

**INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMME FOR ADVANCED STUDIES  
FONDATION MAISON DES SCIENCES DE L'HOMME, PARIS**

**Report on the Project**

**DEMOCRACY AND CONFLICT IN SOUTH ASIA**

**January-March 2004**

**Core group members**

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**1. Concept**

Proponents of democracy believe it offers the best hope for justice in a given society. For example William J. Dixon argues "democratic states do not ordinarily use coercion for day-to-day management of political competition," (1994). Yet such arguments do not explain why democracies are ridden with conflict. Democracy is a concept that gained popularity in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and the early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. As an ideology its rise was closely linked to the rise of the nation-state in Western Europe (Habermas, 1996). In a democracy, sovereignty supposedly rests with "the people." In a nation state it is nationalism that constitutes a legitimate definition of who belongs to the category of people. In a pluralistic society it often leads to a reinforcement of traditional cleavages based on religion, language, ethnicity, caste and gender and transforms them into newer inequalities. This is because, central to the processes of democratic nation-state formation, is the question of identity. The state machinery seeks to create a homogenised identity of *the Nation* and its citizenry that accepts the central role of the existing elite. This is done through privileging majoritarian, male and monolithic cultural values that deny the space for difference. The denial is legitimised through liberal and social democratic discourses of state formation that camouflage the political will that consciously decides who belongs and who does not. (Etienne Balibar, 1990 and Nira Yuval-Davis, 1991). Democracy then is a process of conscious exclusion and inclusion. Perhaps for this reason democracies are habitually involved in ethnic conflicts (Michael Mann, 2000).

The conceptual approach of this project emerges from a growing interest among social scientists on questions of democracy, nationalism and conflict and their mutual interactions. Conflict is not alien to democracies. This is because “the extent to which democracies include processes of marginalization or exclusion, and the ways in which these democracies treat those who exist on their margins,” is a telling example of why democracies are habitually sites of conflict (Penrose, 2000). In this project, the group dealt with different stakeholders in democracies and how their political negotiations often led to conflict in the context of South Asia. It was our aim to try to study how groups in a democratic system negotiate with the state during conflict situations. We hoped to study how nationalisms or group identities or ethnos impacts upon democracy creating what Anderson called “the impending crisis of the nation-state hyphen,” (1996). Our endeavour was to analyse the impact of nationalism within a democratic form of government and its effect on intra-national and intra-state disparities and cleavages. This, we hoped, would highlight how nationalism transforms democracies into what has been termed by Oren Yiftachel as ethnocracies.

Democracy is affected by the socio-spatial consciousness of those who construct it. Nationalistic democracies aim at being a hegemonic form of territorial consciousness (Kaiser, 2000). National identity links territory to culture, language, history and memory. While nation-form legitimates national identity by tracing it back to real or fictional common past with that of a specific group it also privileges certain territories. What happens to territories that remain underprivileged and what happens to marginal groups that associate with such territories? It was hoped that the three-month project under the aegis of the International Programme for Advanced Studies funded by Maison des Sciences de l' Homme, Paris, would provide the occasion for intense debates and discussions on such questions.

The research project consisted of three core group members who participated in all the discussions. They included Paula Banerjee, faculty Calcutta University, India, Christophe Jaffrelot, Director of CERI, Paris, and Mohammad Waseem, Chairman International Relations, Qaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan. The core group members stayed in Paris from January until the end of March in 2004. There were formal and informal discussions almost every week during the three months. There were six formal meetings and in three of these the core group members presented their research. In the final days, there was an international seminar on *Democracy, ethnicity and Conflicts in South Asia*. It was hoped that the research done by the core group members will ultimately result in publication of a book.

Other than the core group members there were a number of scholars who participated in these discussions. They included: Jean Luc Racine (Maison des Sciences de l'Homme) Eric Meyers (INALCO), Jérémie Codron (Sciences Po), Mushirul Hasan (Jamia Milia Islamia University), Minia Chatterjee (Science Po) and Mariam Abou Zahab (INALCO and Sciences Po).

## 2. Short Biographical Notes on the Core Group Members

**Paula Banerjee** specialises in diplomatic history and has worked on American foreign policy in South Asia at the University of Cincinnati where she was the recipient of the prestigious Taft Fellowship. Her book entitled *When Ambitions Clash: Indo-US relations from 1947 to 1974* was published in 2003. She has been working on themes related to women and borders in South Asia and has published extensively in journals such as *International Studies* and *Canadian Women's Studies* on issues such as histories of borders and women in conflict situations. She has also worked extensively on women's issues in general both as a researcher and an activist. She has co-authored a book on *Women in Society and Politics of France*. Paula received the WISCOMP Fellow of Peace Award in 2001-2002 for her work on women's dialogue across borders in South Asia. She is the recipient of a number of international and national awards and grants. She is the editor of *Refugee Watch*. Currently she is teaching at the Department of South and Southeast Asian Studies, University of Calcutta

**Christophe Jaffrelot** holds degrees from the Paris Institut d'Etudes Politiques, University Paris I - Sorbonne and Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales and a PhD in political science from the IEP de Paris. He lectures in South Asian politics at Sciences Po, Paris. He is the director of CERI. His books include: *India's Silent Revolution - The Rise of the Lower Castes in North India*, *La démocratie en Inde - Religion, caste et politique, Paris*, and *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian politics*. Among his edited volumes are: *Pakistan: Nationalism without a Nation?*, *Démocraties d'ailleurs: démocraties et démocratisations hors d'Occident*, and *L'Inde contemporaine de 1950 à nos jours*. He has written and edited many other books and has published extensively in both English and French international and national journals.

**Mohammad Waseem** is Chairman of International Relations Department at Qaid-i-Azam University Islamabad. He has done research on ethnic, Islamic, constitutional, electoral and sectarian politics of Pakistan. His books include *Politics and the State in Pakistan*, *The 1993 Elections in Pakistan*, *Strengthening Democracy in Pakistan* [jointly with S. J. Burki], *Electoral Reform in Pakistan* (ed) and *Democratisation in Pakistan: The 2002 Elections and Beyond* (forthcoming). Waseem was Pakistan Chair St Antony's College Oxford 1995-1999, Fulbright fellow in New Century Scholars Programme at Brookings in Washington DC, Ford Foundation fellow at Oxford, DAAD fellow at Heidelberg, Fulbright Fellow at Columbia, Indian Historical Research Council fellow, British Council fellow and American Political Science Association fellow. Waseem has been on editorial boards of academic journals *Ethnicities* (Bristol), *Contemporary South Asia* (Bradford) and *International Studies* (New Delhi).

### 3. Formal Meetings and Discussions

The following seminars were organised by Christophe Jaffrelot at CERI during the stay of Paula Banerjee and Mohammad Waseem in Paris, in January-March 2004

28 January: "The Relationship between Democracy and Communalism in India", C. Jaffrelot (CERI – Paris);

6 February : "India as a Security-Oriented State - with special reference to the North East", P. Banerjee (Calcutta University);

25 February : "The Relationship between Democracy and Communalism in Sri Lanka", Eric Meyer (INALCO – Paris);

2 March : Democratisation and ethnic conflict in Pakistan, Mohammad Waseem (Qaïd-I-Azam University, Islamabad)

5 March : "The Relationship between Democracy and Communalism in Bangladesh", Jérémie Codron (Sciences Po, Paris);

16 March : "Shia-Sunni conflicts and electoral politics in pakistani Punjab", Mariam Abou Zahab (INALCO and Sciences Po – Paris)

Presentation of the three members of the core group are summarised below:

#### **The Relationship between Democracy and Communalism in India**

Speaker- C. Jaffrelot; (28 January, 2004)

Christophe Jaffrelot while speaking on democracy and communalism in India divided his presentation in two parts, the colonial and the post-colonial times. He began his commentary from the colonial period. He was of the opinion that by the end of the 19th century, group rights had become an integral part of the agenda of the Hindu nationalists. As a consequence, leaders such as Bhai Parmanand suggested the partition of Punjab in the early years of the 20th century in order to save the Hindu minority from the Muslim majority in the province, and therefore, proposed much before Jinnah the two-nation theory. Such a theory attracted British attention, as they were interested in conferring group rights on the people of India and thereby creating grounds for much divisiveness. The Southborough Committee, the body entrusted with the work of redefining the electoral franchise within the framework of the constitutional reform known as the "Montford" reforms after the names of Montagu and Chelmsford, consulted Ambedkar in the beginning of 1919. It was Ambedkar who suggested either the reservation of the seats or communal awards that British considered suitable for the situation in India. By installing Communal Awards the British legitimised a system of making a community the repository of political power. It

was the group identity that assumed importance. Separate electorate was not only given to the Muslims of India but also to all the minority communities in the country. The Award also declared untouchables as a minority, and thus the Hindu depressed classes were given a number of special seats to be filled from special depressed class electorates in the area where their voters were concentrated. The Hindus, who represented the majority community, were minorities in certain areas. In these areas they demanded special privileges for the Hindus and the Hindu Mahasabha upheld this demand. Herein lay the seeds of Hindutva. Therefore, Jaffrelot is of the opinion that group rights polarised society and democratisation of society, as represented by the reform in franchise, ushered in a vicious competition for political power among elites of different communities.

In the second half of his talk Jaffrelot spoke on Steven Wilkinson's thesis. Wilkinson is of the opinion that parties in power often design riots before elections to polarise opinion and consolidate their support base within the majority community. Jaffrelot stated that riots in Gujarat in 2002 presented a typical example of such a fact. It was the majority/minority syndrome that made such riots necessary for BJP who tried to consolidate their pre-eminent position among Hindus in Gujarat. So, even in this case, it was democracy that brought polarisation and conflict within Indian polity. Jaffrelot's presentation portrayed that rather than being a solvent of problems democracy in the context of India has gone on a par with communalisation of politics .

**India as a Security-Oriented State - with special reference to the North East**  
Speaker- Paula Banerjee; (6 February, 2004)

Paula Banerjee spoke on how India emerged as a national security state particularly with the examples drawn from the Northeast. Banerjee said that although India is the largest democracy of the world and has over a fifty-year history of democratic governance, there is a democratic deficit that has led to a growing conflict among states and communities in India. Such democratic deficit is particularly visible in the context of Northeast.

According to Banerjee, the first elections under the Government of India Act of 1935 were fought in 1937 where Congress won seven of the eleven provinces. The standard contemporary official British explanation for the Congress success emphasized the party's organization and its effective use of potent nationalist symbols. This appeal to nationalist symbols at the nascent stage of democratisation meant that the select group of leaders of the democratic system adhered to an exclusive rather than an inclusive system. Nationalism portrayed the limits of the democratic possibilities available given the nature of power in this semi-colonial milieu. Rather than pursuing social equality, the democratic system facilitated the functioning of the state and the maintenance of social order. Giving priority to maintenance of social order meant that groups that wanted to change

the status quo such as some of the hill tribes in Northeast India were considered deviant and hence dealt with severely.

The Indian state then went on to construct hill tribes in the Northeast not just as different but also as violent. The response of the Indian state has been institutionalisation of that difference through such draconian laws as the *Armed Forces Special Powers Act* of 1958. Banerjee commented that it had to be remembered that the *Armed Forces Special Powers Act* of 1958 passed through a democratic process at a time when the Congress system of cooption and appropriation was at its height. Yet the AFSPA passed both houses of Parliament without too much of a problem. After all, this Act was for Assam and Manipur where violence was considered the order of the day. Little did those who voted for this Act realise that once precedence is established it is very difficult to change it. Hence violence led to more violence with an increase in draconian Acts that vitiated the social fabric. A number of groups in the Northeast have internalised the same logic of violence. According to Banerjee, in certain areas there is massive group-induced displacement. In Assam Bodos displaced Muslims, in Tripura Bengalis displaced the tribals, and Nepalese from most of the Northeast were displaced in large numbers because all these groups were participants in the numbers game set up by Indian democracy. Banerjee concluded her discussion by saying that in the case of India democracy has not proved to be conflict solvent but have actually led to greater conflict and violence.

### **Democratisation and ethnic conflict in Pakistan**

Speaker - Mohammad Waseem (2 March, 2004)

Mohammad Waseem spoke on the relevance of democracy in Pakistani politics. The newly formed Pakistani state in 1947 was a state of migrants. Initially, all migrants were known as *Mohajirs*. However, a generation later, this term was used generally for only Urdu-speaking migrants while (East) Punjabi migrants had been largely assimilated in their host province of (West) Punjab. The former's influence was disproportionate to their numbers, not only because the architect of Pakistan came from the same milieu but also because they formed an intellectual and commercial elite. Also, they settled in towns and cities of Sindh province where they replaced Hindu professionals and civil servants who had left for India. They controlled the top positions in the Muslim league. Their language, Urdu, was given the status of the official language.

Punjabis represented only 38% of the country's population in 1951. However, they accounted for 79 % of army, which proved to be their stronghold and the reason for their eventual rise to power. They were also numerous in the bureaucracy and the national administration. Their relative prosperity and stronghold in the agricultural sector led to the Green Revolution in Pakistan. They specifically benefited from the structural improvements made by the British, such as construction of large irrigation canal networks and a comprehensive railway system.

In the early years the Punjabis and *Mohajirs* elites dominated Pakistan. They took advantage of the institutional imbalance in favour of army and bureaucracy. This led to manipulation of the formal rule of public representatives, which is a system based on numbers. After the demise of Jinnah and Liaquat Ali Khan, the *Mohajirs* lost ground to the Punjabis. The rise to power of the latter led to the military coup in 1958 under Ayub Khan, a Pathan, who started a new Punjabi-Pathan nexus. The militarisation of Pakistan led to loss of democracy and centralisation of power in the hands of the federal government. This led to increasing alienation of Bengalis, who accounted for 55% of the population but only a marginal ratio in army and bureaucracy and a meagre share in industrial and agricultural wealth. Eventually, this led to the loss of East Pakistan.

After the emergence of Bangladesh, Pakistan completely shifted its gaze from the East and towards the West. Pakistan under Bhutto was set on experimenting with democracy once again. However, his populist style of government and socialist oriented economic policies combined with centralisation of power in Islamabad led to alienation of various elite groups including army, bureaucracy, landed and industrial elites, ethnic leadership and *ulema*. Punjabis gained back their position of authority after the 1977 military coup that dislodged Bhutto. This led to the growing influence of the army that once again deviated from democratic experiments. Today it is the Army-Mullah nexus that has proved to be a problem for any return to democracy. According to Waseem, in the case of Pakistan democracy proved to be a progressive force in general, and yet it has led to violence and ethnic tensions in the absence of a framework for distribution of power.

#### **4. One Day Workshop**

The programme of the one-day workshop held on 23 March 2004 at Maison Suger (MSH), which was at the end of the three months research undertaken by the core group members, is given below:

#### **Democracy, Ethnicity and Conflicts in South Asia**

Morning session

#### **Democratisation and the making of ethno-religious communities under British rule**

Chair Jean-Luc Racine (CEIAS/MSH –Paris)

- 1) Sri Lanka,  
Eric Meyer (INALCO, Paris)
- 2) The making of the Muslim identity  
Mushirul Hasan (Jamia Millia, New Delhi)

- 3) The emergence of Hindu nationalism in colonial Punjab  
Christophe Jaffrelot (CERI, Paris)

Discussant, Claude Markovits (CEIAS, Paris)

Afternoon session

### **Democracy and the making of conflict in post-independence South Asia**

Chair, Max Zins (CERI, Paris)

- 4) National security and conflict in the North East  
Paula Banerjee (Calcutta University)

- 5) India, the ethnic democracy  
Gurharpal Singh (Birmingham University)

Discussant: Barbara Harriss-White (Queen Elizabeth House - Oxford)

- 6) Democratisation and ethnic conflict in Pakistan  
Mohammad Waseem (Qaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad)

- 7) *Shia-Sunni* conflicts and electoral politics in Pakistani Punjab,  
Mariam Abou Zahab (INALCO and Sciences Po – Paris)

Discussant: Amélie Blom (Sciences Po – Paris)

### **5. Future prospects: publication**

During the course of the three months period, it was felt that experiences of democracy are extremely diverse in the context of South Asia. Its relationship to conflict has multiple nuances. The diversity of the problematic at hand is reason enough to bring out a publication on this theme. It was also agreed that to understand the problematic it is essential to analyse how South Asian democracies interfaces with nationalism, ethnicity and religion. However, the core group members felt that the lack of a Sri Lankan perspective might diminish the relevance of the volume. It was felt that scholars such as Jayadeva Uyangoda (who was supposed to join the group but who finally could not come to Paris) and Neera Wikramasinghe might be approached so that their perspective could be included in the final publication.

The table of contents of the book in the making is given below:

## **Democracy and Conflict in South Asia**

Edited by: Paula Banerjee, Christophe Jaffrelot and Mohammed Waseem

### **India**

India as an Ethnic Democracy  
Gurharpal Singh

India as a Security-Oriented State - with special reference to the North East  
Paula Banerjee

Hindu/ Muslim Riots, By-products of Electoral Democracy?  
Christophe Jaffrelot

### **Pakistan**

Ethnic Conflicts and Democracy in Pakistan  
Mohammed Waseem

The Shia/Sunni Conflict and Electoral Democracy  
Mariam Abou Zahab

### **Sri Lanka**

[Title to be announced]  
Neera Wikramasinghe

[Title to be announced]  
Jayadeva Udaygoda

Publishers will be approached simultaneously in India and Pakistan as soon as the manuscript of the book will be completed.

## **6. Voices of the Recipients of the IPAS Fellowship**

Paula Banerjee: The IPAS fellowship gave me a unique opportunity to work with social scientists of great repute on a theme of our choice. I could also interact with a number of French colleagues and be exposed to research programmes undertaken by French social scientists on South Asia. I lectured in a number of French Universities such as the Jean Monet University in St. Etienne and University of Paris VII. I also gave lectures in the Himalayan Studies Institute and interacted with colleagues in EHESS. I visited and delivered talks in Netherlands and England during my tenure in France. I would like to thank Jean Luc Racine for his many kindness from the conception of the project until now. I cannot list them all even if I tried. Many thanks to him and the other colleagues of Maison des Sciences de l'Homme for inviting me and giving me this wonderful

opportunity to work in Paris. The libraries, particularly the Science Po and the MSH libraries, were simply marvellous. I would also like to thank Christophe Jaffrelot and Mohammed Waseem for making my stay in Paris so enervating and intellectually satisfying. They helped me to rethink my own research problematic and enriched me with a more complete vision.

I would like to especially extend my thanks to young students of Sciences Po who looked after us so well. I remember our jaunts to Gare du Nord for Indian spices. A special thanks to Josiane Racine for making sure that I did not miss India. Gilles Tarabout was extremely kind in including me in the coming MSH conference on Law and Constitutionalism in India. Thanks to both Ranabir Samaddar and Barbara Harris-White for their many comments on my paper. Also Madame de Montfalcon and Madame Ochoa made sure that we never really faced any hitches and glitches.

Mohammad Waseem: My stay in MSH for the first quarter of the year 2004 was very fruitful for the research project on the interface between democracy and conflict in South Asia. First, it was a rare experience to work as a partner in a joint research project. In that capacity, it was a great learning experience because of requirements of a collective effort at discussing and generating ideas. I liked it and found it immensely rewarding. Secondly, it was important for me as a scholar who has been exposed essentially to the Anglo-American academic tradition both in Pakistan and abroad to operate in the French intellectual environment. Thirdly, I was impressed by the mandate of the MSH programme for advanced studies to operate at a mature level of research as distinct from the doctoral and immediate post-doctoral research. That makes it a programme of great potential to bring together scholars with an experience of a decade or more in the field. For me, it was always inspiring to interact with scholars in charge of various programmes in MSH such as Dr. Jean-Luc Racine, Director, International Programme for Advanced Studies, and Dr. Gilles Tarabout, Director South Asia Programme of Co-operation in Social Sciences. The same is true for Dr Denis Matringe, Director of the Centre for South Asian Studies in the same building. I was able to draw on the library, computer and other infrastructural facilities of MSH, along with enjoying access to Science Po. While in Paris, I was able to travel abroad to participate in academic activities These included: a lecture in the South Asian Institute of the Hiedelberg University; participation in the meeting of the Regional Review Committee for South Asia of the Asia Fellowship Awards programme of the University of Pennsylvania Institute for the Advanced Study of India (UPIASI); and attending the conference on Religion and Violence in South Asia in Balliol College Oxford; lecture to the class of M. Phil. students at the Institute of Political Studies; a briefing lunch with a group of students who were going to UN to act as a Pakistani delegation in various bodies, including Security Council; a meeting with officers of the Foreign Office of France, courtesy Dr. Racine involving a candid discussion on matters of mutual interest for Pakistan and France; and a visit to the Association for the Foundation for Innovative Politics, courtesy Ms. Miniya Chatterjee who had joined the group recently.

Finally, working with Christophe Jaffrelot and Paula Banerjee as a team was highly rewarding by way of an evolving pattern of thinking about the myriad problems of democracy and the absence of it in South Asia.