

# Lokniti Newsletter

# 9 / June 2005

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SOWING DEMOCRACY

Title: 'Sowing Democracy'

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[http://cartoonistgroup.com/properties/anderson\\_kirk/art\\_images/3\\_4\\_Sowing\\_democracy.jpg](http://cartoonistgroup.com/properties/anderson_kirk/art_images/3_4_Sowing_democracy.jpg)

To visit the visual archive being developed by Lokniti, kindly visit our website at [www.lokniti.org](http://www.lokniti.org).

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## EDITORIAL

Hello and welcome!

This is the ninth edition of the Lokniti newsletter. This issue includes updates on the SDSA survey and summaries of Qualitative Assessment papers and a Dialogue on Democracy, in addition to the events happening at Lokniti.

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’

Efforts are underway in the writing of the *Report on the State of Democracy in South Asia*. Mr. Roddur De has taken charge of assembling an archive of political cartoons on democracy in South Asia. These will constitute instrumental additions to the Report giving it a distinctly South Asian flavour.

#### The SDSA Visual Archive

Lokniti welcomes suggestions and web links that will aid this project. Mr. Roddur De can be contacted at [roddurde@gmail.com](mailto:roddurde@gmail.com) and [roddur@lokniti.org](mailto:roddur@lokniti.org).

### Cross-national Survey

A workshop on data analysis of the SDSA survey conducted in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka was held at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi from 16-21 May 2005. The participants at the workshop included Prof. Yogendra Yadav, Prof. Suhas Palshikar, Mr. Sanjay Kumar, Mr. Dhananjai Joshi, Ms. SriRanjani, Ms. Ritu Rao and Mr. Solano da Silva from India, Mr. Bilal Hasan from Pakistan, Mr. Pradeep Peiries from Sri Lanka and Mr. Jiwan Subedi from Nepal.

The survey has been completed in the countries on Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bangladesh. A booster sample of tribals and Sikhs in India has been completed. It has been decided that a booster sample of Hindus and Christians in Pakistan would be undertaken.

### Qualitative Assessment

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

Anil Bhattarai, *Promise of Democracy in Nepal*: The meanings and practice of democracy in Nepal are in a state of constant flux. There are three main translations of democracy in the Nepali language each with its own historical significance and connotation. The paper examines two sets of questions relating to the meaning of democracy in Nepal: first, the meanings of democracy as understood by different groups of people and

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second, the emergence and transformation of these meanings in the last seven decades. The author recognizes three major processes of the formation of the idea of democracy in Nepal: the implantation of the Western idea of democracy due to the exposure of the Nepali intelligentsia to the Indian independence movement, the emergence and spread of Left ideology influenced by the Russian and Chinese revolutions which propound a distinct notion of democracy, and the appropriation of the concept of democracy to sustain the Panchayat regime in Nepal for three decades.

The author points to two positions of the elites regarding democracy. Some elites yearn for the order that an autocratic is credited with and despise the democratic system for being too open to be able to bring about this order. Others accept democracy not as an ideal for substantive change but as a system limited to some procedural aspects of rules and rights and duties.

The paper also notes certain justifications of democracy. Democracy is considered acceptable as it is credited with allowing the individual the freedom and the opportunities to develop his/her potential to the fullest. Democracy is also considered feasible in relation to other unacceptable alternatives. The author remarks that the promise of democracy in Nepal is still in the making and continues to be an area of contestation.

Krishna Khanal, *Future of Democracy in Nepal*: The paper details the historical events and processes that have shaped Nepal. It points out that the 1990 constitution recognized three basic elements – the sovereignty of the people, constitutional monarchy, and the parliamentary system of government based on

the Westminster model. However, this constitutional experiment suffers from certain contradictions and systemic weaknesses: the fallacy of constitutional monarchy as the monarchy continued to play an assertive and independent role in governance and policy-making; the problems of governance such as corruption in politics, adversarial and antagonistic relationship between the government and the opposition, and coalition politics which have resulted in instability and corruption; the politics of exclusion which is a result of the majoritarian model of representation which is the foundation of the structure of the state in Nepal and the politics practiced as a result which excludes ethnic and dalit groups from mainstream politics; and the Maoist insurgency. The 18-point programme by fifteen political parties against royal regression seeks to broaden constitutional reforms.

The future trajectory of Nepal is dependent on the response of the state to the Maoist insurgency, the inclusion of various social and cultural groups in the polity, the debate on the monarchy through legitimate channels like the Constituent Assembly and the extent to which political forces exercise constitutional restraint and evolve a political culture commensurate to the democratic system.

## DIALOGUES

*A Dialogue on the State of Democracy in India (South India)* was held in Bangalore, Karnataka on 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> December 2003. The dialogue was centred on three themes: the Promise of Democracy, the Working of Democracy and the Outcomes and Futures of Democracy in India. The discussions at the dialogue focused on the issues summarized below:

A valueless democracy: A revolution takes place in the background of certain values. But participants remarked that there are no values that are considered sacrosanct in free and democratic India. Brahminical values go against the democratic spirit of dignity, equality and fraternity. Lower castes are kept out of the society. Inequality is sanctioned by divine and human consent. Even fundamental rights are not a guarantor of the enjoyment of those freedoms and there is no possibility to attain justice for the poor and deprived. A large proportion of India's population is still socially and economically deprived.

The role of the judiciary in Indian democracy: Most participants in the dialogue felt that the judiciary in India has begun to enjoy power to the extent of choosing to deliberate on issues that would generally fall under the jurisdiction of the legislature or the executive. The system of checks and balances between the legislature, the judiciary and the executive is slowly tilting in favour of the judiciary, which is becoming a law unto itself. There is no scope for constructive criticism of the judiciary because it construes criticism as contempt. The social background of the higher judiciary in India shows a predominance of certain sections of the society and dalits, backward classes, minorities and women have an insignificant presence. Some participants felt that judicial activism was on the rise due to the failure of other organs of the democratic state. The issues, which should be resolved politically, are put on the back burner by politicians and the judiciary is forced into dealing with them.

Political parties function undemocratically: Some discussants put forth the view that the functioning of institutions should also be part of the assessment of democracy. Political parties, which are the instruments of democracy, are undemocratic and hegemonic in their functioning. Political leaders are not interested in inner party democracy. They do not hold themselves accountable to the electorate. Dissent is not tolerated. One participant remarked that Indian politicians are destroying democracy. Another participant opined that political democracy in India does not challenge Brahminical values and culture; rather it re-imposes them. Even dalit politicians start believing and promoting these values. A discussant opined that bad legislation and bad administration could only be done away with when people are aware and express their choice through their representative. But our representatives are nominated by political parties and once they are in the legislature, they are at the mercy of these parties.

Role of civil society organizations: Many participants remarked that organisations like Bangalore Agenda Task Force (BATF) do

**Suggested Reading**

Fukuda-Parr, Sakiko and A. K. Shiva Kumar (eds.) *Readings in Human Development*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004

'The essays (in the volume) trace the evolution of the human development approach from its first formulation to the present day. The book provides a lucid illustration of global measures to address human poverty, security, and welfare issues.'

-- The blurb

Sakiko Fukuda-Parr is Director, Human Development Report Office, UNDP, New York. She is the lead author for HDR 2001 and 2002. A. K. Shiva Kumar is Special Advisor, United Nations Children's Fund, New Delhi.

not increase participation of ordinary citizens but shrink the political space for the poor and deprived. These groups become extra-constitutional power centers. The initiative of decentralised democracy under the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Amendments to the Constitution are very important and cannot be replaced or bypassed by any civil society group. Other discussants noted that if more and more citizens are involved in the political process, even if these citizens represented the affluent sections of society, it is a sign of the expansion of democracy.

Exclusion of large sections of the population from the polity and economy: Discussants referred to two groups that have been systematically excluded from participation in the polity and economy: the dalits and backward classes and people living in rural areas. Before independence, it was only the upper castes that enjoyed the privileges of power. But in the past 55 years, the dalit and backward classes have also received political and social benefits due to the policy of reservations. If democracy should really mean something for the dalits, tribals, backward castes and the poor, it should first help them break through the shackles of taboos and restrictions that their lives have been bound by and bring them within the socio-economic and political mainstream of the nation. Some participants pointed out to the fact that although a lot of money is being spent in the name of villages, the results of this spending is hardly visible with inadequate infrastructure in the form of roads, electricity, borewells for drinking water, health and medical facilities, an easily accessible public transport system, etc. Every government and the development pattern is oriented to the progress and benefits of cities. The inadequate share in the present development process and the lack of livelihood opportunities have forced the rural

poor to migrate to cities where they live in inhuman living conditions and struggle to survive.

The successes of Indian democracy: Some participants chose to focus on the positive outcomes of Indian democracy. The fact that the oppressed and depressed citizens of India have started asserting their rights and fighting for them could be regarded as a positive contribution of democracy. It was because of democracy that more than one-fifth of political seats in Parliament and state legislatures were filled with dalits whereas in our traditional society, there was no place for dalits in the exercise of political power. Similar is the case of reservation in the bureaucracy and in educational institutions. One discussant spoke about the disquiet with democracy in India that was expressed during the various sessions and suggested that these were the deficiencies of the functioning of democracy which suggested the need for improvement and not for the disregard democracy altogether.

#### **EVENTS AT LOKNITI**

The Annual Lokniti India Network Meeting was held from 6 – 9 May 2005 in Bangalore, Karnataka, India. The meeting was attended by the members of the Lokniti research team from Delhi and the State Co-ordinators from the various Indian States. Margaret Levi, President of the American Political Science Association (APSA) and Ashutosh Varshney, Chair of APSA's Committee on International Political Science were invited to participate in the deliberations of the network.

The projects undertaken by Lokniti during 2004-2005 were discussed during the meeting. These included the National

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Elections Study (NES) 2004, the State of Democracy in South Asia, and the project on Political Parties. An overview of six papers that were published from the data generated by the NES 2004 was also undertaken. A panel discussion led by Suhas Palshikar, Yogendra Yadav, Margaret Levi, Ashutosh Varshney and K C Suri was held on 'The Empirical Studies on Indian Politics'. The first of the series of annual lectures that have been planned by the Lokniti network was delivered by Dr. Ramachandra Guha. The topic of the lecture was 'The Challenge of Contemporary History'.

The presentations made at the meeting are available for download from our website.

**For Further Information**

On the Lokniti Network meeting, you can visit the Lokniti website at [http://www.lokniti.org/network\\_meeting\\_2005.htm](http://www.lokniti.org/network_meeting_2005.htm) or the APSA website at [http://www.apsa.com/content\\_15566.cfm](http://www.apsa.com/content_15566.cfm).

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**NEXT ISSUE**

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

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