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Pg.	Contents
2.	The Right to Food and the National Food Security Bill
4.	Ongoing Archiving of National Election Studies by Divya Vaid
5.	Report on NES Training Workshop submitted to ICSSR
6.	ICSSR Research Project to Dr. Akhil Ranjan Dutta, Assam
6.	Academic Engagements of Members of the Lokniti Network
8.	Suggested reading

In keeping with one of the basic aims of Lokniti - "Monitoring on a regular basis the working of Indian democracy with special attention to the participation of marginalised people" this month's edition has an update on the debates surrounding the food security bill.

Though the bill is only at a draft stage and has not yet been placed before the legislative houses for discussion, however discontent amongst activists and experts is already being vocalised. Questions about the approach - i.e. to address hunger and not nutrition, as well as the inadequate provisions of the bill are being raised.

This issue features the first of a two part article on the struggle for the right to food. It provides a brief on the campaign waged till the preparation of the Draft National Food Security Bill, 2010. A summary of the provisions of the draft bill are also given.

Besides the above, updates on the work at Lokniti, Delhi as well as its network members is also provided.

We look forward to your sustained support. Suggestions and comments about the newsletter may be sent to vanita.lokniti@gmail.com.

Thank you

Vanita L. Falcao

❖ The Right to Food and the National Food Security Bill

*“Legal action is one of the means that can be used, in a democratic political system, to hold the state accountable to its responsibilities.”*¹ Keeping this in mind in April 2001, People’s Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL, Rajasthan) filed a writ petition in the Supreme Court seeking legal enforcement of the right to food. The petition being handled by the Human Rights Law Network (HRLN) is technically known as "PUCL vs. Union of India and others (Writ Petition [Civil] No. 196 of 2001)". The petition states that the right to food is a basic right since it is a logical extension of the fundamental right to life enshrined in Article 21 of the Indian Constitution.

The petition was filed at a time when the country’s food stocks reached unprecedented levels while hunger in drought-affected areas intensified. Jean Dreze says while speaking about the large buffer stocks being maintained by the Food Corporation of India (FCI) “When millions of people are undernourished if not starving, hoarding food on this scale - at enormous cost - is nothing short of implicit mass murder.”²

Initially the case was brought against the Government of India, the FCI and six State Governments, in the context of inadequate drought relief. Subsequently, the case covered the larger issues of chronic hunger and undernutrition, and all the State Governments were added to the list of ‘respondents’.

Hearings have been held at regular intervals since April, 2001.³ During the course of litigation, several interim orders have been passed. These include orders to:

- introduce cooked mid-day meals in all primary schools
- provide 35 kgs of grain per month at highly subsidized prices to 15 million destitute households,
- universalise the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), etc⁴.

The final judgment in the case is yet to be passed.

It was in the context of this writ petition and the prolonged legal proceedings that the need for a unified Right to Food Campaign (RFC) was realised. As a result of the public hearings, rallies, dharnas, padyatras, conventions, action-oriented research, media advocacy, and lobbying with Members of Parliament, a National Food Security Bill 2010 was drafted and later passed by the Empowered Group of Ministers (EGoM).

This draft bill however appears to have ignored the holistic approach to food security that the RFC was advocating for in the context of the “nutritional emergency” prevalent in the

¹ Jaishankar, Y and Dreze, J. 2005 ‘Supreme Court Orders on the Right to Food: A Tool for Action – A Primer’ (accessed at [Supreme Court Orders on the Right to Food: A Tool for Action](#) on 7th May 2010)

² Dreze, J. ‘Food Security and the Right to Food’ in S.M. Dev, K. Kannan and N Ramachandran (ed) ‘Towards a Food Secure India’, Institute for Human Development, Delhi, 2003. (Pg 434)

³ <http://www.righttofoodindia.org/case/case.html>

⁴ A complete list of the interim orders issued by the Supreme Court can be accessed at <http://www.righttofoodindia.org/orders/interimorders.html>

country. Stated below are the salient features of the Draft National Food Security Bill 2010⁵:

- It extends to the whole of India
- A Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) will be implemented jointly by Central and State Governments
- Guidelines for identification of Below Poverty Line (BPL) families will be issued by the Central Government
- The Central Government will fix the number of the identified BPL families on the basis of poverty estimates notified by the Planning Commission of India and census data of Registrar General of India
- If a particular State Government is to extend support of this kind to certain additional families in the State, it may do so but only by separate identification of such additional families and with its own budgetary resources
- Identified BPL families are entitled to receive every month from the government 25 kg rice and/or wheat at subsidised issue prices from the central pool to state governments under TPDS, which is to be distributed through Fair Price Shops (FPS)
- Women shall be considered the head of the household for the purpose of distribution of BPL Cards, unless there is no adult woman in the household.

- Responsibilities of the Central Government:
 - i) Procure food grain
 - ii) Allocate food grain to the state
 - iii) Transport the allocated food grain to the state.

- Responsibilities of the State Government:
 - i) Identify eligible BPL families with the help of gram sabhas and local urban bodies
 - ii) Review BPL status of each identified family at periodic intervals
 - iii) Take delivery of food grains from centre, organize intra-state allocations up to FPS's and ensure delivery/supply of the food grains to BPL families.
 - iv) State government shall create and maintain storage facilities at the district and block/taluka level.
 - v) State government shall also be responsible for making payment of food security allowance to identified BPL families in case of failure to supply in any month the entitled quantities of food grains to such families.
 - vi) Every State Government shall set up a Vigilance Committee for each FPS

- Food Security Funds:

In the event that the Central Government is unable to deliver the allocation, it must compensate by funds to the State the amount equivalent to the shortfall. A dedicated Central Food Security Fund will be set up for this purpose. Similarly each state/union territory shall set up a dedicated Food Security Allowance Fund for the purpose.

⁵ These salient features were extracted from the version of the draft bill available on the official website of the RFC. The document however comes with the disclaimer “*The RFC is not sure if the EGoM draft of the ‘National Food security Bill’ that has been forwarded to the Cabinet. We are uploading this version on our website, in view of the growing public queries for the same, following media reports and growing opposition against the EGoM Draft Bill .*”

From the above mentioned we see that the provisions of the Draft Bill are indicative of the very narrow approach to nutritional security. This approach has been opposed by advocates of food security on various grounds. The three main objections of activists and experts to the proposed bill are:

- i) equating food grain guarantee with nutritional guarantee
- ii) the proposed BPL that will be used to determine the beneficiaries of the TPDS.
- iii) the proposed limits or caps to be placed by the Centre on the number of BPL persons in a state.

The argument being raised is that simply providing a specified amount of food grain at highly subsidised rates to a particular section of the population, though important, is far from sufficient. A more detailed discussion of the basis of the criticisms of the Draft Bill; and the demands of the RFC will be presented in the following issue.

❖ **Ongoing Archiving of National Election Studies** by Divya Vaid

The CSDS Data Archive contains datasets from the National Election Studies and other Lokniti surveys dating back to the 1960s. A comprehensive process of archiving of these datasets is presently underway. This exercise is aimed at making our data collection and dissemination process more streamlined and transparent.

The archiving exercise involves:

1. Bringing up-to-date and collating datasets from all the surveys conducted by Lokniti since the 1960s.
2. Checking each dataset for consistency and ensuring all the variables are correctly coded with accompanying questions from the interview schedule
3. Providing an accompanying document with an introduction to the dataset including survey scope, survey period, sample size, sampling

method and details of the funding organisation etc. This document also contains details on the variables in the study, recoded variables and syntax definitions.

4. An important aspect of this data archiving plan is to ensure that all datasets are accompanied by syntax files for the appropriate weights and the major recodes.
5. Each dataset is also accompanied by a copy of the interview schedule, a copy of the codebook, a methodological paper, if available, about the survey in question and any other relevant documentation on the dataset.

We encourage all past and present users of this data to revert to us with their comments about, and omissions in, these datasets. This would help us not only in clarifying questions raised by users, but these comments would also be valuable for archiving in the future.

❖ Report on NES Training Workshop submitted to ICSSR

A comprehensive report on the **Training Component** of the National Election Study (NES) 2009 was submitted to the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR). The training workshops of the NES' 09 were funded by the ICSSR.

Through the training workshops, Lokniti was able to meet one of its main objectives i.e. capacity building of young researchers with regard to survey training and field investigation.

For the NES '09, three *Trainers Training Workshops* and thirty six *Field Investigators Training Workshops* were conducted across the country. Approximately 2000 field investigators were trained.

Besides covering all aspects of the workshops, the report also discusses in detail the feedback received from the field investigators (trainees). In order to modify and improve future training workshops feedback was taken from the trainees. Some points from the analysis of this feedback are highlighted below.

- Nearly six out of every ten trainees found the **method of presentation** in the workshop 'Very Good'. 39 percent of the students said that it was good and the remaining 4 percent considered it to be average.
- 47 percent of the trainees found the workshops to be 'Very Effective' in enhancing their knowledge about survey research techniques and an equivalent number rated the training as 'Effective'
- An overwhelming 80 percent of the trainees reported that the workshop helped them 'very well' in becoming familiar with **fieldwork techniques**. Whereas, only a percent of the trainees felt that the workshop did not help them much.
- 69 percent of the participants said that the training was very helpful in **dealing with difficulties** that arose while conducting the interviews. Further, 27 percent said that it helped them to some extent in finding solutions to the difficulties that they encountered during the fieldwork.

The complete report is available at: http://www.lokniti.org/report_to_ICSSR_on_training_workshops.pdf

Prof. S.N Misra retires

Prof. S.N Misra, Department of Political Science Utkal University, Bhubaneswar retired on the 31st of March 2010. Prof. Misra has been associated with Lokniti since its inception. He was a member of the first group of scholars that met in CSDS in November-December 1995 to undertake the National Election Study (NES), 1996. Dr. Misra was the state coordinator of Orissa for the NES 1996 survey and continued to be associated with Lokniti. Over the last fifteen years he successfully completed various Lokniti research projects in Orissa. We look forward to always having him as an active member of the Lokniti team.

ICSSR Major Research Project Grant awarded Research Project to Dr. Akhil Ranjan Dutta, Gauhati University, Assam

ICSSR has granted a two year long major research project to Dr. Akhil Ranjan Dutta for 2010-11 to work on '**Implementing NRHM in Assam: A study on convergence among policies, institutions and Infrastructure**'.

The project outline

The National Rural Health Mission (NRHM), launched across the country in 2005 involves varieties of institutions- all layers of the government i.e. Union and State Governments as well as PRIs and also the civil society organisations. Whereas there has been no dearth of money for implementation of the Mission, the real challenge has been how to ensure maximum utilization of the allotted funds with good practices at all levels of governance. The state of Assam has been rated high in terms of implementing NRHM schemes. However, there has not been any significant upward move of the health security indicators after the NRHM had been launched in the state except for the increase of institutional delivery and immunization. It provokes to take up a comprehensive study on the real pace of implementation of the NRHM schemes in the state with the objectives and research questions stated below.

Basic research questions of the study

- How convergent has been the relationship between policies, institutions, infrastructure and practices under NRHM in Assam?
- How the institutions at different levels cooperated with each other towards delivering services under NRHM?
- To what extent these convergent/non-convergent relationships are responsible for success or failure of the schemes under NRHM?

❖ **Academic Engagements of Members of the Lokniti Network:**

Seminars/Lectures/Discussions

Rajesh Dev, Meghalaya:

- A two day seminar on "Democracy, Identity and Group Rights: Locating the Northeast Indian perspective in a comparative perspective" was held at Women's College in collaboration with IIAS, Shimla on March 22 & 23, 2010. 20 papers were presented on theoretical and empirical issues of groups claims and their negotiation through available democratic strategies. Members from the lokniti network also made presentation, held at Shillong.

Dr Gul Mohd., Kashmir

- Delivered a lecture on 'Negotiating world peace' at the University of Kashmir.

Dr. K.M. Sajad Ibrahim, Kerala

- Department of Political Science, University of Kerala and (wat in Lok) coordinated a national seminar on "Globalisation, Religious Fundamentalism and Terrorism: Issues in South India" that was held from the 8th and 9th of April 2010.

Prof. Ashutosh Kumar, Punjab

5th Prof. Pradeep Kumar Memorial Lecture organised by Dept of Political Science, Panjab University

Prof M. M Puri, Professor Emeritus in the Department of Political Science and former Vice Chancellor, Panjab University delivered the Fifth Pradeep Kumar Memorial Lecture "Emerging Contours of India's Foreign Policy" at Gandhi Bhavan.

Prof. Puri's lecture laid out a broad framework to make sense of India's foreign policy and also outlined the dominant themes in it. He began by providing a historical background and pointed to key moments in the post-war world which have had an impact on India's foreign policy. He spoke about the relevance of non-alignment and India's role in world politics. In his lecture he emphasized on the role of technology on global affairs in general and India's foreign policy in particular. Prof Puri concluded by pointing to the likely direction foreign policy will take in the coming years. In this context, he mentioned that India's relationship with her neighbours is likely to play a decisive role.

This annual endowment lecture is organised in memory of Prof. Pradeep Kumar, who was both a student and teacher for many years at the Department. Presiding over the lecture, Prof T R Sharma, former Chairperson, also reminisced about Prof Pradeep Kumar as a friend and colleague. Dr Ronki Ram, Chairperson also spoke at the event.

S.N. Misra, Orissa

- Delivered a talk on Ambedkar and nation building in Bhubaneswar on the 14th of April 2010. The talk was organised by the state government of Orissa.
- Member of panel discussing "Indian Constitution and Rights of Citizens" aired on Doordarshan on the 21st of April 2010.

Sanjay Kumar, Delhi

- Delivered a lecture on "Electoral Patterns in India" at a refresher course in Political Science, Academic Staff College, Jawaharlal Nehru University, 21st April, 2010

Spoke on "Issues of Electoral Reforms", at a discussion on "The Crisis Staring India in the Face: Is Democracy a Sham?" organized by Citizen India, an Akshara Theater Initiative, on 24th April, 2010

Publications

Divya Vaid, Delhi

- Vaid, D and Heath, A.F. 2010. 'Unequal Opportunities: Class, Caste and Social Mobility,' in A.F. Heath and R. Jeffery (ed) Diversity and Change in Modern India, Proceedings of the British Academy 159: 129-164: Oxford University Press, Oxford .

Yogendra Yadav, Delhi

- Heath, O and Yadav, Y. 2010. 'The Rise of Caste Politics: Party System Change and Voter Realignment, 1962-2004' in A.F. Heath and R. Jeffery (ed) Diversity and Change in Modern India, Proceedings of the British Academy 159: 189-217: Oxford University Press, Oxford .

Suggested Reading

“Caste Dynamics and Political Processes in Bihar” authored by Sanjay Kumar, Mohd. Sanjeer Alam and Dhananjai Joshi will be published in the forthcoming issue of the Indian School of Political Economy (ISPE). This issue of the journal will focus solely on Bihar, in view of the upcoming elections scheduled to be held in a few months. The paper focuses on the patterns of electoral politics in Bihar during the last few decades, and also traces the history of electoral politics in Bihar.

Over the last six decades, politics in Bihar has undergone tremendous change. This change is often attributed to deeper structural cleavages along the axis of castes. However, little if any, attempt has been made to support or contest such oversimplified formulations with theoretical and empirical underpinnings. Some studies have tried to use empirical evidence to prove the strong influence of caste on larger political processes, but the analytical domain remains too narrow to understand the complexity defining politics in Bihar. This paper goes beyond these overly generalised notions of caste induced politics in the state. It demonstrates that the politics of Bihar has indeed been informed by dynamics of social relations chiefly manifested in assertion of caste identity, but it is not as simple as it appears to be, for the dynamics of caste and political preference operate at multiple layers of the socio-political structure and are influenced by processes that are multi-dimensional.