

# Lokniti Newsletter

# 7 / April 2005

## *IN THIS EDITION:*

[Editorial](#)  
[Contact Us](#)  
[Next Issue](#)

[Events at Lokniti](#)  
[Projects Undertaken](#)  
[Recent publications](#)

['State of Democracy in South Asia'](#)  
[Cross-national survey](#)  
[Qualitative Assessment](#)  
[Case Studies](#)  
[Dialogues](#)

## EDITORIAL

Welcome again to a new edition of the Lokniti newsletter!

A summary of the Report on the Regional Dialogue on the SDSA project that was held in Goa in March 2005 has been included. This issue also includes summaries of a few Qualitative Assessment papers, case studies and a dialogue on democracy. For detailed information on Lokniti and the projects mentioned here, kindly log on to our website [www.lokniti.org](http://www.lokniti.org).

With best wishes,  
Edzia Carvalho.

## ‘STATE OF DEMOCRACY IN SOUTH ASIA’

### Cross-national Survey

The Regional Dialogue on the *State of Democracy in South Asia* was held in Goa from 27-29<sup>th</sup> March 2005. Participants included the Principal Investigators, representatives of the International Advisory Board, the Lokniti India network, and writers of the case studies and qualitative assessment papers and the Lokniti research team.

Excerpts from the Report on the Regional Dialogue on the *State of Democracy in South Asia* prepared by Ms. SriRanjani follow:

The Goa Regional Dialogue was intended to place on the agenda the first round of interpretations of the early findings of the different research instruments employed in the State of Democracy in South Asia project.

Presentations were made on the work done through the four components of the State of Democracy in South Asia – Survey, Dialogues, Case Studies and Qualitative Assessment. The presentations were organized around the five-part grid of (i) the promise of democracy, (ii) the design of democracy, (iii) the working of democracy, (iv) the outcome of democracy and (v) the futures of democracy.

There was some discussion on the idea of ‘Promise’ as political aspiration and as ‘an opportunity for better futures.’ These dual aspects were read from the dialogues, Qualitative Assessment papers and the survey instrument particularly through the open ended question ‘What is democracy is understood differently by different people. According to you what is democracy?’

Discussion on the ‘Design’ aspect focused on sustenance of institutions in the light of military rule, usurpations and monarchical assertion on the one hand, and the backdrop of accommodative ability, tolerance of diversity and minority rights on the other hand.

The session on the ‘Working’ aspect was regarding the manner in which the process of democracy unfolded in South Asia and the specific South Asian issues that were encountered in the process. Some such issues specific to the ‘working’ of democracy in South Asia pertained to affirmative action, majority-minority syndrome in religion, ethno-linguistic strife, understanding and role of civil society and social movements, role of non-state actors, etc.

The session on ‘Outcomes’ centred on the output generated by the survey instrument on the following themes – legitimacy, efficacy, trust, participation and democratic institutions; identity, dignity and notion of selfhood; security and freedom from fear; material outcomes and freedom from want. The data on these themes was compared across the five countries involved in the State of Democracy in South Asia project.



To view the information collected through surveys, dialogues, case studies and qualitative assessments on the concept of democracy in South Asia, the following paradigms were suggested as prisms:

- Religion/Secularism: Religion, as a paradigmatic force, reinforces the centrality of the community. This in turn is reiterated vis-à-vis the issues of majoritarianism and hegemony. Secularism has become an ideology of the elite and thereby an alienating discourse.
- Nationalism: There is a tendency in South Asia to be bogged down by the 19<sup>th</sup> century understanding of nationalism that is linked to religion as a community of one people or as a community of communities where communities compete in numerical terms leading to majoritarian hegemony. The need is to broaden the understanding of the concept of nation as a community of citizens.
- Non-state systems: One cannot afford to ignore the role of the non-state systems (LTTE, Maoists).

It was acknowledged that challenges to democracy in South Asia need collective action. What emerges from the work done so far is that democracy has become a part of the ‘common sense’ of South Asia. The interpretive challenge is to see how and in what ways it is a part of this common sense. It was emphasized that we needed a sensitivity to multiple vantage points. Overall, there was an acceptance of democracy not just as an anti-colonial project but also as a modernizing project of transforming society.

### Qualitative Assessment

A brief summary of two Qualitative Assessment papers that have been received under the SDSA project follows. The summaries have been prepared by Ms. Ritu Rao.

Hasan Askari Rizvi, Pakistan: *Working Of Democracy In Pakistan*: The well-recognized prerequisites of a political order are described as free and fair electoral process, the rule of law, socio-economic justice and accountability of those exercising state power. However there are serious problems with these principles at the operational level in Pakistan. A conflict between the professed democratic values and the operational realities of authoritarianism and non-sustainable civil institutions and processes is the main feature of the Pakistani experience. The redeeming feature of this conflict is that despite the long spells of authoritarian and military rule, the theoretical commitment to democracy and participatory governance has persisted in Pakistan. Neither of the two political trends has been able to overwhelm the other. The political system is characterized by intermittent breakdown of constitution and political order, weak and non-viable political institutions and processes, rapid expansion of the role of the military-bureaucratic elite, military rule and military dominated civilian governments and authoritarian and narrow-based management.

Sayeed Jaffer Ahmed, Pakistan: *Design Of Democracy In Pakistan*: In assessing the quality of democracy in a given society, it is justified to look into the actual practice of democratic functioning as an outcome of, apart from other things, the structures evolved over a period of time and the rules made through a process of consultation in a society. In

[↑ Top](#)



democratic societies it is generally presumed that the domain of design responds directly to the societal needs and demands. Thus for the larger part the design owes itself to the society. However while referring to Pakistan two important observations may be made. First, the design was rather superimposed instead of growing from the interest of the majority of the society. As a result of this many an aspect of actual political practices in the society appear to be in contrast and contradiction with the ascertained rules emanating from the design rather than an offshoot of these rules. Second, in the case of Pakistan the design itself for example the constitution of the country has continuously changed in the last 57 years making it rather difficult to talk about the design.

## Case Studies

A brief summary of two case studies that have been commissioned under the SDSA project follows:

Markus Mayer and Ananda Galapatti, Sri Lanka: *Youth and Democracy's Future: Insights from Sri Lanka*: This paper examines the role of youth in Sri Lankan society, their attitudes to current systems of governance, and their perceptions on the status of democracy in Sri Lanka, using data from the National Youth Survey, Sri Lanka and the ILO-IMCAP School-to-Work Transition Youth Survey. The concept of youth is explored, with some indications on the problematic nature of youth as a clear category in the context of developing countries. Finally, the paper goes on to speculate on how the specific social locations of youth may place them at a disadvantage in using prevailing social practices, such as patron/client relations or bypassing formal processes through established social linkages. The authors note that the structures of democratic governance in Sri Lanka may have been overlaid upon latent quasi-feudal systems, making the practice of services in exchange for favours a commonly perceived mechanism for fulfilling one's needs. Similarly, they note a propensity amongst people to bypass formal processes or mechanisms through the use of established social linkages to access health or education services. Within this context, the authors advocate that notions of democracy may need further critical analysis, if it is to be made an applicable and easily practicable concept, given these indications of existing social practice

Saba Gul Khattak, Pakistan: *Inconvenient Facts: Women and Political Representation under Military Regimes*: The case study looks into the issue of military regimes and quotas for women's political empowerment in Pakistan. It has been commonly stated that although military regimes in Pakistan are generally considered to be anti-women and anti-rights, they have provided more support to the women of Pakistan through the granting of quotas than civilian regimes. This paper discusses different explanations for women's increased representation and concludes that while there are definite limits on the extent and quality of political empowerment for women in Pakistan, it is women's own resilience and the changes on the ground that have paved the way for increased participation and impact on politics.

## Dialogues

A summary of the Sequential Report of the *Dialogue on Democracy: Majorities & Minorities* organised in Chittagong, Bangladesh from July 29-30, 2004 follows:

The dialogue was conducted around the following themes: ‘Democracy and Minority’, ‘Election Violence and Democracy’ and ‘Democracy and Women’. Some of the main issues that were addressed during the discussions were:

The working of democracy in Bangladesh: Democracy is ‘leader-centric’ and fascist. It has become ‘masthan-centric’. There is widespread criminalization of politics. Democratic practice has been reduced to appealing to the minorities for votes and forgetting about them till the next elections. To be effective, democracy must be inclusive and ensure proper participation of all communities and segments of society.

Creation of minorities: Democracy was imported to Bangladesh in the name of nationalism. By resisting the efforts at assimilation made by the British and West Pakistan, the concept of having an exclusive identity found a way into the imagination of Bangladesh. After independence, the exclusionary tendency was applied to the CHT people and the religious minorities. The scarcity of resources and the competition to gain control over these resources has contributed towards the marginalization of a group of people and thus in the creation of minorities. Processes and institutions of governance must be sensitive to the levels of empowerment of vulnerable groups, including minorities. There should be mechanisms for giving voice to the widest political diversity and this plurality reflected in governance.

Linguistic majoritarianism: The very name of **Bangladesh** that means land of the Bengali speaking people creates this majoritarianism. It is being emphasized that Bengali is the language of Bangladesh and all other languages are mere dialects and thus a *High Culture* and *Low Culture* is being fabricated.

Cultural violence: Many participants representing the Chittagong Hill Tracts expressed their inability to live a life with the freedom to practice their culture and religion. The Peace Accord has ensured an uneasy calm in the CHT. The army continues to administer the CHT. The people from the CHT are depicted as outsiders and immigrants by the government and the media in Bangladesh and are not considered a part of the nation. The number of Bengali settlers will outnumber the hill people in a few years because of the opportunities and incentives offered to the settlers by the government.

The poor as a disadvantaged majority: Poor people are often denied justice as they don’t have the requisite political protection. So, the majority have become the minority, as the majority of people don’t have any kind of political protection. So, they don’t have any power.

Impact of the Aid Industry: The ADB, USAID financed programmes as well as other external factors are in a way responsible for all the human rights violations that occurred in

[↑ Top](#)

the CHT. The entire *Khyang* population were driven out of their land because of the Pulpwood Plantation Project. The Participation and Access systems are very disrupted and in most cases, totally destroyed. These violations are taking place in the coastal regions such as in Modhupur also. The rights of the local people are violated through the implementation of those projects. Aid has become a chronic liability for Bangladesh. Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Social Impact Assessment (SIA) are not properly done and knowledge becomes fragmented.

Women's experience, empowerment and participation in Democracy: Many of the women who came into politics at that high level come in because of family connections and often they are not the preferred partners of political power. These women are used to mobilize the other women to vote for male candidates or they are there to ensure the logistics of organizing events and fund raising and making sure party conventions come on time etc. But they hardly ever shape the political agenda in the party. While women are active voters, as candidates they are low on the list and there are far less women candidates in winning seats and then far less to get into parliament. At the political level, you find that the women's role is declining at the decision-making and the representation level and it is increasing at the participatory level. Because of the lack of power women experience in making laws in the political process, in access to education and employment and in decision-making over the resources that they generate or that they need because of that they are powerless.

Elections and democracy: Democracy requires going beyond democracy of the superstructure. Elections are formal rituals of democracy. Democracy must aspire for a democratic society. Electoral majorities result in majoritarian tyrannies. Democracies must strive or constitutional remedies for non-discriminatory protection to the electoral and other minorities. Constant review of the electoral system and institutions, basis of representation, etc. to ensure inclusiveness by internalising emerging changes. Everyone, irrespective of gender, ethnicity, linguistic or religious identity, should have equal opportunity to seek public office, and gender, ethnicity, linguistic or religious identity of an individual may not be used to deny him or her any public office.

## EVENTS AT LOKNITI

### Projects Undertaken

A **post-poll survey** was conducted in the states of Bihar, Jharkhand and Haryana during the assembly elections held in these states. The survey was supported by the *The Hindu* and the *Indian School of Political Economy*. The findings of the survey were reported in *The Hindu*. A study to monitor poll irregularities was also been conducted in the three states.

#### Access Special Supplements

'How Haryana Voted: Assembly Elections – 2005', published in *The Hindu* on March 06, 2005, <http://www.hindu.com/2005/03/06/05headline.htm>

'How Jharkhand Voted', published in *The Hindu* on March 07, 2005, <http://www.hindu.com/2005/03/07/05headline.htm>

'How Bihar Voted', published in *The Hindu* on March 10, 2005, <http://www.hindu.com/2005/03/10/05headline.htm>

[↑ Top](#)

### Recent Publications

- DeSouza, Peter Ronald and Solano da Silva, 'Dialogues: The Monarchy and Democracy in Nepal', *Democracy Derailed – Seminar*, 548, April 2005
- Kumar, Sanjay, 'India's Urban Middle Class', in Takashi Inoguchi, Miguel Basanez, Akihito Tanaka and Timur Dadabaev (ed) *Values and Life Styles in Urban Asia*, Institute of Oriental Culture, University of Tokyo, Tokyo, March 2005
- Yadav, Yogendra and Dhananjai Joshi, 'How Haryana Voted: Assembly Elections – 2005; The Wave and What Caused It', *The Hindu*, March 06, 2005
- Yadav, Yogendra and Sanjay Kumar 'How Jharkhand Voted: Not Alliance Arithmetic Alone', *The Hindu*, March 07, 2005
- Yadav, Yogendra and Sanjay Kumar 'How Bihar Voted: A Shift Across the Social Divide', *The Hindu*, March 10, 2005

### Presentations

- Kumar, Sanjay, 'Policy of Economic Liberalization in India: Popular perceptions and impact on Voting Behavior', paper presented at National seminar on *Politics of Globalisation, Identity and Development*, held at Department of Political Science, Panjab University, Chandigarh, March 23-24, 2005
- Kumar, Sanjay, 'Coalition Politics in India: Experiences from Bihar', preliminary findings of research presented at a two day workshop on *Coalition Politics in India*, organised by the University of Pennsylvania, Institute for the Advanced Study of India, India Habitat Centre, March 19-20, 2005.

#### Suggested Reading

International IDEA,  
*Reconciliation after Violent Conflict: A Handbook*,  
Handbook Series, Sweden:  
International Institute for  
Democracy and Electoral  
Assistance, 2003

'(This Handbook) presents a range of tools that can be, and have been employed in the design and implementation of reconciliation processes. Most of them draw on the experience of people grappling with problems of past violence and injustice... (The Handbook) presents options and methods, with their strengths and weaknesses evaluated, so that practitioners and policy-makers can adopt or adapt them, as best suits each specific context.'

--- The blurb

The Handbook can be downloaded from  
<http://www.idea.int/publications/reconciliation/index.cfm>

### CONTACT US

Lokniti,  
Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS),  
29, Rajpur Road, Delhi – 110054, India.  
Ph: 91 11 23942199 Ext 333  
Telefax: 91 11 23831290  
Email: [edzia@csdsdelhi.org](mailto:edzia@csdsdelhi.org), [edzia@lokniti.org](mailto:edzia@lokniti.org)

### NEXT ISSUE

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

[↑ Top](#)