and are of Indian origin. They have been

migrating to Nepal since the 1860's, and now constitute 15% of the total population of the country. The Madhesis have always been socially, economically and politically the poorest and most disadvantaged group in Nepal, and do not enjoy any citizenship rights. Their 'denial of citizenship rights has contributed to landlessness, marginalization and restricted access to many State, market and public resources' writes Prof. H.P. Bhattarai

The case study looks at the reasons which makes the Madhesi people unable to acquire the required documents necessary to establish their citizenship, 'the difficulties they face in accessing the resources of the State' and market, and also tries to capture the attitude of political parties, social movements and civil society organizations towards the Madhesi.

Prof. Bhattarai then goes on to discuss the concept of 'Citizenship' in the Nepalese context. The modern concept of citizenship was introduced in Nepal through the enactment of the Citizenship Act of 1952 and has since been amended five times. These amendments happened when it was observed that Nepal showed the highest rate of naturalization of Indians among South Asian countries. The discourse of citizenship, says Prof Bhattarai, generates political tension as it is intricately tied to the issue of ethnicity and regionalism. Tying ethnicity to the discourse on identity can be problematic as ethnic identity is not a fixed form of identity. Secondly Nepal, is characterized by unequal ethnic relations reflecting an intense unequal competition for State resources.

The Madhesi people migrated to the once malaria infested Tarai due to the active policy of the Nepalese government. The 2001 census showed they comprised of 32% of the Tarai population. Considered 'quasi-foreigners' (due to their Indian origin) up to the 1950s, the Katmandu elite greatly hesitates to grant them

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citizenship for fear of being over run by Indians.

India and Nepal having porous borders have much cross border interactions. However there is also hostility especially for the Madhesi, who are viewed as outsiders both in Nepal and India, thus leading to an identity crisis for the Madhesi people.

The successful acquiring of citizenship is much linked to 'language, facial structure, family links with hill people etc' as the law is ill defined and finally the giving of citizenship is thus left to the discretion of the bureaucrats, writes Prof. Bhattarai.

Legally too, Article 8 of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal is discriminatory and a stumbling block for the Madhesi in obtaining citizenship. Article 8, limits birthright citizenship to 1962. And those who were born before that period but had not claimed citizenship in 1962 are denied citizenship. Prof Bhattarai then investigates reasons that make it difficult for the Tarai people to get citizenship.

The people of the Tarai live a nomadic life. They own no property, whose documents can be used to ascertain their identity; and being poor they do not have the time or money to invest in collecting the required documentation or travel to the required offices to get their citizenship certificate. Nepalese bureaucrats also look upon the way they dress with suspicion. Thus a Madhesi may not get a citizenship certificate after being in Nepal for generations while an Indian who has recently moved there and purchased land or forged documents, can.

The citizenship certificate is useful for numerous reasons such as for establishing a small-scale firm, running an import business, accessing bank loans and government welfare schemes, making a passport, registering a marriage or birth and for gaining political representation during elections. Importantly it also has a symbolic meaning as those who have a citizenship certificate

have an emotional sense of national identity as its denial in ones own country means humiliation as one is treated as a foreigner. The lack of a citizenship certificate has especially affected the landless poor Madhesi as they have not been able to benefit from the Land Reforms Program implemented by the Government.

However, numerous organizations like the Nepal Sadbhavana Party (NSP), Madhesi Mukti Morcha and its sister organizations and NGOs have begun organizing Madhesi people, though divisions along, caste, linguistics and ethnic lines proves to be constraints to Madhesi unity.

Events

Soon the eastern states of Assam and West Bengal, and the southern states of Kerala and Tamil Nadu will be going to the polls in April-May and as usual when any state elections are round the corner, the Lokniti office goes into a flurry of activity.

Lokniti has been studying all the major state and parliamentary election since 1996 and is planning a pre-poll along with a combination of post and exit poll surveys, followed by seat forecasting and political analysis which will be telecast on CNN-IBN, while our print partners will be Hindustan Times and Hindu.

We are hoping to interview a total of 20,000 people to understand voting behaviour and attitudes, election issues like directive of election commission, peoples opinion on governance and overall performance of the state governments.

The findings of our surveys will be telecast on CNN-IBN as follows, Assam- 10th April, West Bengal-11th April, Kerala- 12th April and Tamil Nadu- 13th April respectively. Our print

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partner for the surveys is *The Hindu*. For more details visit

<http://www.lokniti.org/opinionpollsurveys.htm>

Magazine Review



Himal Southasia is a bi-monthly magazine published from Kathmandu, Nepal. As the name suggests it covers a range of perspectives on current political issues in South Asia. Besides subscribing to the magazine you can also view it online at www.himalmag.com

Debates

The Naxalites have been displaying a strong presence in the country's political arena in the recent months. Their attacks on the state have been growing in variety, frequency, intensity and

daring. Unfortunately, instead of display a national policy and addressing social inequities that bring about the emergence of groups like the Naxalites, the State has been floundering, even after numerous rounds of meetings with the thirteen affected states.

The Salwa Judum has been positioned as a people's initiative in Chhattisgarh against the Naxals even while it receives full government support and is in actuality a counter insurgency strategy. This novel attempt at countering the Naxals is being studied carefully by the other affected states even as violence and rights violations in Chhattisgarh have marked escalated.

In our debate sections this month, we would like your feedback on what do you think are the reasons why groups like the Naxalites emerge and find a supporting voice in the country, what kind of a comment is the presence of Naxals on the Indian democracy, what should be the country's policy on the Naxals. Send us your thoughts and analysis to be published in the next newsletter due in May 2006.

Visits

David A. Howell, Director of Studies, The National Election Studies (NES), The Comparative Study of Electoral Systems, Centre for Political Studies, Institute for Social Research, the University of Michigan, was in Delhi for a week assisting us to professionalize our vast resource of statistics which are an invaluable academic asset not just to research scholars in the country but the world over.

The American National Election Studies (ANES) produces high quality data on voting, public opinion, and political participation to serve the research needs of social scientists, teachers, students,

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policy makers and journalists who want to better understand the theoretical and empirical foundations of national election outcomes. Central to this mission is the active involvement of the ANES research community in all phases of the project. To know more about the ANES visit <http://www.umich.edu/~nes/>

Prof. Ira Katznelson, President of the American Political Science

Association had a interesting meeting with the Lokniti team. He discussed commonalities and differences between the kinds of data sought through the National Election Study in the two countries, the methodologies employed and the interesting reading they gave about the peculiarities of each country. To know more about the American Political Science Association visit <http://www.apsanet.org/>

Suggested Reading

Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne Hoerber Rudolph, 2006, *Postmodern Gandhi and Others Essays*, Ghandhi in the world and at home, Oxford University Press.

The Gandhi of the loincloth and the walking stick seems an unlikely advocate of postmodernism. In eight seminal essays, Lloyd and Susanne Rudolph argue against equating Gandhi with traditionalism and read him as a postmodern thinker. In the first chapter, the Rudolph's contend that Gandhi's critiques of 'modern civilization' in his 1909 book, *Hind Swaraj* was an opening salvo of the postmodern era. His autobiography, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* and his theory and practice of non-violent collective action, satyagraha, articulate and exemplify a postmodern situational understanding of truth. The authors show how in London the young Gandhi was shaped by the anti-modern 'other west' of Ruskin and Tolstoy and how a generation later, the mature Gandhi shaped the 'small is beautiful' other west that challenged modernity's hegemony.

In succeeding chapters, the volume shows how Gandhi's ashrams and satyagrahas democratized Habermas' bourgeois 'public sphere', how Gandhi's meaning in America was contested by narratives of him as anti-imperialist, a guru, a mahatma or even a fraud, and how Gandhi restored Indian self-esteem and national identity by showing them that it is more courageous to be non-violent than violent. Gandhi was a practitioner and an activist as well as a theorist, as Marx famously put it about himself, Gandhi meant to change the world as well as interpret it, and he did.

This volume will appeal to those who want to understand Gandhi's continued relevance to the 21st century and to students and scholars of history, politics, charismatic leadership, colonialism and post-colonialism.

Blurb

Lectures and Seminars:

Delivered a lecture on Politics and Public Opinion at,
Department of Politics and Public Opinion, University of
Pune, March 25, 2006

Conducted a training workshop of field investigators, for
conducting Civic Literacy Survey, at Janaagraha, Bangalore,
March 8, 2006. Janaagraha is conducting this Study on
“Assessing levels of Civic Literacy in Bangalore” in
collaboration with Lokniti, CSDS.

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NEXT ISSUE

The next issue of the Lokniti newsletter will be in May 2006.
Please send us your inputs to the newsletter on or before 30th
April 2006

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