

Lokniti Newsletter

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EDITORIAL

A warm welcome to the members of the Lokniti network.

This issue of the Lokniti newsletter contains updates on the SDSA project, and events organised by Lokniti and its network members. It also includes the first of the summaries of the case studies that have been commissioned and dialogues that have been organised as a part of the project.

Kindly log on to our website www.lokniti.org for further information.

I would like to acknowledge the encouragement and appreciation for the newsletter by Lokniti members and Lokniti network members. I hope that we will continue with this productive enterprise with your assistance.

With best wishes,
Edzia Carvalho.

‘STATE OF DEMOCRACY IN SOUTH ASIA’

Cross-national Survey

The attitudinal survey that is a component of the ‘State of Democracy in South Asia’ has been undertaken and completed in Nepal. The survey results have also come in from the field and the preliminary findings will be presented on the 6th and 7th of November 2004 in Kathmandu.

Mohammad Waseem, the country co-ordinator for Pakistan assisted by his team of three supervisors conducted the workshop for the survey in Pakistan in Islamabad from the 18th to the 20th of September 2004. The survey, which is in its first phase, will cover the Punjab and the Hazara division of the North West Frontier Province. The second phase will cover the rest of the North West Frontier Province, Sindh and Balochistan.

In Sri Lanka, it was decided that 75 constituencies from 21 districts would be surveyed. The first phase of the fieldwork has been completed. 1332 interviews were conducted by 70 investigators. The second phase of the fieldwork is underway.

The survey in India will commence as soon as the workshop for the field supervisors and investigators is completed. The fieldwork in India is scheduled to be completed by the 15th of December 2004.

Upcoming Events

The workshop for the SDSA survey in India will be held from the 5th to the 7th of November, 2004 in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala and Guwahati, Assam and from the 8th to the 10th of November 2004 in Delhi, India.

Upcoming Events

The workshop for the SDSA survey in Bangladesh will be conducted on 23rd and 24th of November 2004 in Dhaka, Bangladesh by Imtiaz Ahmad, the Bangladesh country co-ordinator, Yogendra Yadav and Dwaipan Bhattacharya.

Case Studies

A brief summary of three case studies that have been commissioned under the SDSA project follows:

- Dr. Binayak Sen, Bangladesh: *A Street View of Policing: Does Democracy Protect Against Tyranny for the Children on the Street?*

The case study looks at how the ‘rule of law’ is seen from the position of one of the most vulnerable classes of citizens in South Asia, street children. Conventional democratic theory tells us that the ‘rule of law’ is an essential component of democracy, which finds embodiment in institutions such as the police. The police are supposed to ensure freedom from fear and to do so impartially. Yet street children enjoy no such security, denied not just the simple pleasures of childhood but also the simple rights of citizenship and they therefore see the police differently. Is this what the ‘rule of law’ will always mean to the people on the street because this class of citizens is in a sense an impediment to capitalist democracy? Does democracy, because it is connected with modernity, actually produce forms of tyranny in the garb of impersonality?

- Dr. Jani de Silva, Sri Lanka: *Democracy, Power and Violence: Party Politics and the Transformation of the Village Feud in the Sri Lankan South*
This paper explores the troubled link between democracy, violence and the imperatives of political power at the local level in the Sri Lankan south. It does this through an analysis of a violent event which involved the assassination of a young MP during the local elections in 1997. This paper argues that the Sri Lankan electoral landscape is riven by diverse social idioms which mediate the re-activation of power at the local level. Thrown into uneasy proximity, such idioms break into open conflict at critical moments. This gives rise to the spectacular eruptions of violence which mark party politics in Sri Lanka today.

- Mr. Alito Siquiera, India: *Life of a File: An Anthropological Study of the Citizen's Experience with Bureaucracy*
The case study using the political anthropological approach looks at the commonplace experience of the citizen when dealing with the state. Central to the democratic state is the regulation of social and political behaviour according to rules, where entitlements are given on the basis of impersonal procedures and decisions are taken in an impersonal manner according to the merit of the case. The conventional wisdom is that the democratic state does not operate in the manner set out by the theory of constitutional democracy. The study illustrates the functioning of the state by looking at one claim by an ordinary citizen on the state and seeing how the state responds to that claim. This is tracked by looking at the 'life of a file', which contains the claim, as it travels through the system.

Dialogues

A dialogue in Pakistan on *Democracy: Majorities and Minorities* was held from the 10th and 11th October 2004.

A brief summary of the report of *State of Democracy in Pakistan, a national dialogue held on 7-8 February 2004 in Lahore, Pakistan* follows:

Upcoming Events

A dialogue on *Democracy and Human Security* will be held in Pokhara, Nepal on the 27th and 28th of November, 2004.

There was an overall consensus among the participants of the dialogue on the dismal state of democracy in Pakistan. The participants also pointed out several hurdles to the development of a democratic culture in Pakistan. It was noted that political parties were internally undemocratic because influential families and individuals dominated them. To several participants, the real problem was the lack of democratic attitudes and an indifference to the question of democracy at the social level. The absence of substantial public reaction against the 1999 military coup was quoted as an example of these phenomena. It was also noted that democracy was incompatible with the social structure, which was based on tribal, ethnic and cultural lines. Democracy would remain a dream until and unless these structures were abolished. Religion was outlined as an obstacle to equality, which was the essence of democracy.

Many of the participants pointed out the structural problems that limited the people's interest in political affairs and led to the alienation of vulnerable sections of the society. The role of the military and the bureaucracy in the development of an over-arching state apparatus was criticized. The popular mandate had been manipulated by the elite whose interests were further augmented by a class-based education system and a biased curriculum. The judiciary was accused of granting legitimacy to all these efforts. Furthermore, the electoral process had been discredited by both pre- and post-election rigging. The most affected were the smaller ethno-national communities whose grievances had little or no relevance to state policy.

A couple of participants elaborated the achievements of the democratic experience in Pakistan. It was observed that the 'ills' in the country were wrongly associated with democracy. Most of the problems were related to bad governance. It was also argued that the increased political consciousness among the masses was the result of the limited democratic experience in the country. It was also argued that another positive development was the growth of civil society organizations, which played an important role in bringing forth the issues concerning the marginalized sections of the society and providing and enhancing the space for expression of views on issues such as human rights, democracy, peace and development.

The participants felt that the future of democracy in Pakistan hinged on reforming the social as well as state structures and institutions. It was proposed that the Senate should be strengthened by increasing its power as a decision-making body. Abolishing the 'concurrent list', which enabled the Centre to interfere in provincial matters, and replacing it with a provincial list would guarantee provincial autonomy. It was also suggested that the number of provinces should be increased keeping in view the cultural and ethnic boundaries. The federation should be strengthened by the de-centralization of power and the devolution of authority to the provincial and local levels. Empowerment of the local communities was noted as an important prerequisite for the development of a true democracy in Pakistan. It was also demanded that the state should ensure freedom of expression, religion and assembly for religious minorities in order to bring them to the mainstream. Social development on modern lines was also thought necessary for proper representation of the neglected sections of the society (women, minorities, ethnic groups etc.) at the policy-making levels.

Several participants observed the importance of internal democratization of political parties for ensuring a successful democratic process in Pakistan. One of the participants stressed the need for bringing some kind of balance among the three wings of the military in order to neutralize the dominant role of army. Such an effort at the political level was to be strengthened by developing institutions and an education system that promoted democratic norms and culture.



EVENTS AT LOKNITI

Projects Undertaken

A **post poll cross section survey** was undertaken by Lokniti and the Department of Politics and Public Administration, Pune University in Maharashtra in October 2004 between the closing of polls and announcement of the results. A total of 128 locations or polling stations in 64 assembly constituencies, two each in every constituency, were selected for the survey. From each polling station, 15 individuals were randomly selected from the electoral rolls, making a total of 1920 potential respondents. 1448 actual interviews were conducted. The preliminary findings of the survey were published in *The Hindu* and *Loksatta*, a Marathi daily.

Dr. Folasade Ayonrinde is the new research scholar on the **exchange programme on ‘Democracy and Diversity in Comparative Perspective’** between West African and South Asian scholars. She is working on ‘Improving the Political and Economic Status of Women in Nigeria: Learning from India’.

Events Organised

A National Seminar on ‘Reconstructing Democratic Concerns in Modern India’ was organised by Lokniti from the 8th to the 10th of October 2004 at CSDS, Delhi. The primary task of the seminar was to revisit, recover and reconstruct a wide range of ideas, themes, issues and arguments from the 19th and the 20th century intellectual history of India and thereby contribute to what is believed to be an incipient political theory of India, from which democratic concerns could be derived.

Recent Publications

- CSDS Team, ‘How Maharashtra Voted: Assembly Elections 2004’, *The Hindu*, October 24, 2004, p. 12-13.
- DeSouza, Peter R. ‘The Struggle for Local Government: Indian Democracy’s New Phase’, *Publius: The Journal of Federalism*, 33:4, Fall 2003.

THE LOKNITI NETWORK

The **Lokniti India network meeting** was held in Bangalore on the 2nd and 3rd of October 2004. A systematic analysis of the administrative and methodological issues involved in conducting the National Election Survey 2004 was undertaken. The meeting discussed the proposal of studying parties in collaboration with International IDEA. The list of parties to be studied was discussed

New Projects

Lokniti will collaborate with the Indian School of Political Economy to undertake a study of District level politics, collection and analysis of local government election data and information on MLAs and MPs.

Upcoming Events

A dialogue on *Democracy: Dialogue Between Activists and Academicians on Questions of Regional Imbalance, Ethnicity and Language in the North Bengal region of the state of West Bengal* will be held on the 26th and 27th of November, 2004 at Jalpaiguri, West Bengal

Upcoming Events

A National Seminar on ‘Democracy’s Marginal Citizens’ is being organised by Lokniti on the 19th and 20th of November 2004 at CSDS, Delhi. For further information, visit http://www.lokniti.org/upcoming_events.htm

For Further Information

On our publications please visit our website at <http://www.lokniti.org/publications.htm>



and finalised. It was strongly felt that to make the study of parties meaningful and pertinent, the social profile of main national level and state level leaders of the respective parties must be studied. This would be undertaken as Lokniti's own study after completing the IDEA study.

The Asian Barometer Bangkok Planning Meeting was held from the 21st to the 23rd October 2004 at the King Prajadhipok's Institute, Bangkok, Thailand. It was organised by the Asian Barometer in association with the Institute of Political Science, Academia Sinica and the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy: The Asian Foundation. Prof. Yogendra Yadav attended the meeting on behalf of Lokniti.

For Further Information
Please visit our website at
<http://www.lokniti.org>

Events Organised

- National seminar on "Conservation of Fish Resources and its Sustainability", sponsored by the UGC was organised on the 4th and 5th October 2004 by Dr. Maria do Ceu Rodrigues, MES College, Goa (India State Co-ordinator for Goa).

Recent Publications

- Series of articles on the Maharashtra survey conducted by Lokniti in *Loksatta* (Marathi daily), Sunday 24th October 2004 to Friday, 29th October 2004.

Suggested Reading

Vora, Rajendra and Suhas Palshikar (eds.) *Indian Democracy: Meanings and Practices*, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2004.

The blurb says
'.... The essays in the volume show that despite having stood the test of time, Indian democracy is not a democracy in any substantive sense.... Section 1 looks at the various and contesting ways in which democracy is understood in India.... The second section focuses on four important developments that have dominated Indian politics since the beginning of the 1990s: the crisis of secularism, backward caste assertion, the volatility of party politics and the decline of social movements....'

CONTACT US

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NEXT ISSUE

The next issue of the Lokniti newsletter will be issued in December 2004.

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