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LOKNITI NEWSLETTER

Centre for the Study of Developing Societies

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This Bulletin

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THE month of April witnessed tremendous activity at the Lokniti office. With the NES 2009 gaining momentum, sample questionnaires and ballot papers flooded the office fax tray and several mail boxes. Checking, cross-checking and translation kept most of us busy, while the rest remained glued to news channel updates and the Election Commission website.

One room was taken over by the archiving team and it continues to remain clogged with newspaper, files and folders. Amidst this mayhem, the monthly newsletter sought its own slice of space and attention.

The idea was to revamp the newsletter by inducing debates and bringing in opinion from newer frontiers. This edition carries one guest article and one article by a research intern, apart from the regular news items.

The trend seems to be here to stay, if the articles coming in for the next edition are anything to go by! Here's looking forward to many more editions and newer and fresher ideas.

Before signing off, I would like to thank Shawan for taking time off from his busy schedule and making this edition possible. Thank you to Banasmita for the photographs and the infective enthusiasm. And thanks to all the contributors for their generosity. The newsletter shall owe its future to them.

Srilata Sircar
Guest Editor

In the backdrop of Third Front, coalition politics is more of a boon than a bane

Kaushal K. Vidyarthee

COALITION governments are not new to India. After the very first elections in 1952, three state governments were formed as coalition governments. Since 1977 India had a number of coalition governments at the centre. Here, I want to argue that the coalition politics had moderating and maturing effects on India's democracy and the multiparty democracy is better suited to India than the two-party system.

Democracies consisting of only two parties such as in the USA are extremely rare. Almost every other democracy in the world from the nascent ones like Slovakia, Benin and Senegal to de facto dictatorships like Ethiopia and Zimbabwe; from one of the oldest (Britain) to the youngest (Kosovo) have multiparty politics. Why India—the largest democracy with its enormous diversity and pluralism should desire a two-party system? Multi-party democracy thrives on diversity, inclusiveness and differences. It gives people freedom to make their free choice about political ideologies they want to align with and the leadership they feel worth voting for. To be sure, democracy is not about restricting people's political choice. Given these, the Third Front is very welcome. It will give a non-Congress and non-BJP alternative to smaller parties and people of India.

On the issue of the efficiency of government, one has to understand that the Indian democracy suffers from corruption, under-representation of many groups and unaccountable, non-transparent bureaucracies. Since 1990s we have had coalition governments at the centre as well as in many states. This has resulted in greater progress in these years as opposed to the first forty years of independence. Efficiency is a product of the institutions supporting the democracy rather than the political system.

Over the years, as effective democracy has spread to more areas and groups (poor and marginalized), the interests to be represented in Parliament have increased many times over. With more than forty national parties the

coalition politics is a reality and one should desire for a better managed coalition. Most of the political crises of a coalition government represent a problem not of coalition politics per se, but of the phenomenon of 'outside support'.

Fourth Professor Pradeep Kumar Memorial Lecture

Intolerance and Freedom of Expression: The Case of M F Husain

Prof Peter Ronald de Souza, Director IAS, Shimla and former co-director of Lokniti, delivered the Fourth Pradeep Kumar Memorial Lecture, at the Gandhi Bhavan. Department of Political Science, Panjab University has been organizing an annual lecture in memory of Prof. Pradeep Kumar, who was both a student and teacher for many years at the Department.

Prof. Peter de Souza's lecture entitled "Intolerance and Freedom of Expression: The Case of M F Husain", addressed the issue of freedom of expression in the context of a multi-cultural society using M F Husain as a case study. The lecture raised numerous interesting questions including, what does art reflect especially in a democratising society, what place does art have in society, does art have any limits, who sets the constraints, how are those constraints to be implemented, what is legitimate protest, methods of adjudicating disputes and so on.

The three themes around which the lecture was woven included the issue of deepening of democracy, cultural policing and the case of M F Husain. Indian democracy is probably the most plural societies in the world and is in the process of creating a political community. In the process, though many groups have come into the political sphere, the threshold of tolerance has also been lowered. Comparatively faith groups more than caste groups are more intolerant in India. The space for dissent and non-conformism must be kept alive and the challenge for Indian society according to Prof de Souza is to negotiate what space should be allowed for dissent and non-conformism.

BOOK RELEASE

"Loktantra ka Naya Lok" (in 2 volumes), edited by Arvind Mohan (Vani Prakashan, 2009)

A two-volume Hindi collection of state election studies by Lokniti was released at a function at the India International Centre Annexe on Sunday, 19th April at 11 AM.

Coalition can provide coherent and effective governance when the cementing forces that bind them are that of a broadly shared political and policy vision. The NDA and UPA had these arrangements in their coalitions with greater efficiency than earlier coalitions of Desai, Gujral, VP Singh etc. This is a sign of a maturing multi-party democracy.

One can't imagine today's evolved BJP without its going through the highs and lows of NDA coalition. The BJP can't project Ayodhya as an election issue because of the NDA. By contrasting the secular credentials of current coalition government in Bihar and the single party-led government in Gujarat and envisioning the Nuclear Deal debate in the public space in case of a Congress-only Government (i.e. no UPA-Left coalition), anyone can emphasize the moderating effects of coalition politics.

Choices for voters: Voting in electoral politics is about prioritizing between parties, ideologies, candidates, local and regional concerns, and national policies among many other things. Each voter may form their own combinations of these priorities for voting. Two-party system will restrict these choices. My opponents would argue that 'most voters are not primarily ideological in their thinking'. Ideology is not only about the left-right-centre and secular-communal derivatives but also about the central-regional-local and the caste-class derivatives. Moreover, India's polity is not characterized by a single Left-Right ideological axis but multiple cross-cutting axes, e.g. secular-communal, centralist-regional autonomist, and a variety of caste bloc-based axes, varying state-wise. The success of left parties, the emergence of caste-based parties and secular coalitions are perfect example of ideology-based politics. Aren't Democrats and Republicans in the USA about

ideologies? Further ideology is a broader concept; it transcends manifestos and realizes itself in day to day unconscious practices.

Internal Democracy: Democracy does not preclude the internal democracy within parties. Some parties have been good at implementing it, while others have not. The internal democracy within parties will improve the quality of candidates and voters will have better choices. Getting to the point of 'a dozen election symbols on the ballot', I would like to draw attention to the recent elections in five states where voters gave thumping majority to a single party (e.g. the most fractured polity of Uttar Pradesh got a single party government where more than twenty parties contested).

Absence of shared policy objectives in Coalition Politics: The 'Common Minimum Programme-CMP' of UPA coalition is an example of a 'broadly shared policy vision'. The moderating effect of CMP on the allies of the UPA can not be denied. Narendra Modi's extremist agenda has in fact led the NDA to lose out on partners in many states (e.g. Telegu Desam Party and National Conference), and this in turn provides an automatic check on ideologically blinkered views.

In a multi lingual, multi ethnic and plural country like India, the idea of multi party is not only feasible but also imperative for the smooth functioning of the world's largest democracy. When such multiplicity of parties exists, coalitions will be natural and inevitable. The endeavour should be to improve these to function with better results.

Kaushal Kishore Vidyarthi has completed MPhil in Development Studies from Wolfson College, Oxford University. He is currently working as Vice President (Graduates) of Oxford University Students' Union. He was an Inlaks Scholar (2006-08). This article was written as an entry for an informal debate on the Oxford Indian Society blog.

<p>Mohd. Sanjeer Alam of Lokniti has been selected to participate in <i>Development and Inequality in the Global South</i> at the Brown International Advanced Research Institute, University of Brown, USA. This is an intensive residential workshop from May 31 to June 13.</p>	<p>Navpreet Kaur of Lokniti has been selected to participate in <i>Towards a Global Humanities : Critical Traditions from the Global South</i> at the Brown International Advanced Research Institute, University of Brown, USA. This is an intensive residential workshop from May 31 to June 13.</p>
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challenge this supposition and argue that despite consistent levels of participation in elections through voting, a large number of women remain politically powerless. I further argue that a significant section of women who may be considered to be economically and socially empowered to a satisfactory degree, do not possess a comparable degree of political power.

However, before proceeding to elaborate my arguments, it is essential to first establish certain yardsticks for the determination of the level of political, economic and social empowerment which are terms that are abstract and subjective at the same time. Considering that the secret ballot is at the heart of India's democratic process and a freely cast vote on the basis of one's own political judgment is the key to a citizen's successful participation in this democracy, it is not unreasonable to take the nature of a woman's voting decision as the indicator of her political empowerment. Thus in this study I have considered women who have cast their votes on the basis of their own independent decision, to be the most politically empowered. Those who have gone with the decision of their caste or community leaders or that of their colleagues are taken to be having a certain kind of political orientation that can't be written off as absence of empowerment altogether. Those women who have voted as per the decision of their husband or other family members have been considered to be the least empowered in political terms. The freedom enjoyed by a woman in her decision to spend her money has been taken to be the indicator of economic empowerment. The woman's say in the decision about having children (only married women have been considered due to logistical reasons) has been considered to be an indicator of her social empowerment. With these indicators as tools for analysis, the findings of the State of the Nation Survey (SONS) conducted by Lokniti, CSDS among women respondents in January 2008, has thrown up some observations that question the assumptions commonly made with regard to the direct correlation between women's political participation and their political empowerment as also their social and economic status and their political empowerment.

At first glance, the findings of the survey match meticulously with the commonly held perceptions about the positive correlation between education and socio-economic status

Women in Politics : Is Participation Empowerment?

Srilata Sircar

THE National Commission for Women, in its website, has equated political empowerment of women to "equitable representation in all fora". The policy statement of the National Policy for the Empowerment of Women (2001) has also emphasized on "participation in decision making at the local level" as the key to women's political empowerment. Inherent in these statements as also in the general disposition (of the government and other non-governmental players) towards women's political empowerment is the assumption that participation in the political process automatically amounts to political consciousness, autonomy of political will and hence political empowerment. It is with this assumption in mind that the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution were implemented, with a view to create "strong foundation for their participation in decision making at the local level." In this essay I seek to

and political empowerment. For instance, 82% of the women respondents with graduate, post graduate or professional degrees had voted on their own without consulting any other individuals or bodies. In case of non literate respondents this figure was only 41%. Similarly, only 12% of those women who voted according to the decision of their husband or other family members were women dwelling in metropolitan cities. On the contrary, 50% of the women who voted as per the decision of their husband or other family members lived in villages. However, on closer inspection, the findings on economic and social empowerment show major discrepancies with those of political empowerment. When the political behaviour of women who take independent decisions on how to spend their money or have a considerable say in the decision over how money is to be spent, was scrutinized, it was found that 35% of these women had voted according to the decision of their husbands or other family members. Predictably, this percentage was even higher (about 55%) amongst those women who had no say in the decision about how their money is spent. On the social front, similar figures emerged with regard to political empowerment. 37% of those women who independently decide on having children (when and how many) or always have a say in this decision, voted according to the decision of their husbands or other family members. Amongst women who were never consulted in the decision about having children, this figure was a mildly higher 41%.

Thus while the findings of the survey do broadly support the correlation between higher economic and social empowerment and higher political empowerment, they persistently indicate that high levels of economic autonomy or social autonomy do not translate in full or even a comparable measure to political autonomy. This is corroborated by the fact that 70% of the respondents agreed to always having a say or taking an independent decision with regard to having children. 89% of the respondents agreed to always having a say or taking an independent decision with regard to spending money. In comparison, only 56% respondents claimed that they had voted as per their own independent decision. It may be added here that female turn out in Lok Sabha elections since 1984 has remained consistently lower than the average turn out by four to five percentage points. The female turn out has also fallen from 59% in 1984

to 53.6% in 2004. When considered in collation, what these various figures imply is that while a little more than half the total female electorate voted in the 2004 Lok Sabha elections, a little less than half of those who voted, actually did so not according to their own free political will, but as per the political judgment of their husband or other family members, with the husband being the key decision maker in about 70% of these cases. Thus, while the political participation of women in terms of their electoral turn out is closely comparable to the average political participation in the country, their level of political empowerment can be severely questioned on the basis of the findings of the SONS January 2008. Additionally, women's economic and social empowerment has not translated into political empowerment in any appreciable measure.



Women at a Polling Station in Ladakh

Perhaps the explanation to this state of affairs can be located in the disposition towards policy relating to women and the concerns of the women's movement in general. There seems to have been a concerted effort towards the upliftment of the social and economic status of women through legislation and development policies and programmes. The legislation aimed at prevention of female foeticide, domestic violence, dowry deaths and the emphasis of self help groups and non governmental organizations on the economic self reliance of women through self employment initiatives etc are cases in point. On the social front, concerns over women's

control over their sexual and reproductive health and their pro active role in contraception and family planning have held centre stage. These programmes and plans rightly identify areas where intervention and action are necessary to improve the social and economic status of women, even as the efficacy and success of these initiatives in many cases remain debatable. What these programmes have failed to achieve or even address is the issue of political mobilization of women through ensuring political autonomy and scope for possession of free political will. At most, both the government and the non governmental actors have emphasized on the need for political participation, intrinsically equating it to political empowerment. That this is not the case and that women's political participation has been largely passive and unfruitful is not only indicated by the above mentioned findings but also by the various reports and studies on the impact of the 73rd and 74th Amendment Acts.

The OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) report on the Indian decentralization experience is one such document. Widespread occurrence of proxy governance at local PRI levels and substantial evidence of political power being usurped by "mukhiya patis" in areas reserved for women elected representatives are further indicators of how political participation has failed to guarantee political empowerment to women. When electoral rights had been first officially granted to women in India in 1921, the ideological argument behind this had been borrowed from the concept of "spheres" which had for long dominated western liberal political thought. Under this concept, the activities of men were attributed to the "public sphere" which encompassed politics, culture, law, philosophy and the like. The activities of women on the other hand were relegated to the "private sphere" which dealt with the personal, the natural, the emotional and the like. The argument behind granting voting rights to women was based on a reinterpretation of the theory of spheres. It was argued that women, due to their qualities of devotion, pacifism and religiosity would have a moderating and balancing impact on the sphere of politics and so their inclusion would benefit this sphere. I would like to argue here that though the participation of women in politics is now premised upon its beneficial impact on their own status rather than its beneficial impact on politics itself, the divide between the two spheres

continues to linger in the outcome of this political participation, as we have seen through the findings cited above. Women's status within the household economy in terms of decision making with regard to expenditure seems to be tending towards positive developments. At the same time, women's social status on the domestic front with regard to the decision of having children also seems to be positively disposed. However, when it comes to autonomy with regard to decisions pertaining to the "public" realm of politics, a significant fraction of women are still governed by the will of their families and especially their husbands. Whether this takes a coercive form or is a self imposed restriction is yet to be seen. Chances are that there would be a mix of both cases.

In conclusion, it may be said that the outlook of the government and the non governmental players towards the question of women's political empowerment needs to change. The easy equation of political participation and political empowerment no longer holds. What is needed is policy and programmes aimed distinctly at providing women across classes, regions and religions with political information and training that can eventually build up to creation of political autonomy and capability for taking independent political decisions. In the absence of such measures, the project of women's empowerment will remain skewed and continue to yield only lop-sided results.

Reference:

1. <http://wcd.nic.in/empwomen.htm> (24.04.09)
2. *Fluctuating, Ambivalent Legitimacy of Gender as a Political Category*, Stephanie Tawa Lama-Rewal, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 36, No. 17 (Apr. 28 - May 4, 2001),
3. Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development report on the experience of decentralization in India, published by the ILO.

Theatre Camp : "Together for Change"

As part of the Lokniti project titled *'Democracy and Children's Rights in India and the UK: Law, Policy and Outcomes'*, this theatre camp by a project partner, Children's Rights in Goa, will train selected children between 7th May to 9th May, 2009 followed by a stage performance in June. Selection took place in April 2009. The project is funded by UKIERI.

National Election Survey 2009...update

Targeted sample of **596500**

We expect to achieve sample size of **35000+**

536 Parliamentary Constituencies

729 Assembly Constituencies

2836 Polling Stations

Three intensive *Trainers' Training Workshops*
at Delhi, Guwahati and Hyderabad

Training Workshops for field investigators at 38 locations
across the country

Covering all states of India.

Ms Kai Yin Low, a student of LLM International Human Rights Law (Part time), at the University of Essex, Colchester has been associated with Lokniti as a research student under the UK-India Education Research Initiative project (UKIERI).

Her research paper is titled *Democracy and Children's Rights in India and the UK: Law, Policy and Outcomes Administrative Detention of Children in India*.

The proposed research will examine the types of administrative detention affecting children in India. The case study will seek to identify how often, when, under what circumstances, and for how long children are subjected to administrative detention in India. The research in India will complement and enhance the Global Survey by developing a specific country case study. The main institutional base for research is CSDS Delhi

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<p>Shawan has studied Sociology at St Xavier's College, Kolkata. He is currently working with Indian Express, Delhi. He has been interning at Lokniti since April 2009.</p> <p>Shawan has assisted in the NES 2009. His future career interest is in political reporting.</p>	<p>Abhishek has studied Political science at Kirori Mal College, Delhi. He is currently pursuing MA Development Studies from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences. He was an intern at Lokniti for the month of April 2009.</p> <p>Abhishek has done archival work at Lokniti and has also been a part of the NES 2009. His career interest is in academics.</p>	<p>Srilata has graduated in History from St Stephen's College, Delhi. She is currently pursuing MA Development Studies at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences. She was an intern at Lokniti for the month of April 2009.</p> <p>Srilata was in charge of bringing out the Lokniti newsletter for April 2009 and has also assisted in NES 2009. Her interests are history, politics and gender issues.</p>	<p>Ashish has graduated in Political Science from the University of Patna. He is currently pursuing MA Political Science from Delhi University. He has been interning at Lokniti since April 21, 2009.</p> <p>Ashish has been involved in archival work at Lokniti. His future career interest is in academics and activism.</p>

ALSO READ

The Red Corridor goes to the polls by *Yogendra Yadav* at <http://www.hindu.com/2009/04/16/stories/2009041661501400.htm>

It's the turn of the rural heartland by *Yogendra Yadav* at <http://www.hindu.com/2009/04/23/stories/2009042350161400.htm>

Stakes high for the BJP in Third Phase by *Sanjay Kumar* at http://www.lokniti.org/the_articles_of_sanjay_kumar.html

When 3+1=5 by *A.K.Verma* at <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/when-3-1-5/444742/>

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