

Lokniti Newsletter

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EDITORIAL

Welcome again to a new edition of the Lokniti newsletter!

This issue includes updates on the SDSA project and events organised by Lokniti. A list of the case studies that have been commissioned has also been included. For detailed information on Lokniti and the projects mentioned here, kindly log on to our website www.lokniti.org.

With best wishes,
Edzia Carvalho.

‘STATE OF DEMOCRACY IN SOUTH ASIA’

Prof. Yogendra Yadav, in his analysis of the ongoing crisis in Nepal, which was published in *The Hindu*, presents the main findings of Nepal SDSA survey in which he gives voice to the continuing choice expressed by the Nepali people for democracy.

To Read Prof. Yadav’s article

‘Nepalis want Democracy, not Monarchy’, please visit our website at: www.lokniti.org

The **ethnographic study** on the impact of the tsunami on the institutions of the state, society and the international community involved in the process of rebuilding the affected areas in India has been completed and the research team is presently working on the report of the study. Dr. G. K. Prasad, Lokniti State Co-ordinator for Tamil Nadu supervised the seven-member team in their field study in the two selected districts – Nagapattinam and Kanyakumari. In each of these two districts, two villages were studied. The team consisted of three members from Delhi and four from Tamil Nadu including two lady researchers. They spent 15 days in the field, seven days each in both the districts and one day in Chennai for collecting general administrative information.

The Social Scientists’ Association, which has also undertaken an ethnographic study on the tsunami relief and rehabilitation efforts in Sri Lanka, has identified four Tsunami affected villages to support. Since our last report, the research team has undertaken two visits to the villages Kudawella West in Hambantota district and Mohottiwatte, Balapitiya of the Galle district. As a continuing effort of supporting Tsunami affected communities, the SSA staff also visited Mancholai Chenai, Kinniya of the Trincomalee district on the 4th of February 2005. At the moment SSA is taking initial steps to visit Aaliyawelai, Vadamarachchi of the Jaffna district.

Prof. Jayadeva Uyangoda has offered his reflections on the post-tsunami relief and rehabilitation efforts that have been undertaken in Sri Lanka in two articles ‘Post-Tsunami Recovery In Sri Lanka: Some Ideas for Reflection’ and ‘Peace after the Tsunami: New Windows of Opportunity’, which was published in the *Daily Mirror*, Sri Lanka.

To Access ‘Peace After the Tsunami: New Windows of Opportunity’ online, please visit the following link: <http://www.peaceinsrilanka.org/InsideNews/news.asp?newsID=3362>

Cross-national Survey

The fieldwork and data entry in Sri Lanka has been completed. In Pakistan and Bangladesh, the fieldwork has been completed and data entry is in progress.

A Workshop on the Preliminary Findings of the India Survey was held on 22nd Feb 2005 at CSDS. The workshop was sponsored by the Economic Cross Cultural Programme of the European Union. Present at the workshop were the Principal Investigators of the *State of Democracy in South Asia*, representatives of the European Union, senior members of CSDS and the Lokniti team in Delhi. The methodology adopted to conduct the survey as well as the preliminary findings of the SDSA India survey were discussed here.

The State of Democracy in Nepal Survey Report

The *State of Democracy in Nepal Survey Report* is available online. To download the report, please visit our website at <http://www.lokniti.org/nepalsurveyreport.htm>

Qualitative Assessment

The following draft papers on the Qualitative Assessment have been received:

- Sayed Jaffer Ahmed, Pakistan: *The Design of Democracy*
- Mijarul Quayes, Bangladesh: *The Promise of Democracy*
- Surinder S. Jodhka, India: *The Design, Working and Outcomes of Democracy in the Socio-economic and Cultural Domain*

Case Studies

The following is the list of the first draft of the case studies that we have received so far:

- Mr. Alito Siquiera, India: *The Biography of the File: Politicising Bureaucratic Processes and Expanding Democracy*
- Prof. Errol D'Souza, India: *Collusion in Government and Corruption*
- Prof. Gopal Guru, India: *Jan Sunwai: A New Instrument of Democracy in India*
- Dr. Vimla Ramachandran, India: *Democratic Inequalities: The Dilemma of Elementary Education in India*
- Prof. Moonis Ahmar, Pakistan: *The Modern Elite, Clergy and the Islamic Movement in Pakistan*
- Dr. Saba Gul Khattak, Pakistan: *Inconvenient Facts: Women and Political Representation under Military Regimes*
- Ms. Shandana Khan Mohmand, Pakistan: *Decentralisation in Pakistan: For or Against Democracy?*
- Mr. Suresh Dhakal and Mr. Sanjeev Pokharel, Nepal: *Local Movements, Political Processes and Transformation of Bhaktapur: A Case Study of Bhaktapur Municipality*
- Mr. Rajendra Pradhan, Nepal: *An Ethnography of the Legal Process: A Case Study of a Land Dispute in Nepal*
- Dr. Jani de Silva, Sri Lanka: *Democracy, Power, Violence: Party Politics and the Transformation of the Village Feud in the Sri Lankan South*

Dialogues

A summary of the Sequential Report of the National Dialogue on the State of Democracy in South Asia held in Dhaka Bangladesh on the 27th and 28th of March 2004 follows:

The two day discussion centered around the matrix drawn up for the SDSA project namely, the promise of democracy, its institutional design, its working and the outcomes and futures. The discussants reflected on this research grid and offered suggestions to make it more operational in the South Asian reality. A discussant felt that a western variant of democracy had been adopted in South Asia, and in this adaptation, the spirit underlying democracy was lost. This was the cause of the problems that democratic countries in South Asia face today. Some of the major themes that were discussed were:

The promise of democracy: It was expressed by the discussants that since democracy promises different things to different people, it would be useful to map these responses. The common man has been disillusioned by the practice of democracy that only promises him misery and that he would like something better than the existing state of affairs. Others felt that people did not confuse corruption and similar deviations with democracy but rightly equated it with the working of the government. The people looked to democracy to provide them good governance. This would also entail the freedom from want and from fear. The birth of Bangladesh was premised on two fundamental principles – the aspiration for democracy and a non-communal vision for the new nation. The proclamation of independence was drafted with three objectives in mind—to ensure the people of Bangladesh equality, freedom and social justice. This was the promise of democracy to the people of Bangladesh.

The importance to safeguard the Constitution from partisan and communal politics: It was widely felt that the constitution as a regulative instrument was weak. It was being amended and manipulated by vested interests to further their own ends. It was pointed out that three amendments to the constitution affected half of the constitution. Many discussants called for a review of the constitution to ensure that the constitution is not used as a tool in the hands of crafty politicians.

The relationship between formal and informal institutions: A tendency to formalize institutions was pointed out. This existed because it is believed that formalization of institutions makes the process fair, just, impartial and impersonal. This however also results in a failure to build the capacity of informal institutions like ‘Gram Sarkar’. The ‘micro-credit’ groups, which are one of the biggest success stories in Bangladesh, continue to be called ‘informal’ groups so that they cannot be brought under the influence of the formal rules and regulations of the Cooperative Department. It has however been observed that these groups adhere to rigorous rules and regulations themselves. It was suggested that were these groups to come under the ambit of formal institutions, they would not have been the success story they are today.

The organs of government have disappointed in their functioning: In a democratic society, each organ of government must act independently, judiciously and honestly. In Bangladesh, the judiciary, the legislature, the nominal and real executive and local government have all fared miserably and below expectations. Partisan politics has crippled the functioning of these institutions. The legislature has lost touch with the electorate. It is middlemen or mastans who are the link between the people and their representatives. There is no devolution of power to the institutions of representative local government as a result of which they cannot function effectively.

The hegemony of political parties over other democratic institutions: Political parties in Bangladesh do not function democratically and both the major parties, the Awami League and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, undermine the functioning of democratic institutions like the legislature and the judiciary to further their own interests. This state of affairs would continue until political parties are regulated and democratized.

The relationship between the armed forces and democratic government: The armed forces are dominant players in the political game and members of the armed forces are getting increasingly involved in active politics. Discussants expressed the opinion that the army is the defence force of the republic and not a substitute to the civil government or bureaucracy. The alternative to a political government should never be a military government.

‘Commercialization’ of politics: In addition to the criminalisation of politics and electoral malpractices that has been seen in recent years, an ‘unholy alliance’ has been formed between people with political power and people with economic power. Opportunism and corruption have increased.

The disjunction between a democratic society and non-democratic polity: It was expressed that although society in Bangladesh has a democratic ethos and psyche, the polity does not. Some discussants felt that there is an inherent tendency in the polity towards authoritarianism. Mediating agencies like politicians and the intelligentsia, who function as the agents of transfer of the popular ethos and culture into political culture, have failed to do this in Bangladesh. There is a need to sustain those capacities that can confront this absolutism.

The role of civil society: Every civil society organization in Bangladesh, which should work for and with the people and pose a challenge to the government when it violates people’s rights has been politicized and polarised across partisan divisions which renders them dysfunctional.

Constitutional minorities: The issue of the absence of ethnic and religious minorities in the electoral and political system was discussed. Members of minority groups who are struck by chronic marginalization are doubly disadvantaged and they may have completely different notions of social exclusion than their counterparts within the same society.

Outcomes and futures of democracy in Bangladesh: The role of government and the opposition in democracy cannot be revived without the ideal implementation of constitution. It was reiterated that the future of democracy in Bangladesh is dependant on the activities of politicians, their level of knowledge, and commitment to democracy.

EVENTS AT LOKNITI

Projects Undertaken

A **post-poll survey** is being conducted in the states of Bihar, Jharkhand and Haryana during the assembly elections being held in the states. The findings of the survey will be reported in *The Hindu* and academic output of the findings of the survey will be published

For Further Information

On the survey, you can contact Mr. Sanjay Kumar at sanjay@lokniti.org or Mr. Dhananjai Joshi at dhananjai@lokniti.org.

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in the journal of the Pune-based institute, Indian School of Political Economy. A study to monitor poll irregularities has also been conducted in the three states.

Prof. Eghosa Osaghae, Vice Chancellor of Igbinedion University, Okada, Nigeria visited India under the **South South Exchange programme** initiated by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi and the Centre for Democracy and Development, Lagos. In addition to delivering talks at Delhi University and Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi, Prof. Osaghae also visited The Centre for the Study of Social Sciences, Calcutta, Gauhati University, Guwahati and The International Academy for Creative Teaching, Bangalore. Prof. Osaghae's main area of expertise are ethnicity and its management, federalism, problems of the African state in comparative perspective and the consequences of political and economic reforms on these subjects.

Errata

The National Seminar on *Civil Society–State Interface: Implications for Democracy in India*, that was reported to be held on February 19-20 will be held on March 7-8, 2005. For further information, please contact Dr. Sanjay Lodha at:
sanjay_lodha6@yahoo.com or at
kishti2@sancharnet.in

Recent Publications

- DeSouza, Peter Ronald, 'A Carnival of Greed', *The Indian Express*, 10 February 2005
- Joshi, Dhananjai 'Bhajapa ke Raj Mein Pene ki Paani ki Samasya Bigdi' (in Hindi), *Prabhat Khabar*, 25 January 2005
- Kumar, Sanjay, 'Vidhan Sabha Chunaav-2005: Bhajapa ke Liye Choti Se Asha', (in Hindi), *Prabhat Khabar*, 3 February 2005
- Kumar, Sanjay, 'Adivasiyo/Dalito me Congress-JhaaMumo Ka Palra Bhari, Sawarn Ab Bhi Bhaa ja Paa Gathbandhan ke Saath', (in Hindi), *Prabhat Khabar*, 31 January 2005
- Kumar, Sanjay, 'Jharkhand Assembly Elections 2005: Little Hope for the BJP', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XL No. 5, January 29-February 4, 2005.
- Kumar, Sanjay, 'Jharkhand me Domicile kaa Mudda', (in Hindi), *Prabhat Khabar*, 26 January 2005
- Uyangoda, Jayadeva, 'Peace after the Tsunami: New Windows of Opportunity', *Daily Mirror*, 5 February 2005
- Yadav, Yogendra, 'Nepalis Want Democracy, not Monarchy', *The Hindu*, 3 February 2005

Presentations

- DeSouza, Peter Ronald, 'Democracy and Politics of Defection in India' organised by ICSSR North-Western Regional Centre, Punjab University, Chandigarh on 12 February 2005.
- DeSouza, Peter Ronald, 'Reservation Route to Empowerment: Innovations in Panchayati Raj' at the seminar on *Anti-Discrimination and Affirmative Action in a Comparative Perspective* from the 24-25 February 2005, organized by the Centre for Political Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi in collaboration with Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches Internationales (CERI), Paris and Centre de Sciences Humaines (CSH), New Delhi.

Suggested Reading

Dixit, Kanak Mani and Shastri Ramachandran, (eds.) *State of Nepal*, Lalitpur, Nepal: Himal Books, 2004

The book contains essays by some of the best analytical minds on their area of interest in Nepal, its polity, and its people. The editors of the book aimed to 'try and explain contemporary Nepal to the world...', to generate scholarly interest in the country especially when it needs it the most.



- Yadav, Yogendra ‘Understanding Indian Democracy’ presented at the *Conference of the Commonwealth Chief Election Officers* organised by the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Election Commission of India on 24th February 2005 at Delhi.

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NEXT ISSUE

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

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