

Lokniti Newsletter

'Foreign Aid in Nepal: A Filtration Process'

11 / August 2005

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Explanation: 1st layer: foreigners who manage the projects and take home the bulk of the money, 2nd layer: Nepali politicians and the elite class take their share, 3rd layer: Nepali middle class takes its share, final layer: there is nothing left for the poor.

Source: Nepali Times (2001),

<http://home.uchicago.edu/~shrestha/cartoons/cartoons.html>

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EDITORIAL

Welcome to a new edition of the Lokniti newsletter!

This issue includes updates on the SDSA survey and summaries of Qualitative Assessment papers and a Dialogue on Democracy. For further information on Lokniti and the projects mentioned here, log on to our website www.lokniti.org.

Lokniti will miss the presence of two colleagues, Dhananjai Joshi and Solano Da Silva who will be leaving the Institute to pursue higher studies. We wish them all the very best in their future endeavours with the hope that goodbyes are said in anticipation of meeting again.

With best wishes,
Edzia Carvalho

‘STATE OF DEMOCRACY IN SOUTH ASIA’

A meeting of the Principal Investigators and the CSDS Advisers on the project was held at Gurgaon, Haryana from 12th to 14th July 2005. The meeting was a brainstorming session to draw up the outline of the flagship report. Two data sets were compiled during the sessions: the first explores questions of human security and the second examines the opinions on democracy. Some tentative interpretation of the data was attempted and a framework for the flagship report prepared.

Cross-national Survey

The data cleaning and coding of open-ended questions has been completed. Preliminary analysis of the data has been undertaken and indexes have also been created.

Qualitative Assessment

A brief summary of two Qualitative Assessment papers that have been received under the SDSA project follows.

Sayed Jaffer Ahmed, *Design of Democracy in Pakistan*: The paper discusses the state institutional, party political, non-party political and social, economic and cultural domains of the design of democracy in Pakistan. It is generally assumed that the design of institutions responds to societal needs and demands. In Pakistan, the design has been superimposed instead of having emanated from society. In fact, the design has also been changed continuously.

The design of the state institutional domain was based on a parliamentary system of government with federal features. The parliamentary system of government in Pakistan oscillated between the Presidential executive and the Parliamentary executive, which resulted in the exclusion of the legislature from effective decision-making. Governments with requisite political support tried to amend the constitution to suit their own personal needs rather than to adjust it to changes in society, and weakened the principles enshrined in it. There is also a highly centralizing tendency in the federal scheme; local government institutions are

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largely non-existent, and when functioning, have been weak and vulnerable to political pressure.

In the party political domain the author comments that find that the Muslim League, which dominated the scene after independence, was subjected to numerous splits, which consequently formed the first opposition. The party experienced a decline in the 1950s and this period also saw the rise of the Pakistan People's Party in West Pakistan and Awami League in East Pakistan. The author notes that political parties in Pakistan generally lack democracy and organization; this is, in part, due to the disruptions in the democratic process that occurred periodically.

In the non-party political domain, the author comments on the growing political polarization, social unrest and awareness that led to the rise of the organized students', workers', professionals' and women's movements. The students' movements were a useful source of political recruitment. The author also notes that non-governmental organizations have mushroomed in Pakistan since the 1980s. The media, which is also a part of the design of this domain, however, is largely overshadowed by the political and has always been restricted to state control.

As a part of the socio-economic and cultural domain, the author comments that the variance in the socio-economic background between eastern and western parts of the country and the feudal and elitist social structure of the two parts resulted in a major challenge of constructing democratic institutions in such socio-economic backgrounds that were not conducive to their growth.

The feudal class realigned with the military and the bureaucracy to dominate power structure in the country.

Hasan Askari Rizvi, *Working of Democracy in Pakistan*: Political leaders and parties, civil society groups and political activists have repeatedly expressed an ideological commitment to democracy. A conflict between professed democratic values and operational realities of authoritarianism and non-sustainable civil institutions and processes however, has been the main feature of Pakistani experience of democracy.

The political system in Pakistan is characterized by intermittent breakdowns of the constitutional and political order, weak and non-viable political institutions and processes, rapid expansion of the role of military-bureaucratic elite and military rule and military-dominated civilian governments.

The author traces the rise of the bureaucratic-military elite in Pakistan's politics, which has undermined the prospects of democracy. He says that Pakistan has inherited an institutional imbalance from the moment of independence. This has been caused by (i) a process of political decay and degeneration that was set in motion after independence by the lack of organizational capacity of political parties at the time for state- and nation-building (ii) the degeneration of the political machinery in contrast to the organizational efficiency of the bureaucracy and the military.

The author also notes the role of Islamic groups in democracy. These groups have undermined the prospects for democracy, as they either reject democracy outright or support the electoral

process so that they can gain power and then implement a system in keeping with their understanding of the Islamic system.

The repeated assumption of power by the military and its desire to shape the Pakistani polity in accordance with its political preferences has undermined the steady growth and sustainability of democratic institutions and processes. They have engaged in 'constitutional engineering' coupled with the co-option of the political elite, the exclusion of those unwilling to be co-opted, and carefully manipulated elections to ensure desired outcomes. Despite this, the author reiterates that the commitment to democracy and participatory governance has persisted in Pakistan and will continue to 'question the legitimacy of non-participatory and authoritarian governance'.

Dialogues

Suggested Reading

Keane, John 2004. *Violence and Democracy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

'John Keane calls for a fresh understanding of the relationship between democracy and violence. Taking issue with the common sense view that 'human nature' is violent, Keane shows why mature democracies do not wage war upon each other, and why they are unusually sensitive to violence. He argues that we need to think more discriminatingly about the origins of violence, its consequences, its uses and remedies. He ...asks why violence is the greatest enemy of democracy, and why today's global 'triangle of violence' is tempting politicians to invoke undemocratic emergency powers. Throughout, Keane gives prominence to ethical questions, such as the circumstances in which violence can be justified, and argues that violent behaviour and means of violence can and should be 'democratised' - made publicly accountable to others, so encouraging efforts to erase surplus violence from the world.'

--- The blurb

A Dialogue on *Democracy in Nepal: Experiences of the Past and Agenda for Future* was held on 22--23 November 2003 at Dhulikhel, Nepal. A summary of the dialogue report prepared by Anil Bhattarai follows:

Nepal is in a situation where the basics of democracy—'the core questions' as Prof. Lok Raj Baral has termed them—are yet to be resolved. These questions relate to the position of the monarchy in Nepali politics. This is becoming increasingly so in the present political context when the King is exercising his extra-constitutional power. For many participants, the failure of the political leadership is the prime reason behind this state of affairs. Many participants, including those in the higher decision-making positions in the parties, pointed out the failure of the political parties in democratizing themselves. This does not, however, mean that the king acted out of necessity. The monarchy in Nepal is obviously unconcerned with the basic functioning of democracy. In democracy people can punish the political parties for their wrongdoings, but how could a king be punished for doing wrong?

It is a fact of history that the monarchy has always tried to subvert democracy in Nepal. The role of the political parties and political leadership comes to the forefront. After all, it was their loss of popular support, and the rampant corruption in the bureaucracy that gave the monarchy an opportunity to assert itself with the assistance of the army.

Some fundamental questions on civil society were raised in the discussions. It was remarked that the civil society are also functioning as landlords. It was alleged that a majority of NGOs were controlled by the upper caste Brahmin elite. The *janajati*, dalit and women's movement in Nepal have contested this control of institutions in society by the elite.

The restructuring of the polity has become a public political agenda because of their assertion. Many participants opined that the current unitary structure of the state was not conducive to promoting democracy in Nepal's multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi-religious society. Other participants suggested a greater devolution of power and resources to the local bodies before federalizing the structure of the state. It was suggested that the autonomous district councils could go a long way in ensuring the participation of the hitherto excluded, sections of the population in Nepal.

The promises made by various political actors--parties, state, civil society--have remained unfulfilled, as was clear from the discussions. The reasons for this lay in the design and functioning of democratic institutions in Nepal. Parties failed not only because individual leaders were corrupt and unaccountable, but the very structures of political parties were clearly undemocratic. So was the case of civil society, as is generally understood in terms of NGOs and other non-party and non-state institutions that flourished in the post-1990 liberal political milieu. The state in Nepal has remained non-transparent, highly

centralized, and therefore, largely unaccountable to the majority of the population. The future agenda, therefore, focussed on some of the fundamental bottlenecks faced by the state in terms of its democratization. The monarchy as an institution has to be reformed and made transparent. The democratization of political parties is at the centre of the argument. Proposals for electoral reforms, devolution of power and creation of federal and/or regional structure were some suggestions presented by the participants.

The exclusion of different groups of people remains at the heart of the failure of political actors to address many social issues. It was pointed out at the end of the discussion that although there was not much discussion about the market and private sector, the private sector in Nepal could not be separated from the state, and therefore, focus on state during the discussions was understandable.

The discussion ended with a desire among most of the participants to continue this discourse not only at national level, but also at regional and local levels to facilitate further thought and action.

LOKNITI NETWORK

A two-day National Seminar on *A Worldwide Perspective of Human Rights: Issues of the Woman and the Child* will be organized by M. E. S. College, Goa in association with the UGC on 24th and 25th October 2005.

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The themes around which the seminar will be organized are: The Rights of Women and Children, Child Labour, Crimes against Women and Children, The Impact of War and Strife on Women and Children. The seminar hopes to sensitize and create awareness on the rights of the woman and the child among the students in particular and the public at large.

For Further Information

On how to participate in the seminar, kindly email Dr. Maria do Ceu Rodrigues at mariadoceurodrigues@yahoo.co.in or visit our website at www.lokniti.org

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NEXT ISSUE

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

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