



SWEDISH  
COLLEGIUM  
for ADVANCED STUDY

## REGULAR SESSION INFORMATION

**Session:** Diversifying the Idea of Democracy: Lessons from the 'Developing World'

**Session Convener(s):** Suhas Palshikar, University of Pune and Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi

**Chair:** Suhas Palshikar, University of Pune and Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi

**Comments:** -

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I) *Politicisation of Dalits in an Uttar Pradesh Village: Exploring Narratives of Democracy from the Margins*  
Radhika Govinda, Ambedkar University, Delhi

II) *Democracy Assessment in Nepal*  
Krishna Hachhethu, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu

III) *Ruling Parties: Parties Without Bases?*  
Pradeep Peiris, Social Scientists' Association, Colombo

IV) *Political Exclusion and Reproduction of Marginality – A Critique of Actually Existing Local Democracy in Sri Lanka*  
Jayadeva Uyangoda, University of Colombo

## ABSTRACTS

### Session description

The idea of democracy is most frequently invoked as a basis for good governance; legitimation of the regime; justification for social action and movements; and simply as a basis for designing the governmental framework in newly established political societies. Universalization of democracy as an ideal and as political practice –both through people’s struggles and through the more controversial industry of ‘democracy promotion’ ( and exporting democracy)—has led to diversity of ‘democratic practices’, pluralization of meanings and theorizations of democracy as also diversity of methods of studying and assessing democratic practice. We propose to set up a panel at the IIS on this theme. The panel would address the following issues: new meanings of democracy that have evolved in the last decade; functioning of democracy in the developing world in terms of institutional frameworks and ability to fulfill popular expectation; significance of the new vocabulary of democracy referring to governance, civil society participation and people’s movements; and the shift in focus and methods of studying democracy. The panel will particularly welcome theorizations based on empirical studies of democratic processes either in one society or in a comparative context.

### Papers

#### I) *Politicisation of Dalits in an Uttar Pradesh Village: Exploring Narratives of Democracy from the Margins*

Radhika Govinda, Ambedkar University, Delhi

This paper traces the politicization of Dalits in an Uttar Pradesh village in an attempt to explore the new and multiple ways in which democracy is imagined, experienced and negotiated at the grassroots by those at the margins of contemporary village society. The trajectory of politicization of Dalits has been neither linear nor uncomplicated. While scholars have sought to understand this politicization in the context of Uttar Pradesh, their focus has tended to be on the power and prominence that the ‘Dalit party’ BSP has garnered for itself in the state (Jaffrelot 2003; Pai 2002) and the increasing assertion by the Dalits in local electoral politics (Lieten 1996; Pai 2001; Rai 2000). Few (with the exception of Narayan 2011) have attempted a political ethnography to capture the dynamics of this change as it unravels in the life of a village and its Dalits.

This paper too is a political ethnography of a village and its Dalits but from the perspective of Dalit women. It offers rich insights into the role played by women’s and social movements and civil society actors in the politicization of Dalits. The paper is based on empirical research conducted through extensive interviews and participant observation with the Chamar caste of Dalits in a village in Bundelkhand region of Uttar Pradesh. The formation of a Dalit women’s self-help group and the murder of a BSP card-holding *naya neta* are central to the narrative of politicization of the Dalits of the village, and demonstrate how the language and idiom of democracy are being simultaneously challenged and reconfigured.

#### II) *Democracy Assessment in Nepal*

Krishna Hachhethu, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu

Democracy assessments in Nepal – done recently in interval of three years between 2004 and 2007 as a part of regional collaboration of examining democracy in South Asia – by applying multiple research tools (survey, dialogue, case study, qualitative assessment) reveal citizens’ voice for a radical change in the sphere of state, government, society and economy. The findings of second round of democracy study in Nepal (2007) are more distinct in this regard. Following the popular uprising of April 2006, followed by rise of ethnicity, upsurge of

regional sub-nationalism and movements by marginal sections of society, i.e. women and dalit, Nepali state has formally transferred into a new destination with a distinct change in its core characteristics: from that of monarchy to republic, Hindu state to secular state, uni-language to multi-language policy, unitary to federal state, national building through assimilation to accommodation of diverse social groups, domination of one particular group to inclusive representation of diverse social groups etc. The task or challenge ahead is consolidation of these changes by (a) inserting the new attributes of Nepali state in the new constitution under making by a Constituent Assembly, and (b) hence implementing the new constitution in spirit with political competition, collaboration and cooperation.

### III) *Ruling Parties: Parties Without Bases?*

Pradeep Peiris, Social Scientists' Association, Colombo

The relationship between political parties and their putative social base raises complex questions, even in the context of developed democracies and abundant information flow. Obviously, in the developing countries and countries with comparatively shorter experience in democracy, understanding the bases of the political parties is even more difficult.

The classical 'responsible government' model and the structural functionalist scholarship assume parties to represent the interest of communities and amass electoral support of those communities by making representation in the interest of those communities. Hence, the social cleavage- class, ethnicity, religion, caste, ideology, etc – based analysis almost dominant in the inquiry of bases of political parties. The contemporary literature of party bases expand the analysis from sociological bases to value and political cleavages. Nevertheless, it still fails to answer many paradoxes in the way parties function.

Sri Lankan electoral politics began as early as 1930s and in most part of the country's electoral history only two parties governed the country. The United National Party (UNP) and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) governed the country either as a single party or as the leading coalition partner. The UNP was the first political party that ruled the post independent Sri Lanka and was labeled as the capitalist party of urban English speaking elites due to the socio-economic profile of its leaders. On the other hand, the SLFP was considered as the party of rural peasants who belong to Sinhala Buddhists. However, there is no scholarly attempt in understanding the bases of Sri Lankan political parties, especially the UNP and the SLFP. Even though there were differences between these two parties at the early stages of the two party competition, it continued to fade over time. During the past decades these two parties neither maintained a continuous policy position nor maintained a distinctive economic policy. They also had no clear policy on the ethnic conflict that dominated three decades of Sri Lankan politics. Nevertheless, these two parties command overwhelming majority of the votes at every parliamentary election.

In this context, this paper aims at inquiring the social bases of the two main parties, the UNP and the SLFP, in order to understand the dynamics of social bases of parties that form ruling coalitions. This paper will be a chapter of my PhD dissertation that I will be submitting to University of Colombo in 2012.

### IV) *Political Exclusion and Reproduction of Marginality – A Critique of Actually Existing Local Democracy in Sri Lanka*

Jayadeva Uyangoda, University of Colombo

Sri Lanka's democratic politics has many anomalies, which are obviously not unique to Sri Lanka. The co-existence of parliamentary democracy with protracted insurgencies, incorporation of violence into the electoral process, enduring incapacity of the political elites to reform the state in a context protracted social conflicts and continuing

low representation of women in governance are some such anomalies. Added to this list of 'democratic anomalies' is the ways in which local democracy reproduces practices of political exclusion, particularly citizens of small ethnic minorities, extremely marginalized caste groups, women and the poor. This particular anomaly becomes all the more surprising in view of the fact that Sri Lanka has a fairly well-functioning system of local government.

This paper looks at how the existing processes, structures and practices of local democracy have become conservative through a dual process of social exclusion and political exclusion in Sri Lanka's rural Sinhalese society. Based on the field work conducted in 2009-2010 in the Kurunegala District of the North-Western province, the paper makes the following points:

- (i). Social exclusion and political exclusion are interconnected social process of democracy in inegalitarian social contexts.
- (ii). Inegalitarian social formations tend to appropriate and domesticate political democracy under conditions where processes of societal democratization are no longer robust.
- (iii). Deepening of democracy calls for retrieval of the social transformatory agenda of political democracy.