

REFLECTIONS ON GOVERNANCE IN POST-COLONIAL DEMOCRACY

Report on release of Political Transition and Development Imperatives in India and New Subjects and New Governance in India edited by Ranabir Samaddar and Suhit K. Sen followed by discussion on 'Reflections on Governance in Post-Colonial Democracy', 4 May 2012.

A discussion on governance in post-colonial democracy followed the release of two books titled 'Political Transition and Development Imperatives in India' and 'New Subjects and New Governance in India'. Calcutta Research Group (CRG) Director Ranabir Samaddar kicked off the discussion saying that the work on the two books had begun as a research project on autonomy in 2002 and that it had produced more questions than answers. There is growing dissatisfaction with 'governmentalised autonomy' and an increasing divide between popular aspirations for justice and administrative configurations of autonomy.

The studies on autonomy were followed inescapably by research in the related field of social justice. Samaddar mentioned that the work done by CRG deviated from philosophical ideas of justice and instead focused on ethnographic studies to read justice in real terms. The work on governance, democracy and development, which followed consequentially, was a sort of culmination of a well-rounded enterprise.

The work on governance on the basis of which the two books being released was the third phase of research.

Peter Ronald DeSouza, Director, Indian Institute of Asian Studies, Shimla, acknowledged that the two volumes being released represented significant contributions towards a new framework for understanding post-colonial democracy, and, in the Indian context the two transitions that characterized it - the transition from colonial to constitutional rule and the transition from a welfarist to a market-oriented model. He said, however, that the connection between the empirical evidence presented in the essays and the overarching theoretical framework needed to be established more strongly. He also felt that the richness of the studies could have been enhanced by a comparative study between two states as well as by outlining an alternative route to development.

Yogendra Yadav, Senior Fellow, CSDS, Delhi, in his lecture on 'The Relevance of Survey Research in Understanding Democratic Governance', raised the question of evidence in the social sciences, noting that in the discipline of political science it was weakly articulated, as an entry into an analysis of survey research. Yadav began with the example of the debate over a caste census, noting that one of the objections to it was that it was difficult to execute. The more serious objection, he said, was that it would freeze social identities and was a status quo-ist

instrument. Yadav admitted that while there was some truth in this argument, a truth that caused him some discomfort, such a caste census could also be emancipatory in that it could bring discrete groups into blocs that would have greater political and social strength. . A caste census, he also noted would facilitate targeted programmes of affirmative action. Whichever way it is looked at, he argued that the census, a form of survey, is relevant to society and social research. Three kinds of critiques of survey research, Yadav continued, had come up in the 1960s: that survey research was epistemologically naïve, politically conservative and ethnocentric. Practitioners, he noted, had not responded to these criticisms seriously enough then and survey research remained methodologically naïve even as it had become an industry. Yadav argued, however, that in countries like India, survey research provided democratic tools as it brought about encounters with ordinary people on a mega scale due to the principle of randomness and a foregrounding of the public at a time when public arenas were being increasingly privatized. In conclusion, Yadav said that survey research needed to encounter the post-positivist world besides restoring the centrality of language and fundamentally rethinking field work protocols.

Discussant Amit Prakash, Centre for Studies in Law and Governance, JNU, New Delhi, said he was not so sure that the distinction between the 'conceptual' and the 'empirical' held water. He claimed that conceptual underpinnings informed empirical studies. It was difficult to deconstruct the basic categories of survey research due to its homogenizing tendency. His view was that the debate on survey research had to centre on 'process' more than outcome. It was problematic that numbers were posited as unassailable and that survey research was seen as a direct hotline to truth. Prakash also felt that 'expert' surveys often masquerade as mass surveys leading to a presumption that answers to questions of governance lies in a technocratic realm.

The first **Round Table** on '**Areas of Further Research on Governance in Post-Colonial Democracy**' had Dipankar Sinha, Department of Political Science, Calcutta University, as the chair. Anup Dhar, School of Human Studies, Ambedkar University, Delhi, raised three questions. Firstly, how does one deal with inassimilable exceptions? Secondly, how does one understand the tension between governance and democracy? Thirdly, is it possible to create 'outsidedness' with respect to being left out of existing governmental exercises? He cited Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* as a propositional outside that created an anti-governance, anti-state space. He felt there was a need to explore the politics of the 'non-governed'.

Manish K. Jha, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, spoke about the governing of protests. He asked why certain protests were allowed to flourish while others created unease, like the protest by Anna Hazare or protests against SEZs, mining companies, etc. He argued that due to the exigencies of democracy, the state was required to show, at least overtly, that it was pro-people. Hence, repression, when deemed necessary, was carried out surreptitiously. He said that one set of protests that negotiated with existing power structures were governed with

'benevolence' while more inventive techniques were needed to govern protests that questioned the dominant framework.

Ratan Khasnabis from the Department of Business Management, Calcutta University, said there is a tension between democracy and development in the post-colonial context. Whereas development marginalized people, democracy was supposed to empower them. The key question, according to Khasnabis, was how this tension could be resolved under the existing system.

Discussant Ashutosh Kumar, Department of Political Science, Panjab University, Chandigarh, stressed the logical connection of current governance with colonial state practices, especially in the context of forbidden protests. Pointing out that the middle classes were votaries of state institutions, he asked how one could explain the lack of trust in the state among the middle classes.

Rajarshi Dasgupta, CPS, JNU, Delhi, opined that some rethinking was required on the class characterization of the state and that there was a need to go back to the Emergency as a period where exceptional measures were normalized. He also asked how the category 'poor' was being thought about today as an object of knowledge.

The second **Round Table** was titled '**Areas of Further Research on Women and Governance in Post-Colonial Democracy**'.

Swarna Rajagopalan, Director, Chaitanya, The Policy Consultancy, Chennai, started the session talking about the difficulty unaffiliated, independent researchers faced in accessing records. There were no biographies of women MLAs or MPs. Oral histories were not easily accessible. All that *was* available was a random collection of snapshots. She said that there was an invisibility of women in records in the public sphere as well as a lot of grey areas in the data on domestic violence. She emphasized the need to create a body of accessible information.

Paula Banerjee, Secretary, CRG, and faculty member, Department of South and South East Asian Studies, Calcutta University, observed that in the late colonial period, women were thought of as objects of governance. Women as participants in governance came much later. The notion of self-governance had a lot to do with women's education and the role of women in the nationalist movement. The plethora of laws in the 1950s and 1960s dealing with questions of succession, divorce, etc addressed women as individuals and not as a category of governance. Caste movements and trade union mobilizations were important spaces where women challenged their objectification. They participated in and introspected on their own positions in the movements. The 73rd amendment to the Constitution was a watershed because it cemented women's role in governance and local self-governance was seen as the panacea for all evils.

Uddipana Goswami, Literary Editor, *Seven Sisters Post*, Guwahati, said that one of the major strategies of conflict-resolution adopted by the Indian State to appease ethnic aspirations of communities had been what she called the mechanical application of the principle of autonomy. Rather than resolving conflicts however, such autonomisation created more fissures within and between communities. While ethnic elites benefited from autonomy arrangements, there were various segments that remained marginalised and deprived of any say. The doing away with the third tier of governance in many autonomous councils was one example. Another was the lack of participation of women and their marginalisation in all matters relating to governance. There was no reservation for women in these councils. Goswami noted a disturbing phenomenon: women who participated in insurgent movements often became the moral police of their communities by upholding patriarchal presumptions.

Discussant Badri Narayan Tiwari, G.B. Pant Social Science Institute, Allahabad, opined that discourses on women were full of contradictions. While in rural India women were considered wise but invisible socially, in the city, women were invisible in important sectors although visible in social life.

Bonita Aleaz, Department of Political Science, Calcutta University, commented that two points had emerged from the discussions: the performative facet of social democracy and its experiential aspects. She wondered whether looking for subjective voices aided policymaking. Trying to recover women's take on development, citizenship, etc. might give vent to fragmented voices. The notion of 'common good' had also hardly been tackled in women-related policies. Aleaz felt that due to the absence of women in formal spaces of justice in certain areas, quotidian experiences needed to be looked into. She commented that although it was easier for the state to provide symbolic representation, substantive representation of women in formal spheres was needed.

The evening long discussion in this way identified themes and issues of further research on governance and post-colonial democracy. The meeting ended with thanks to the Ford Foundation for supporting CRG's research work and dialogues on governance. Thanks were also given to the research collective and the network consisting of several individuals, researchers, and discussants who carried on the work for three years. Suhit Sen offered the vote of thanks.