

**A Report on the Study Week Programme on
'Understanding Collective Action, Violence and Post-Colonial Democracy'
organized by Indian Institute of Advanced Study (IIAS), Shimla
in collaboration with Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group (CRG), Kolkata
on 26-28 September 2011 in Shimla**

Democracy's claim to pacification and social ordering is as old as its history and is regarded as an integral part of its normative architecture. By contrast, its association with collective violence in a country like India is too empirically well-established to be disputed. Violence, according to its normative claim, is always located *outside* the democratic domain implying thereby that its recurrence marks less of - and ironically at the same time a direct threat to - democracy. Democracies are called upon to 'manage' 'tackle' or 'deal with' it not necessarily through democratic means. Democracy, in other words, harbours no obligation towards those who do not observe its rules.

The perspective immediately changes insofar as one proposes to define collective violence as a form of collective action and most importantly as a means of collective claim-making – which democracies can ignore only to their own peril. If democracy as a regime has the effect of 'governmentalizing' social relations by ruling, monitoring and chiseling its population, we have to understand that democratic institutions cannot always subsume democratic politics. Democratic institutions and democratic politics are thus implicated in an endless process of dialoguing. Democracy is not a being but a process of eternal becoming. The greatest challenge of democracy is to come to terms with its own normative architecture. The alternative to democracy therefore can only be democracy itself. The workshop held at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study (IIAS), Shimla on 26-28 September 2011 made a case for a claimant-centred approach rather than a state or regime-centred approach and methodology in order to understand the functioning of democracy in a post-colonial society like India.

The short inaugural session chaired by Ranabir Samaddar began with the welcome address by Gangmumei Kabui on behalf of IIAS. In his introductory remarks, Pradip Kumar Bose underlined the emancipatory streak of 'pure' violence, that is to say, violence shorn of any ideological meaning and justification while making a brief review of the writings on collective violence.

Mayur Suresh, Ashok Aggrwal and Suhit Sen made their presentations on 'Encountering Self-Defence: Reading Life and Death into the Legal Text', 'Inclusion as Violence' and 'Congress and Bureaucracy: Contesting Sovereignty' respectively to the first session on 'Approaches to Understanding Legality, Constitutionality, and Violence in Post-Colonial Democracy'. The session was chaired by Pradip Kumar Bose. Lawrence Liang while commenting on the papers pleaded for legal activism that democracy in a country like India, according to him, leaves scope for.

Pradeep Bhargava chaired the second session on 'State-Building, Persistent Inequalities and Histories of Violence'. Partha Pratim Shil and Ashutosh Kumar

presented their papers on ‘Assembling the Indian State: Constabulary Strikes, Indian Independence and the Question of Colonial ‘Inheritance’, British India 1945-1947’ and ‘Democratic Institutions: Social Inequalities and violence in India’ respectively. Ranabir Samaddar while discussing the papers objected to the current attempts at plotting the transition to post-coloniality simply on the discursive realm and made a strong plea for understanding it in terms of contentious politics and the physicality that it involved.

Ratna Kapur’s paper on ‘The Boomerang Effect of Progressive Politics: Critiquing Feminist Legal Engagements on Violence against Women’ presented to the third session on ‘Patriarchy, Gender, Democracy and Violence’ was an attempt at deconstructing each of the otherwise widely used terms figuring in the theme of the session. Swarna Rajagopalan presented her paper on ‘Baby Girl Blues: Patriarchy, Gender, Democracy and Violence’ to the same session. The session was chaired by Samir Kumar Das. Samita Sen’s discussion on the papers raised the issue of historicity of patriarchy and how patriarchy is implicated in such other historically determinate structures as capitalism etc.

The final session on ‘Democratic Institutions and Violence’ was chaired by Samita Sen. While Samir Kumar Das presented his paper on ‘Institutions, Equality and Violence: Reflections on the State of Democracy in Contemporary India’, Sabyasachi Basu Ray Chaudhury’s paper on ‘Election and Violence’ was presented in absentia and was read out by Mithilesh Kumar. The two papers were discussed by Amit Prakash and Pradeep Bhargava. The issue that occupied much of the discussion was whether majority-minority divide and violence are inevitably embedded in the institutions themselves – more particularly in the way democracies design them or they are just incidental to its functioning.

The wrap up session discussed the modalities of taking forward the initiative. Ranabir Samaddar reported the gathering of the Director’s request of translating the initiative into a book-length publication with about 12 authors. It was resolved that 3 more authors (in addition to the 9 who have already written their draft papers) would be requested to contribute particularly on such areas as law, domestic violence and dialogical democracy. The meeting further resolved that Samir Kumar Das and Lawrence Liang be the editors of the proposed publication. The authors will be requested to send the revised versions of their papers by the end of February 2012. The meeting ended with a vote of thanks to the IAS, Ashok Sharma and other members of the office staff and CRG took particular note of the personal initiative that the IAS Director Peter de’Souza had taken while offering timely and valuable pieces of advice. CRG also thanked the host institution IAS for its hospitality. Besides paper contributors and discussants, some of the IAS fellows and scholars from outside also participated in the programme.