

Lokniti Newsletter

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IN THIS EDITION:

Man's capacity for justice makes democracy possible, but man's inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary.

--- Reinhold Niebuhr

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EDITORIAL

Dear Friends of the Lokniti Network,

Welcome to the March issue of the Lokniti newsletter.

India has been on the broil for the last one month. The worldwide protest and that includes India too, against the caricatures of the Prophet Mohommad brought to the fore issues regarding the freedom of the press versus their ability to hurt religious sentiments. While this issue was still making big news, yet another political debate caught the imagination of the Indian public as it found itself debating the pros and cons of India casting her vote in favour of reporting Iran to the Security Council. This in turn brought India's foreign policy under scrutiny. Presently we have the visit of the US President making the headlines and heated debates on Indo-US relations and specifically the civilian nuclear deal they are planning to sign are underway. As this newsletter is being sent out to you, many of us are still pouring over our newspapers to analyse the implications of the budget passed by the house only yesterday. We at Lokniti would love to hear what you think on each of these issues.

On the home front, the Dialogue on Political Parties in India held on 23rd-24th February at CSDS provided a wonderful opportunity for us to meet up with the state co-ordinators of some of the northern states, many of whom have promised to stay in closer contact and contribute more regularly to the Lokniti newsletter. So I'm definitely looking forward to a greater interaction.

Warmly

Lillian D'Costa

'STATE OF DEMOCRACY IN SOUTH ASIA'

Case Study

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

In this case study **Democracy, Power, Violence: Party Politics and the Transformation of the Village Feud in the Sri Lankan South**, the author Jani De Silva examines the link between democracy, violence and the imperatives of power in Sri Lanka. She does this through an ethnographic study of an extraordinary event, which occurred towards the end of nominations week of the local elections of March 1997. Which involved a daylight assassination of a 29-year-old Member of Parliament (MP) Nalanda Ellawala and a police security guard, by an electoral opponent and his supporters. The event was acted out before a crowd of over a hundred people, in the Ratnapura district of Sri Lanka. Eight years on, the perpetrators are still to be brought to justice.

Jani De Silva then goes on to provide a historical sketch of the two major families, namely the Ellawala, to whom Nalanda belonged and Punchinilame, both of whom were big landowners involved in politics and were political rivals as they supported the Sri Lankan Freedom Party (SLEP) and the (United National Party) UNP respectively. With politics in Sri Lanka being rife with violence since the 70's, it was this political rivalry that culminated in the assassination of 29-year old MP.

'By the 1970s party politics often seemed to play itself out in the spectacular idiom of the feud and local enmities often took the form of post-election violence. But it was perhaps the

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General Elections of 1977, which saw a systemization of this 'post-election violence' syndrome, when the Leader of the victorious UNP announced a one-week holiday for the police, which was an open signal for the UNP supporters to attack their opponents, without the presence of the police.

Violence in politics grew closer to shocking proportions, unseen before; in the Referendum of 1982. Senior party leaders were making public statements expressing their intolerance of any kind of civic dissent. Local leaders taking their cue from senior party figures were then spurred to greater heights of aggression at the village level.

Political repression of opponents continued into the early 90's. UNP MPs engaged in spectacular acts of violence to extract political compliance from the electorate. Even after the UNPs fall in 1994, elements of this culture of terror remained, enabling extraordinary acts of violence against members of the new regime. It is against this backdrop that the daylight assassination of Nalanda Ellawala must be understood.

Nalanda Ellawala, his father, and the accused Sushantha Panchinilame were political opponents as they contested against each other in the late 80s and while Panchinilame's party won all over Sri Lanka, Panchinilame lost to Ellawala in that election. Sushantha drew public attention when he was implicated for the kidnapping and brutal murder of 3 students, one of whom had actively campaigned for Nalanda and Sushantha probably viewed Nalanda Ellawala instrumental in his defeat and humiliation. In this discourse the bodies of the boys were 'tortured, defaced and reduced to a spectacle'. It was definitely this family and political rivalry that premeditated the event of the public assassination, besides giving the political career of Sushantha a tremendous boost.

Programs

Lokniti and the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) organised a **Dialogue on the functioning of political parties in India**, on 23-24 February 2006, at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies.

The Dialogue was part of a research project undertaken by the International IDEA to study the internal and external regulation of political parties, to serve public understanding on how parties function and to identify good practices that can be promoted internationally.

The Dialogue brought together political leaders from both national and regional parties such as the Congress, Communist Party of India, Bharatiya Janata Party, Gondwana Ganatantra Parishad, the Biju Janata Dal, Rashtriya Janata Dal, Jharkhand Mukti Morcha, Samajwadi Party, and Lok Jan Shakti Party besides social activists, and the state co-ordinators of the Lokniti network of Orissa, Uttar Pradesh and Punjab. The Dialogue sought to address serious political themes such as 'Parties and Changing Party System', 'Internal party Process', 'Funding and Elections and 'Political and Party Reforms'.

In a rare sight of self-critique, discussants agreed that people were beginning to lose faith in political party and that radical changes needed to be made in terms of transparency and accountability within the parties to restore this faith. Some of the problems politicians admitted to were that political parties, irrespective of their ideology have become leader centric. That internal party democracy was on the decline and needed to be strengthened. They also recognised a dangerous trend towards

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'Corporate Democracy' and criminalization of democracy, which they felt should be nipped in the bud. Another critique was, the inability of political parties to successfully cultivate a second line leadership. Those at the Dialogue strongly felt the need for fresh talent and new faces that are more representative of the diversity of the country; this they felt would help renew people's interest in politics.

Some politicians felt that party workers should cast votes to elect their internal party leaders and that this would begin the process of democratising the parties. Also discussed was election expenditure. Participant's felt that this belief that those who spent the most money win the elections, needs to be demystified. They felt political parties need to come to a consensus on the minimum amount and incorporate greater public involvement in terms of voluntarism and donations to back up the campaigns. The Gondwana Ganatantra Parishad shared their experience of how the food at most of their campaigns was often sponsored by the villagers. Also recognized was the growing involvement and participation of the hitherto backward and marginalized sections of the country in the political processes. In this regard they praised the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments, which is an invaluable tool in the hands of the deprived people.

Strongly voicing their opinion on behalf of the tribals of Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, was the Gondwana Ganatantra Parishad, which stressed that the tribal voice was often sidelined in major parties and therefore they had started their own political party. Importantly they shared their methodology of campaigning for elections on a very small budget, and making sure their candidates were socially responsible and exemplary personas as well. Also discussed in detail was the need for state funding of elections and giving tax exemptions to donations made to

political parties to check financial malpractices. Numerous ideas on state funding for elections, shortening the days of campaigning etc were also examined, to end mal practices during elections.

Lectures/ Seminars/ Talks

- ❖ Sanjay Kumar, Attitudes and Beliefs among Urban Indian Families, paper presented at an Open Symposium at The Foreign Correspondent's Club of Japan, Tokyo, Japan, February 24, 2006.
- ❖ Sanjay Kumar, Traditional Values Still predominates among Urban Indian Families, paper presented at 3rd Asian Barometer Symposium, held at Chuo University, Tokyo, Japan, February 23-24, 2006.
- ❖ Pushkar Raj, Gurgaon Police Violence against Industrial Workers: Implication for Human Rights, paper presented at National Seminar on a World Wide Perspective of Human Rights: Issues of Women and Child, held at MES College of Art and Commerce Goa, October 24-25 2005.

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Suggested Reading

Edited by Bina Agarwal, Jane Humpheries and Ingrid Robeyns, 2006, **Capabilities Freedom and Equality, Amartya Sen's work from a Gender Perspective**, Oxford University Press.

This unique volume is the first to examine Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen's ideas through the lens of gender.

Renowned for his humanitarian approach to economics, his contributions have been crucial to the development of several aspects of feminist economics and gender analysis. This book outlines the range and usefulness of his work from a gender perspective while also exploring some of its salience's and implicit assumptions.

The result is a collection of ground breaking and insightful essays which cover major topics in Sen's work, such as the capability approach, freedom, social choice, justice, agency, missing women and development and well-being. Perspectives have been drawn from both developing and developed countries, with most of the authors applying Sen's concepts to cultural, geographic and historical contexts which differ from his original application.

Significant highlights include a wide-ranging conversation between the book editors and Sen on many aspects of his work and an essay by Sen himself on why he is disinclined to provide a definitive list of capabilities.

The volume also contains six of Sen's original writings, as a reference to be read in conjunction with the fourteen contributed essays.

This multidisciplinary volume makes for a compelling read for both economists and schools from other disciplines as well as for policy makers and practitioners.

Blurb

Debates

The conflagration against the printing of cartoons of Prophet Mohammad in a Danish newspaper and later reproduced in numerous countries shows no signs of abating. Political scientists and the media are thrown into a multi dimensional debate on the freedom of expression and freedom of the press, its limits and its ability to incite and hurt sentiments. In our debate section, we would like to hear your take on the issue. Send us your thoughts and analysis to be published in the next newsletter due in April 2006

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NEXT ISSUE

The next issue of the Lokniti newsletter will be in April 2006.