



June & July 2010

Hello,

This edition of the Lokniti newsletter contains a discussion on caste amongst the Muslims, in the context of the need for a caste based census.

An update on the State of the Nation study on Naxalism conducted during July along with updates on the academic activities of members of the Lokniti network during the months of June and July are also given.

Any feedback or queries may be sent to vanita.lokniti@gmail.com. We look forward to your sustained support.

Thank you

Vanita Leah Falcao

State of the Nation Survey on Naxalism

The bi-annual State of the Nation Survey (SONS) to explore opinions on and the impact of naxalism on people residing in affected areas, was conducted from the 24th – 29th July 2010. The study was carried out in collaboration with CNN-IBN and The Week.

The sample was drawn from 36 naxal affected districts in the states of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Bihar, West Bengal, Maharashtra, Orissa and Andhra Pradesh.

The findings of the survey will be revealed through the week ending 15th August on CNN-IBN, IBN7 & IBN-Lokmat and in the special edition of The Week that hits stands on 13th August. The comprehensive one hour show on all findings will be telecast at 9.00 pm on the 13th of August. There will also be a repeat telecast of the programme on the 14th and 15th of August.

★ **Why a caste based census**
Manjusha Madhu

With the completion of the first round of the Census of India 2011, i.e. house-listing & preparation of the National Population Register, the debate surrounding a caste based census has come to an abrupt stop. The Prime Minister announced in May that a decision would be taken on the same, but since then no announcement has been made.

Caste is a peculiar phenomenon of the Indian sub continent and in the present socio-politico make up subsumes multiple identities of societal and occupational nature. For any meaningful debate on the question of caste there is an acute lack of information about non Hindu communities and one is forced to rely on largely archaic collections of data. Interestingly the framework seems to ignore the presence of caste like practices outside the Hindu community. A caste based census would essentially fill this void. In the wake of increasing demands by Dalit Muslim and Christian communities for scheduled caste (SC) status it would be the fundamental step in the right direction.

For a brief analytical purpose I would like to employ the Muslim community in India to explore the question of caste amongst non-Hindus. Whether the term 'caste' may be used for those amongst the Muslims has substantially divided sociologists and social anthropologists alike¹. Most shy away from using the word for the social stratification present amongst Muslims as certain characteristics seem to be missing in different cases impeding a generic application of the term. For example a vibrant practice of 'endogamy'² seems to be present amongst Muslims but academics vary on the reasons behind it. While some agree that in some cases it is to equate social, economic and cultural background others feel it is to maintain purity of blood which would imply casteism that is Hinduist in nature³.

Expressions of social hierarchy like 'hypergamy' are very much practiced amongst Muslims in different parts of the country. However, the theological notions that feed the caste system like *karma* and *dharma* are absent amongst the Muslims and Islam as a religion stands for egalitarian values with religious piety being the only mode of gradation. A comprehensive research and analysis of the Muslim community illustrates that large sections face much higher inequality than others. Such an analysis also highlights a strong emphasis on 'descent based social stratification'.

¹ There is substantial difference in the methodological analysis of the social stratification in Muslims many opting for a largely Hindu understanding of the term 'caste' wherein the divisions are evaluated keeping the Hindu mode in mind. Even those who have argued for a largely structural understanding of 'caste' inevitably tend to resort to Hindu case studies. However, a theoretical engagement in the understanding of the word caste is beyond the scope of this paper at present

² Perceived to be a key caste characteristic

³ Intiaz Ahmad and M K A Siddiqui in their study of UP and Calcutta Muslims suggest that the occurrence of endogamy is understood by the notion of ritual purity of blood. They also believe that a notion of ritual purity of blood is accompanied by a belief in the possibility of its pollution through inter marriage. However, Mattison Mines in his study of the Tamil Nadu Muslims believes that endogamy is more of an expression of a tendency to match spouses 'who share the same economic background and the same cultural and particularly religious traditions'

There are three key social segments- *Ashrafs*⁴, *Ajlafs* and *Arzals*. The *Ashrafs* who are basically descendants of immigrants are largely divided into four types- *Saiyads*, *Sheikhs*, *Mughals* and *Pathans*. The first two are considered to be of Arab origin and are considered closer to the prophet as opposed to the latter two. However, members of these sub divisions are not endogamous in nature and practice inter-dining. This classification is largely a north Indian phenomenon.

The traditional occupation of *Arzals* (the lowest of all) is similar to that of the SCs- they work as butchers, washer men, barbers and scavengers. The 'Economic and social status of Muslims in India' or popularly the Sachar Committee report (2006) points out that the *Arzals* are essentially converts from untouchable Hindu communities and 'that the change in religion did not bring about any change in their economic and social status'.

Persons belonging to the *Ajlafs* are usually engaged in occupations similar to that of the Hindu OBCs and a sizable section of them are also landowners.

Despite the popular categorisation mentioned above, it is crucial to understand that caste functions not merely on an *ashraf* - *ajlaf* dichotomy but the hierarchisations play out on multiple levels. It is this fluidity and multiplicity that has played a cardinal role in changing the grammar of Muslim politics in India since the 90s with 'the second wave of democratization'. Historical realities of partition and conversion had aggravated the economic situation of the Muslims. This being said, the consolidation of castes as 'interest' groups has provided most poor Muslim communities with a platform to voice their demands. It would also prove interesting to evaluate the apparent caste like distinctions as results of 'acculturation' or an independent development⁵.

There also appears to be a change in the Dalit movement amongst the Muslims - issues have moved beyond the question of Urdu, the Muslim personal law, Babri Masjid to more of what may be perceived to be 'citizenship' rights.

The political rise of Muslim OBC in north India especially Bihar may be seen as a means to counter the 'cumulative oppression' that the Sachar committee⁶ had pointed out and as a response to what is perceived to be the 'state-elite' conspiracy to keep the Muslims backward.

⁴ In the south, the *Moplahs* are grouped on the basis of a similar hierarchisation. They are divided into- *Thangals*, *Arabis*, *Malabaris*, *Pusalars* and *Ossans*. The *Thangals* trace their lineage to the prophet's daughter Fatima and therefore roughly correspond to the *Saiyads* and *Shaikhs* of north India. The *Arabis* are descendants of Arab men and local women who have retained knowledge of their Arab lineage while the *Malabaris* have forgotten the specifics of their Arab ancestry. The *Pusalars* and the *Ossans* correspond to the *ajlaf* with the *Pusalars* or new ones being converts while the *Ossans* are barbers. They are endogamous entities who have separate mosques and burial grounds.

⁵ Zillur Khan in a study of East and West Pakistan (*Caste and Muslim peasantry in India and Pakistan*) contends that the stratification amongst the Muslims are because of the gradations inherent in Islamic society in its historical development and would have been so even without the social environment. However, this question has sociologists considerably divided

⁶ The report states that the third group, those with traditional occupation as that of the SCs, maybe designated as Most Backward Classes (MBCs) as they need multifarious measures, including reservation, as they are 'cumulatively oppressed'

It would be thus interesting to understand the ‘rationality’ that informs the support and opposition to a caste based census⁷. In the wake of systemic marginalization and backwardness of various groups and sub-groups, it is crucial to dismantle the perception of a caste census as a regressive measure and as a tool to fracture a community imagined on the principle of nationalism. A caste based method would equip one with the means to at least begin an understanding of the caste like frameworks operational in the Indian society cutting across religions. It would also be a significant step in capturing the new ‘avatars’ of caste and in implementing ameliorative measures (specific affirmative actions) to bring these fringe societal groups into the mainstream.

★ **Recommended reading**

“Caste Dynamics and Political Process in Bihar” authored by Sanjay Kumar, Mohd. Sanjeer Alam and Dhananjai Joshi has been published in the Indian School of Political Economy (ISPE) Vol XX, Nos. 1&2.

The paper focuses on the patterns and traces the history of electoral politics in Bihar, over the last six decades. Previously some studies have tried to use empirical evidence to prove the strong influence of caste on larger political processes. However, the analytical domain of these studies remains too narrow to understand the complex nature of politics in Bihar. This paper attempts to go beyond the oversimplified formulations of structural cleavages i.e. cleavages along the axis of caste. 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.

This issue of the journal also includes a statistical supplement prepared by the CSDS Data Unit on elections from 2003 till 2009. The supplement provides an all-India party wise summary of performance as well as, performance according to state, district and category.

⁷ *The politics of not counting caste*, Satish Deshpande and Mary E John, *EPW* (June 26- July 09, 2010)

★ Academic Engagements of Members of the Lokniti Network

Lokniti member awarded REACH - Lilly MDR-TB Media Fellowship 2010

Baba Mayaram, Madhya Pradesh has been awarded the REACH - Lilly MDR-Tuberculosis Media Fellowship 2010. This programme will provide journalists from local language newspapers across India with support to undertake in depth analysis of various aspects of TB. The Fellowships are intended to encourage journalists to explore TB as a critical public health concern in India, by identifying and developing stories that remain untold.

Baba Mayaram will conduct his study in the district of Bilaspur. He has for the last two years been living in Pipariya, a small town in the Satpuda valley of Madhya Pradesh. Previously Baba Mayaram's research has been on tribal displacement. Recently he published a book titled 'Satpuda Ke Bashinde' on the issues of displacement related to mining.

Sanjay Kumar, Delhi

Participated in the fourth biennial "Research Methods Festival" at St. Catharine's College, Oxford, UK from 5th – 8th July. It was organized by the Economic and Social Research Council National Centre for Research Methods, Southampton University, UK. Varied themes were explored ranging from ethical and philosophical issues to developments in quantitative methods, however Sanjay mainly attended the sessions devoted to survey research. His participation in the festival was financially supported by the Research Council of UK (RCUK), India.

Akhil Ranjan Dutta, Assam

Co-authored two class XI political science textbooks in Assamese for courses on Political Theory & Indian Constitution. These books have been written in the framework similar to the social sciences textbooks published by National Council of Education Research and Training (NCERT) under the National Curriculum Framework 2005 (Lokniti was actively involved in this initiative) but with more emphasis on regional dimensions and issues.

KK Kailash, Punjab

Reviewed "Federalism and Ethnic Conflict Regulation in India and Pakistan", by Katharine Adeney, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, in *Contemporary South Asia* Vol. 18 (2), June' 10.

Delivered a lecture on "Managing Diversity and Coalition Strategies in Kerala" at the Malabar Christian College, Kozhikode, Kerala on June 28th, '10.

Sudhir Kumar, Uttar Pradesh

Presented a paper titled "Inclusion and Ethnopolitics in India" during a panel discussion on "New Models of Inclusive Politics in India and Asia", at the 18th biennial conference organised by Asian Studies Association of Australia, University of Adelaide, Australia".

Divya Vaid, Delhi

Presented a paper entitled “Educational Assortative Mating in India” at the XVII ISA World Congress of Sociology, held in Gothenburg Sweden, 11th – 17th July, ’10.

Rajeshwari Deshpande, Maharashtra

Presented a paper titled “Bhagwangadavarun Mala Mumbai Disate Aahe: How Caste Survives Amidst Democratic Politics”, at the 13th International Conference on Maharashtra: Culture and Society held at Bratislava, Slovakia from the 17th-19th of June ’10.

KM Sajad Ibrahim, Kerela

Presented a paper titled “Ecotourism in Kerala: A Review of the Thenmala Project”, at an international workshop on “Conservation through Sustainable Use” at Phuket, Thailand. It organised jointly by the University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia and Prince of Songkla University, Phuket Campus, Thailand from the 8th -12th July ’10

Suhas Palshikar, Maharashtra

Presented a paper titled “How far does the study of 'All-India' help understand the politics of Maharashtra?” at the 13th International Conference on Maharashtra: Culture and Society held at Bratislava, Slovakia from the 17th-19th of June ’10.

Sandeep Shastri, Karnataka

Presented the India paper at the “International Roundtable of the Global Dialogue”, as the India coordinator of the “Global Dialogue on Political Parties, Civil Society and Federalism”. This was organized by the Forum of Federations, at Berlin from 9th to 11th June ’10.

Keynote speakers at the International Seminar on “Guarantees of Territorial Pluralism” organized by the Centre for Political and Constitutional Studies (CEPC) in the office of the Spanish Presidency in Madrid along with the Manuel Gimenez Abad Foundation and the Forum of Federations. Dr Shastri was invited to make a presentation on the theme “Electoral Systems and Political Parties”.

Anil Kumar Verma, Uttar Pradesh

Verma, A.K. ‘Devil in the Details: Mayawati’s Criticisms of the Right to Education Act have a Point’. Indian Express, 12th April, ’10. <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/devil-in-the-details/604931/0>

Delivered a lecture on “Communalism: Causes, Impacts & Coping Mechanisms” at the inaugural seminar of the Centre for Conflict Resolution & Human Security (CCRHS), Delhi held at Kanpur on 6th June, ’10.

Invited to speak on “New Model of Inclusive Politics”, at Australia South Asia Research Centre (ASARC), Australian National University, Canberra on 9th July ‘10.

Chaired a panel on “New Model of Inclusive Politics in India and Asia” at the eighteenth biennial conference of the Asian Studies Association of Australia (ASAA), at the University of Adelaide, Australia held from 5th – 8th July’10.

Chaired the Semester Committee in Political Science at Chhatrapati Shahu Ji Maharaj University, Kanpur for the redesigning of the syllabus.

Interviewed by Robin Jeffry, Visiting Research Professor, Institute of South Asian Studies and Asian Research Institute, National University of Singapore on the “Cell-Phone Story: The Mobile Phone In Modern India” on 5th June,’10.

Members of Lokniti attend two weeks summer workshop at Brown University (USA)

By Md. Sanjeer Alam

Md. Sanjeer Alam and Divya Vaid of Lokniti, Delhi participated in the third annual Brown International Advanced Research Institutes (BIARI), which was held from the from 6th to 19th of June at Brown University, USA. Approximately 150 scholars from across the globe, with diverse academic backgrounds gathered, deliberated and exchanged their views on the related issues.

The programme was structured around four focal themes – (a) Development and Inequality in the Global South; (b) Towards a Critical Global Humanities; (c) Climate Change and its Impact and (d) Technology Entrepreneurship and Management. Divya and Sanjeer were a part of the programme that studied development and inequality.

★ Interns at Lokniti

Eesha Kunduri is a student of Economics (BA Hons) at Kirori Mal College, University of Delhi. Her academic interests include public policy, understanding issues of development and political economy. Eesha is also an avid debater and currently heads the debating society of her college.

Vartika Singh is currently pursuing her Masters in Development Studies at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai. She has done her B.A (Hons) in Economics from Hindu College, Delhi University. Issues of development, displacement and urban policies are her areas of interest.

Vivaan Misra a 3rd year student of Carleton College, Minnesota (USA). He has chosen to major in Economics/Political Economy. He is currently conducting a region specific evaluation of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. He is also interested in International Politics particularly the disparity between theory and reality.

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