



NEWSLETTER

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Greetings from the Lokniti team!

With this issue we hope to make the Lokniti newsletter more interactive by providing a space for dialogue and discussion for our readers.

We hope that alternative perspectives will be expressed and we welcome responses to articles in the form of comments or indeed articles that can be included in following editions. These may be sent to vanita.lokniti@gmail.com.

We look forward to suggestions on improving this newsletter.

Thanking you for your sustained support.

Vanita Leah Falcao

Lokniti, CSDS

Panel Discussion: “Indian Elections 2009 – Trends and Perspectives”



Panellists at the event: (From left) Dr. Quraishi, Prof. Yadav, Prof. Palshikar, Ms. Neerja Choudhury, Mr. M Tewari and Mr. N Kohli

A panel discussion on the theme “Indian Elections 2009 – Trends and Perspectives” was organized by Lokniti, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) in collaboration with the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) on the 3rd of July 2009.

The panelists for the evening were politicians Nalin Kohli of the Bharatiya Janta Party and Manish Tewari of the Indian National Congress, Neerja Choudhury of the New Indian Express, as well as Prof. Yogendra Yadav and Prof. Suhas Palshikar co-directors of Lokniti, CSDS. Dr. S.Y. Quraishi, Election Commissioner of India was the chair for the evening. Dr. Beatrice Goravanchi resident representative to India, KAS was also present at the occasion. Dr. Quraishi

informed the audience of the processes and difficulties involved in conducting the elections. Mr. Sanjay Kumar, Prof. Yogendra Yadav and Prof. Suhas Palshikar presented a brief overview of the methodology of the National Election Study (NES), patterns of electoral participation, the social basis of voting and analysed factors that influenced the electoral outcome. The analysis drew upon the findings of the NES 2009. The remaining panelists then presented their opinions on what they felt influenced the outcomes of the elections. This was followed by questions from the audience and a round of discussion.



Findings of Lokniti-KAS Youth Study presented in Berlin and Paris



Speakers at the Discussion in Berlin (from left): Mr. Hurrelmann, Dr. deSouza, Mr. Wolff, Dr. Shastri, Mr. Wagner

Dr. Peter de Souza, Director Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla and Dr. Sandeep Shastri, Pro Vice Chancellor, Jain University principal coordinators of the Youth Study conducted by Lokniti in collaboration with the Konrad Adenaur Stiftung (KAS), were invited by the Konrad Adenaur Stiftung to Paris (jointly organized by the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung and the Institute of Politics, Paris on the 7th of July, 2009) and

Berlin (at the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 9th July, 2009) to make presentations on the Youth Study. Dr de Souza and Dr. Shastri also held discussions with South Asia experts and those working on issues related to the youth.

The study is available in the form of a book: P.R. deSouza, S. Kumar and S. Shastri. (ed) *Indian Youth in a Transforming World – Attitudes and Perceptions*. Sage Publications, Delhi.



Dr. Shastri and Dr. deSouza with the photograph of Konrad Adenauer in Paris

Honesty or Accessibility: That is the Question

- Ashish Mitter

Sitting in the Lokniti office one day, I was asked “would you prefer if the Member of Parliament from your constituency was honest but inaccessible, or accessible but corrupt”. I delivered my answer promptly—inaccessible but honest, I said, and then discovered that I found myself in a minority of one.

The question posed to me may be interpreted as a version of one of the oldest debates surrounding the concept of political representation—are political representatives meant to be mouthpieces for those who voted them into office, or are they to exercise their own judgment once they don the garb of an MP or MLA? Edmund Burke, writing in the late 18th century, called the former the delegate model, and the latter the trustee model of representative democracy. Although he spoke passionately in favor of the trustee model, the debate is by no means closed today.

The delegate model is not short of supporters to champion its cause. Great emphasis is laid on accessibility in modern representative democracy. Parliament is viewed by many as a forum for citizens of a country to voice their views on issues of national importance, debate them, and reach a consensus about them. The representatives of the people, who sit in Parliament, are elected so that they convey the sentiments of their individual constituencies to each other and so to the nation at large. If one is to buy into this idea of what a Parliament is, then it is no wonder that such store is set on

accessibility—the representative must know what his constituency thinks, what it wants, what it feels. It is only by being accessible that an MP knows what the popular sentiment is, that he knows which way the wind is blowing. As long as he is adequately able to discharge his primary responsibility, that is representing the interests of his constituency in Parliament and ensuring that these interests are best served, either through the actions of Parliament or through his own offices, his other actions pale into insignificance. However if one *is* to embrace this model, then one also has to accept that a representative should not exercise his own personal judgment, should not pay heed to his conscience, should not break away from the narrow interests of his constituency and look at the general interest of the nation as a whole.

I do not lay great store on accessibility largely because I feel that the delegate model is inherently flawed. Members of Parliament should not be elected merely because they are most like the common man, because they are most likely to respond to popular sentiment. Instead they should be elected because they possess the judgment and the erudition to work with other members for the best interest of the wider community, be they members of minority communities, politically sidelined or silent groups, or even citizens belonging to other parts of the nation. A hypothetical example that has particular relevance to India may be used to prove this point. If a situation so evolves that a wide section of society is found to be discriminating against another, smaller section, then that can surely not be the basis for Parliament to condone that discrimination, even though popular sentiment may call for it

to do so. And so a representative should not be voted into office because citizens find it easy to share a beer with him, as was one argument made to explain George Bush's electibility.

The argument made in favour of accessibility is that without it, a citizen cannot keep a check on his representative. However, I would argue that the true strength of representative democracy lies in the fact that at the time of an election, citizens place their trust in a particular representative. And this trust should be retained as long as he enacts his role in a national assembly to the best of his ability, even if his actions do not

corroborate with the public sentiment of the day. Indeed, while democracy most obviously allows for citizens to keep a check on their representatives, it also calls for representatives to keep a check on the vagaries of popular opinion. Honesty thus trumps accessibility, and it's not hard to see why. While the ideal scenario would be to have an honest as well as accessible representative, to have one who is dishonest, who promotes vested interests, who is in some way corrupt, is a betrayal of the voters trust. Nothing could be more harmful.

(The author is a student of Political Science at Yale University, USA. He is currently interning at Lokniti, CSDS.)

Publications and Presentations:

- **Ashutosh Kumar, Punjab**

Kumar, Ashutosh. 2009. 'Autonomist Politics of Diversities in a Comparative Perspective: Jammu and Kashmir and Punjab' in Akhtar Majeed (ed) Federal Power Sharing: Accommodating Indian Diversity. Centre for Federal Studies, Hamdard University and Manak Publications, Delhi.

- **Praveen Rai and Sanjay Kumar, Delhi**

Rai, Praveen and Kumar, Sanjay. 2009. 'Jharkhand Mukti Morcha: A Long Story' in Suhas Palshikar (ed) Regional Parties in India. Sadhana Publications, Pune.

- **Lallian Chhunga, Mizoram**

Presented a paper "*Media and Politics: A study of the role of the Press in Mizoram*" at a seminar "Society, Economy and Politics in Mizoram" on 16th July, 2009 at I & PR Auditorium, Aizawl. The seminar was sponsored by the University Grants Commission (UGC) and organised by Government T. Romana College, Aizawl and the Mizo History Association.

Ashish Mitter has been interning at Lokniti since July 2009. He is an undergraduate student of Liberal Arts at Yale University, USA. His main interests lie in politics especially electoral politics, English drama and test cricket.