

Lokniti

Programme for Comparative Democracy



Lokniti Newsletter
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January-February 2007

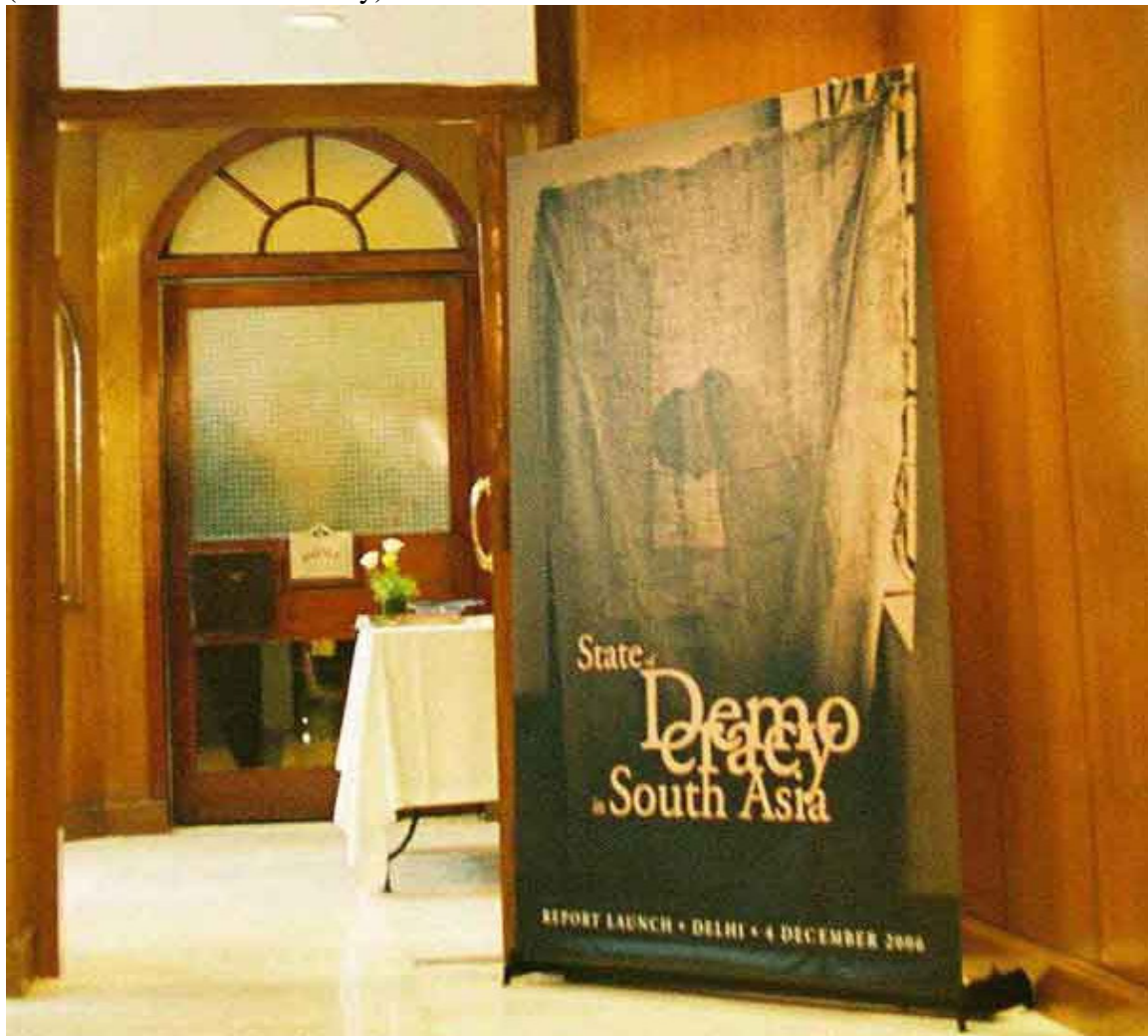


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From the Editor's Desk-

Namaste!

I welcome all our friends to the New Year edition of the *Lokniti* newsletter. Due to unavoidable circumstances, we were unable to bring out the newsletter last month. I apologise for the same. In this edition therefore, we have clubbed the events of December 2006 and January 2007.

Lokniti's calendar for the month of December was dotted with momentous events. The month started with the release of the *State of Democracy in South Asia* (SDSA) report on the 4th of December. A workshop was organised on 4th morning to discuss the findings of the report and the official release took place in the evening. Taking advantage of the presence of all the state coordinators for the release of the SDSA report, *Lokniti* held a meeting of all the state coordinators on the 5th of December 2006.

On the 19th of December, CSDS had the opportunity to host a conversation with Prof. Amartya Sen and Mr. George Soros at the India International Centre Delhi.

The CNN-IBN- *Hindustan Times*-CSDS State of the Nation Survey was conducted in January 2007. CNN-IBN telecast the results of the survey during special programmes from 23rd- 26th January and the *Hindustan Times* carried reports the next day.

This month's photo-essay showcases our experts, our *Democrats and Republicans* (if I may call them so), assessing and evaluating democracy. The photographs are of the SDSA report release and workshop, and the conversation with Prof. Sen and Mr Soros. The visual archive section highlights some memorable moments of the SDSA report release function.

For detailed information on *Lokniti* and the projects mentioned here, kindly log on to our website <http://www.lokniti.org>.

- Best Wishes,
Reetika Syal

Release of SDSA Report-

The much-awaited *State of Democracy in South Asia* (SDSA) Report was released on 4th December 2006. The study was completed with the support of *Economic Cross Cultural Programme of the European Union*, International IDEA and Ford Foundation. This project was started in 2004 with an attempt to review the working of democracy in South Asia. It was an initiative to carry out a base-line evaluation of the democratic enterprise in the five South Asian countries of Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

International IDEA contributed towards the participation of all the South Asian scholars for the launch of the *State of Democracy in South Asia* Report. South Asian participants included the Country Coordinators of all the South Asian countries under this study, Prof. Imtiaz Ahmed from Dhaka University, Bangladesh, Dr. Krishna Hachhethu from Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, Nepal, Prof. Mohammad Waseem from Lahore University of Management Sciences, Pakistan and Prof. Jayadeva Uyangoda from University of Colombo, Sri Lanka.

Other South Asian participants were Prof. Lokraj Baral and Mr. Kanak Mani Dixit from Nepal, Prof. Ameena Mohsin and Mr. Sahidul Alam from Bangladesh and Mr. Pradeep Peiris from Sri Lanka. The international participants included Dr. Sakuntala Kadirgamar and Ms. Leena Rikkila from International IDEA, Prof. Paul Evans from University of British Columbia, Canada, Ms. Marta Lagos from Latinobarometro, Chile. All the participants were in Delhi for a whole day programme on the 4th of December 2006.

A workshop was organised in the conference hall of Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) from 10.30 am to 3.30 pm on 4th December to discuss the findings of the report. All the above-mentioned guests attended this workshop along with the *Lokniti* State coordinators and other social scientists from Delhi.

Ms. Leena Rikkila from International IDEA chaired the first session of the day. In this session Prof. Imtiaz Ahmed and Prof. Suhas Palshikar presented the findings on the 'Promise' of Democracy, and Prof. Mohammad Waseem and Prof. Peter R. deSouza presented findings on the 'Design and Institutions'. Prof. V.B. Singh of CSDS chaired the next session, which had three presentations. Prof. Krishna Hachhethu and Mr. Pradeep Peiris presented the 'Workings of Democracy' in South Asia. In the same session, Prof. Jayadeva Uyangoda and Mr. Sanjay Kumar made a presentation on the 'Outcomes' and Prof. Yogendra Yadav and Dr. Harsh Sethi presented arguments on the 'Future of Democracy'. Prof. Neera Chandoke chaired the panel discussion between Prof. Lokraj Baral, Prof. Ameena Mohsin and Prof. Ramin Jahanbegloo. The three sessions were followed by an open discussion.

The public release of the Report in the evening at Hotel Ambassador, New Delhi, started with the introduction to the SDSA project by Prof. Peter R. deSouza. He acknowledged the generous support and cooperation of the partner organizations, the European Union, The International Institution of Democracy and Electoral Assistance and the Ford Foundation and briefly explained the plural methodologies adopted in this 34 month long project. After the short introduction, all the three sponsors of this study were invited to address the audience.

Prof. Yogendra Yadav presented the key findings of the report. The SDSA report was released by two of the most renowned and senior scholars of South Asia, Prof. Rajni Kothari and Prof. Lokraj Baral. Prof. Paul Evans (Canada), Ms. Marta Lagos (Chile), Prof. Ashis Nandy (India)

and Mr. Kanak Mani Dixit (Nepal) participated in the panel discussion chaired by Prof. D.L. Sheth. Prof. Suhas Palshikar gave the vote of thanks.

State Coordinators' meet-

Taking advantage of the presence of all the state coordinators for the release of the SDSA report, *Lokniti* hosted a meeting of all the state coordinators on the 5th of December 2006. Some important decisions were taken during the meet. The first decision was, an annual award for the Best State coordinator. All State coordinators themselves would nominate the name of a State coordinator and also give a one-page note for their choice. A core committee will take the final decision and a prize of Rs. 5000/- will be awarded to the winner (Rs. 2000 in kind and Rs. 3000 in cash). Second decision was about Prof. Pradeep Kumar Memorial Research Award (details below). The papers presented by the State coordinators at this meet would be compiled and published in a book jointly by Indian Institute for Advanced Studies, Shimla and *Lokniti*. Lastly, a summer workshop in Shimla on research methods was decided upon.

Prof. Pradeep Kumar Memorial Research Award- *Lokniti*, a research programme of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi, (CSDS) has instituted the Professor Pradeep Kumar Memorial Research Award in the memory of Professor Pradeep Kumar. The award will be given to any young scholar (below 40 years) who has carried out a promising piece of research in Political Science (Research articles, dissertations, thesis) in any Indian language (other than English).



Democrats and Republicans- 4th December 2006

The Award would be Rs 25000/-. Those who wish to apply for this award are requested to submit a) A brief bio-data; and b) A copy of the research work (in an Indian language other than English) already undertaken to be sent on or before 15 March 2007 to- Dr Sandeep Shastri, Lokniti Network Convener, 52, Bellary Road, Bangalore 560024, Karnataka

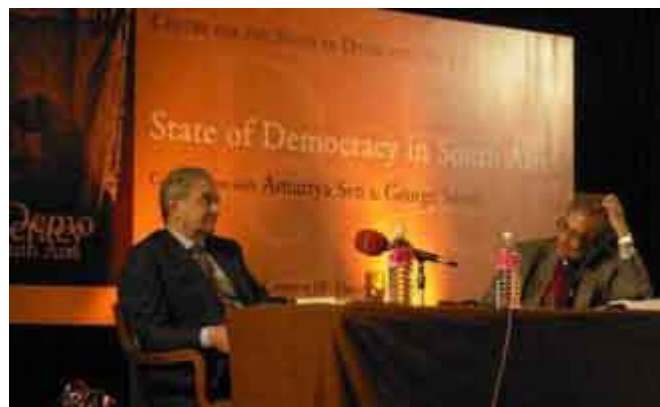
A Conversation with Amartya Sen and George Soros-

It was an occasion of immense pleasure for CSDS when Prof Amartya Sen and Mr. George Soros agreed to have a conversation with us on 19th December 2006 on the State of Democracy in South Asia, at the India International Centre. The event was organised in light of the release of the SDSA report with Prof. Peter R. deSouza in the chair. Prof Suresh Sharma (Director, CSDS) welcomed the guests and presented them with mementos on behalf of the Centre. Prof. Yogendra Yadav explained the SDSA study to the guests by presenting the key findings of the report. After the presentation, Prof. Sen and Mr. Soros were invited to give their responses to the report.

Mr. Soros, a believer in the concept of open society, related the ideas of democracy and open society to promote democracy all over the world. Talking about his mentor and guide Karl Popper, Mr. Soros talked about the dichotomy between open and closed societies and how he got involved in the former Soviet empire, which was a closed society that was collapsing, and he wanted to help it make a transition to an open society. Soros held that Popper's view that totalitarian regimes and ideologies were a threat to open society needed to incorporate the threats that accompanied the collapse of society where there is a breakdown of law and order. This was also a threat to an open society. He was greatly disturbed by the activism in Eastern Europe where the young generation seemed to be opposed to democracy. This was due to a very serious agency problem in representative democracy. The elected representatives are

supposed to serve the interest of the people who elect them. But in actual fact they are guided by self-interest, which leads to corruption, and further disillusionment. He considered the contributions of the SDSA report to be very valuable as it helped understand the problems and weaknesses inherent in democracy.

Prof Sen congratulated CSDS on the report and talked about public discussion in government being an important feature of democracy. One great thing about democracy is that a defeated argument stays. Discussing Pakistan's democracy, Prof Sen said that tolerance of media freedom under the semi-military rule of Gen. Musharraf was much greater than under Nawaz Sharif's elected government. Prof. Sen gave the example of the Gujarat riots and said that when the ruling party in Gujarat lost in the general elections, it showed that public discussion had played a very major part in bringing in a sense of shame.



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Mr. Soros observed that in the pursuit of the truth, discussion and argumentation is desirable. But unfortunately we have learnt to manipulate the truth. And whenever we manipulate the truth, the outcome is not going to correspond to our expectations. Giving the example of America during the Iraq war, he said that when the neo-conservatives invaded Iraq on false pretences, to demonstrate America's superiority, the result was exactly the opposite as America's power and influence was undermined in the world. Things were quite distorted and one

could only raise one's voice against it, at the cost of being unpatriotic.

During the question-answer session, a range of questions were put to Prof. Sen and Mr. Soros. Answering a question on Russian democracy having run into trouble and the effect it will have on Eastern Europe, Mr. Soros said that in the time of energy crisis, Putin is using the control of the natural resources, to assert and enhance Russia's authoritarian power and influence. An opportunity was lost to implement a Marshall like plan on Russia, during the early days of the demise of the Soviet Union. And upbraiding Russia now is counter-productive as it only helps Putin play up to the Russian nationalism. A large part of Eastern Europe has escaped the Russian domination and those countries are most eager to have a unified energy policy to protect Europe from being 'dictated to' by Russia.

Prof. Sen was asked to comment on the issue of the reservation bill imposing a burden in an already precarious higher education system. And whether it was a correct move towards equality and social democracy. Prof. Sen acknowledged it to be a fairly complicated issue and identified basic arguments of recruitment to higher education on the basis of merit and that there may be more economically deprived people who do not belong to a particular caste/community. He firmly believed that the reservation debate in India was conducted without knowing any of the basic facts. According to him, the two 2 eminent questions which the reservations issue raises are- first, is that a good way of detecting the deprived class? And second, if you have neglected school education, can you catch up at the higher education stage?

Prof. Sen's answer to a question on the proposal by Indian government depriving registered associations from receiving foreign grants for developmental work was that it was a method to reduce public discussion. It was a terrible proposal and had negative consequences for democracy. Mr. Soros endorsed this view.

Lokniti Survey Data-

There has been a major change in Lokniti's data usage policy. For the first time, Lokniti data unit has released the questionnaires and findings of the last four national election studies (NES 2004, 1999, 1998 and 1996). All the marginal data of the questions has been uploaded on the Lokniti website for public use (www.lokniti.org).

State of the Nation Survey-

The CSDS- CNN-IBN- *Hindustan Times* State of the Nation survey was conducted in January 2007. The sample of 15141 persons was randomly spread over 19 states of India. The results of the survey were telecast on CNN-IBN and HT carried the reports next day. The results were divided into four areas- the political view of the people, their religious views, economic reforms and the middle class.

According to our survey results, Lok Sabha elections in the second week of January 2007 would have resulted in a majority for the UPA government with around 300 seats, without Left support. Nearly three years into its term, the ruling coalition still enjoys popular approval and Sonia Gandhi continues to be the most popular leader of the country. None of the BJP leaders have been able to fill the void after AB Vajpayee and even the BJP voters feel that the party has grown weaker after 2004. The stable picture at the national level hides many upheavals at the state level. In the last 5 months (after our August 2006 State of the Nation survey) Samajvadi party in UP has staged a recovery notwithstanding Nithari killings and Ghosi Khurd. The other surprise is in the rating of the CMs, with the top two positions going to Orissa's Naveen Patnaik and Bihar's Nitish Kumar and the fall of Budhadeb Bhattacharya from third to ninth rank.

Every alternate respondent in this survey- was asked a series of questions about their religious beliefs, attitudes and practices. Contrary to popular beliefs, the survey found that urban, educated Indians are more religious

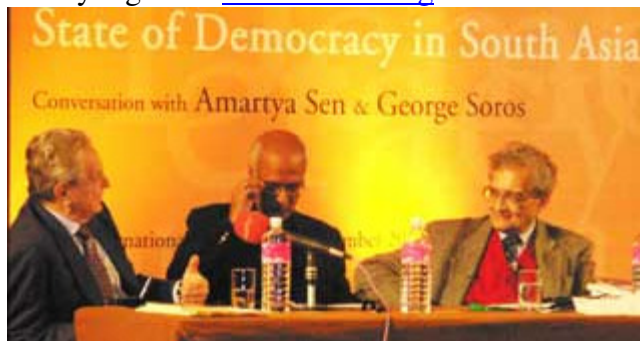
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than their rural and illiterate counterparts; And metropolitan women are far more religious than rural women. Some statistics which show that religion in the country is on the rise are- 93 % people believe in God; irrespective of education; 64 % people visit a temple, mosque or *gurdwara* regularly; 53 % pray daily; the educated pray more regularly; 24 % consult a palmist; 68% participate or take interest in religious functions of other religions.

Sociologists tell us that the stress of urban living pushes people to search for anchors in their lives. Since they cannot go back to their villages, they recreate a community through religion. That explains the religiosity among those who live in big cities.

The poll also found out that the middle class of the country, though aspirational, self absorbed, and busy climbing the socio economic ladder is quite satisfied with its economic conditions and more than half believed their condition had improved. The poll had defined a middle class person as one who owns either a two-wheeler or a four-wheeler or a colour TV or a telephone. Going by that definition, the total middle class population is 20.2 per cent of the entire population of India.

The findings show a slow but steady change in attitudes and values. The middle class is more religious now but believes that action matters more than fate. A majority of them are still not interested in politics. The middle class has great economic ambitions but strangely prefer steady Government service to the unpredictable but high-paying private sector jobs. To read more on the State of the Nation survey log on to www.lokniti.org



Democrats and Republicans- 19th December 2006

Prof. Pradeep Kumar Memorial Lecture-

The Department of Political Science Panjab University organised the 2nd annual 'Professor Pradeep Kumar Memorial' Lecture on 8th November 2006. Prof. Suhas Palshikar of the Department of Politics, Pune University, delivered the Lecture on the topic of "*Caste And Politics in Post-Mandal Era*". The session was presided over by Prof. Veer Singh (Dean, University Instruction) of Panjab University. Prof. Brar of the Department was the first speaker and he talked about Prof Pradeep Kumar and his contribution to academics. Students and faculty of the social science departments of Panjab University attended the meeting.

Prof Palshikar said that the study of caste has come to a pass in the discipline of political science. Three decades after the publication of Rajni Kothari's seminal edited work on caste and Indian politics, there has been little by way of analysis and explanation of many of the riddles of caste operation in India.

He outlined the journey of caste in political competition in India from the mid-60s to the late 80s when the term 'OBC politics' got introduced in the political vocabulary. Since the 90s, i.e. the post mandal era political competition is observed both between the middle peasantry and the OBC (which is an amorphous administrative unit) and between the OBC and the rise of claims of the dalits. A study of this post mandal politics however does not take note of some important factors like the way in which the BJP and Congress have been able to ensure presence of OBCs while sidelining the OBC agenda. He pointed out that survey data (NSSO and NES data) show how the traditional links between castes and occupations are changing, every caste is becoming multi-class and there is political fragmentation among various caste blocks.

Despite this, understanding caste has been limited to understanding political competition between various caste groups. But social contestations against caste do not exist as such not only in electoral politics but also in the larger realm of transformative politics. The need to attack the material basis of caste is missing.

..

Thus he listed the main questions that political scientists need to ask today, namely, whether and to what extent caste is a resource in a democracy and on the other hand to what extent, democracy is working as a resource in caste society. Moreover, even as there is presence of various caste groups in politics, does that presence translate to their effective representation in terms of setting new agendas.

Shodharthy Competition

Shodharthy has organized an Essay Competition to encourage young lecturers, research scholars and students to write original/research-oriented articles in Hindi medium. Three themes have been identified for the same

- a. Public orientation of Indian Politics
- b. Indian Nuclear Policy in the context of the changing global order
- c. Tradition of Political Thought in Modern India

The articles must be written in Devnagari script in not more than 3000 words. Age limit is 40 years. Only original and unpublished writings shall be accepted. The last date for receipt of essays is 30 June 2007. The article should be neatly typed on A4 size paper, and sent by registered post/speed post/ courier only to- Dr. A.K. Verma,

Editor- *Shodharthy*,
78 New Civil Lines
(Behind Gurudeo Palace),
Kanpur 208024. Uttar Pradesh

A soft copy in *Kruti Dev* Font could also be sent in a CD. The essays selected will be awarded. The winners shall be honoured at *Lokniti*, Delhi

Shodharthy Release-

The second volume (Vol. 2, No.1, January – March 2006) of *Shodharthy* (a quarterly hindi journal) was released at a function in the Patna Book Fair, Patna on 2nd December 2006.

The function was presided over by Prof. L.N. Sharma, former Head of Political Science Department, Patna University. Prof. Naval Kishor Chaudhury, Head, Department of Economics, Patna University, was the Chief Guest.

NTS-Asia-

NTS-Asia (a consortium of Non-Traditional Security Studies in Asia) organised its inaugural meeting on 8th –9th January 2007 in Singapore. The meeting was attended by Prof. Peter R. deSouza, as *Lokniti* is a member of NTS-Asia. Some highlights of the inaugural meeting were- facilitating close research collaboration among members of NTS-Asia. For this purpose, the member institutes shared information about the range of research topics/areas that they were interested in and currently working on. Organised along a number of research clusters, the members agreed to use these clusters as possible themes for organizing sub-regional workshops, as well as other activities; for e.g- natural disasters, NTS Approaches Conflict, Violence and Arms Proliferation, Irregular Migration, Uneven development, Climate Change etc.

It was also noted that research should not only look at the threats that NTS issues pose but also examine the likely responses that could be generated from the study. There were suggestions to develop an NTS curriculum. Among the ideas raised in this regard was to share/exchange NTS-related material, training courses, etc. among members. Members of NTS-Asia chose the Research Fellowship Committee to decide on applications for NTS-Asia Research Fellowship programme. Three research fellowship programmes will be awarded each year for a period of three months each. NTS-Asia will organize 3 regional workshops over a period of 2 years. The first is scheduled to take place after the Convention in Colombo.

Research Output-

Ethnopolitical Calculus And Identity Strategies In Northeast India

Dr. Rajesh Dev*

It is almost a cliché that conflicts emerging out of ethnonational claims in many of the states in the eastern portion of the country are often the most definitive source of political violence in the region. These claims and the emerging consequent conflicts have acquired a competitive form where every group that perceives a sense of exploitation—real or imagined—is involved in a contest with its ‘other’. There are dense ethnic formations in the region, which claim their ‘ethnic homelands’ as ‘protective mechanisms’ for their own preservation. These very groups, which now strive for self-definition and self-determination, were at some point in history, proud to be members of the larger collectivities.

Dr. Dev believes that these claims and assertions are being essentially engendered by a variety of institutional engineering that aids the development of exclusiveness. This implies allowing a cultural community, to take social and political control over an ethnic group’s destiny. With the result, ethnic identity becomes a source of awarding entitlements and territorial boundaries become the most prized element of one’s identity.

The author considers the motivating cause of the ethnic antagonism between the dominant and the marginal ethnic groups in this region, to be the structural inequality based upon ethnic identity. For example- the conflict between Bodos and the Assamese, the Khasis and the Garos, the Hmars and the Mizos, the list is endless, are the basically a reflection of this perceived structural inequality that ensues from the identification of a state with the dominant ethnic group and the distribution of state entitlements accordingly

Those who have tried to grasp the dynamics with this identity struggle have attributed the political violence and assertive claims to the scheming of ‘political entrepreneurs’ or to the ‘alienated selves’ of the collectivity. Interestingly while the ‘distancing’ strategies between the region and the Indian state is often a media and scholarly highlight, the increasing appetite among ethnic groups to adopt ‘distancing’ schemes among themselves is attributed, in an undertone, to the machinations by the Indian state to subvert ‘peoples resistance’.

Then again, if we care to analyse slightly more carefully the underlying dynamics of this phenomenon we shall be able to record the fact that the intra-regional distancing processes, that apparently contradicts their collective hesitancy against the Indian state, are deployed strategically to contest or consolidate inter or intra group solidarity determined by the broader political matrix of claims and counter-claims between groups in the region.

The intra-regional consequence of such hesitant relationships is that groups perceiving each other as the ‘dominating other’ are engaged in drawing and re-drawing the margins of their community/ethnic group in a manner that not only serves to reinforce the bonds of in-group cohesion but also help strategize ethno-political goals in a manner that attempts to counteract any apparent perceived loss by the concerned group. This reconfiguring of the margins of a group-identity often involves the identification of an ‘other/enemy’, which could not only be identified as the ‘primary cause’ of the problems faced by a group but also serve as the rationale for reconfiguring group identity to suit high priority strategic interests and ambitions.

*Dr. Rajesh Dev is the Meghalaya state coordinator for Lokniti. He teaches Political Science at Women’s College, Shillong and is a member of Argue India, an independent research group. This piece is a summary of his article, which appeared in The Statesman, on 7th January 2006.

Suggested Reading-

The War of the World: Twentieth-Century Conflict and the Descent of the West- Niall Ferguson

Niall Ferguson, a professor of history at Harvard and a teacher at Harvard Business School, in his new book assesses the performance of the human species in the twentieth century by reciting the main events of the last century right from the great depression to the world wars, the third-world upheavals and the cold war. Paul Kennedy* explains that the key to understanding this book lies in its subtitle “Descent of the West”. The term has two separate though related meanings. The first is Ferguson’s exploration why the twentieth century was so bloody, not just as a result of the world wars’ slaughter but also many other conflicts in which over a million people perished. The second meaning of the subtitle discovers the decline of the West relative to the concurrent rise of the non-western world especially Asia. The author divides his work into chronological sections, narrating the tale before 1914 in the first section, followed by the interwar years, through World War II.

A short epilogue surveys some of the worst events of the century, but remains Eurocentric because Ferguson argues that it was in Europe and its eastern borderlands that the acts of violence were recurring and these occurred due to a dangerous combination of “ethnic conflict, economic volatility and empires in decline”. The first element hardly needs an explanation as it has been the reason of many a conflicts since centuries. But on top of the anxieties for national and religious identities, the people were affected by economic worries (with the industrial and technological advances pushing the agrarian economy backwards). The end of empire also, is all too often accompanied by violent efforts for land and power. Giving accounts of world wars, Ferguson is certain that the “descent” occurred in almost all fronts. In the words of Kennedy, ‘the book leaves the reader deeply troubled by his reminders of what humankind has repeatedly reminders of what humankind has repeatedly inflicted upon itself over the past hundred years.’

* Paul Kennedy reviewed this book in The New York Review, November 2, 2006. This article is a summary of his review.

Articles Published-

- Verma, A.K, Municipal Elections in Uttar Pradesh, *Economic And Political Weekly*, December 23-29, 2006, pp 5218-5221.
- Kumar, Sanjay, Yadav, Yogendra and Karandikar, Rajeeva, Advantage UPA, *Hindustan Times*, January 24, 2007. (In *Hindustan* - Samprag Bam Bam, Raajag Bedam)
- Kumar, Sanjay and Yadav, Yogendra, 93% Indians Believe in God, *Hindustan Times*, January 25, 2007. (In *Hindustan* - Haan Zyada Dharmik Ho Gaye Hain Hum)
- Kumar, Sanjay and Yadav, Yogendra, Economic Reforms, What is it About? *Hindustan Times*, January 26, 2007. (In *Hindustan* - Mahaz 3 Feesdi Samajhte Hain Aarthik Sudharo ka Funda)
- Kumar, Sanjay and Yadav, Yogendra, India’s Heart Beats in Middle Order, *Hindustan Times*, January 27, 2007.

Lectures Given-

- Sanjay Kumar delivered two lectures on ‘Techniques of Survey Research’ to Students of Journalism, Utkal University, Bhubneshwar, Orissa, on January 7th –8th, 2007; and also during a course on Survey Research Techniques, at Christ Church College, Kanpur, on January 17, 2007.
- Mr. Kumar delivered lectures on ‘Religion, Region and Caste in Indian Politics’ and ‘Money and Muscle Power in Indian Politics’ at School of Governance, Maharashtra Institute of Technology, Pune, on January 13, 2007.

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