

**Draft: Please do not quote**

## **The Democratic Audit of South Asia: An Auditor's notebook**

**Peter Ronald deSouza**

Centre for the Study of Developing Societies,  
29, Rajpur Road, Delhi 110054, India

email: [peter@csdsdelhi.org](mailto:peter@csdsdelhi.org)

website: [www.lokniti.org](http://www.lokniti.org)

*Theme subject.* (MT 01) The Crises and Capacity of Democracy,

*Session.* State of Democracy II (272)

*Specialization Area.* Political Processes: Public Opinion, Attitudes, Parties, Forces, Security Groups and Elections.

**Presented at Fukuoka 2006 – 20<sup>th</sup> IPSA World Congress.**

This paper is to basically a reflexive exercise. It reflects on the process of doing a State of Democracy in South Asia (SDSA) study, where the five countries of Nepal, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka, were assessed in terms of their democracy. It looks back, somewhat introspectively, at the nearly 36 months of its execution (from mid 2003 till date), the various decision points it had to face, the unanticipated hurdles it had to overcome, and the many compromises it had to make. These reflections will be at two levels, at the conceptual, where the genuine challenges of getting a group of authors from several nations to accept a common interpretation will be examined, (what can be termed as the challenge of building an overlapping consensus in a situation of ethical and epistemic plurality), and at the operational, where some of the practical difficulties of conducting a collaborative, multi-country, comparative exercise will be discussed. It may be of some use for a democracy audit exercise to look at the auditing process at both these levels since the concerns expressed, although necessarily specific to this particular project, have in all probability aspects that are common to many such exercises. There is thus something to be learned. This paper seeks to add to this pool of collective learning, to reduce, in a sense, the area of innocence.

### **Location as determinant:**

The initial issue on which the audit had to take a position was whether the study area, which may be a region in geographical and perhaps even geo-strategic terms, could also be considered a region in political terms. We needed to identify the grounds for treating South Asia as a democratic region. Did all the five countries which were to be audited by the use of a common methodology - Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bangladesh - also share common problems of democracy or was Pakistan an outlier having political characteristics that were distinct and that justified the suggestion that it perhaps conceptually belonged elsewhere? Did the contemporary political history of Pakistan place it more in the Latin American region than in South Asia?<sup>1</sup> The issue was a difficult one since all the countries did not share a common colonial past, although 4 out of the 5 were British colonies, and since all did not have similar political institutions and also since each had a different post-colonial history (except Nepal). We could only side-step the issue by arguing that since the public discourse in each of these countries uses a common political idiom to talk about political processes involving politicians, parties, government, state, nation,

corruption, political family, ethnic group, etc., and about normative goals such as social justice, equality, and rights, etc., a discourse that was distinctly South Asian, it was valid to treat the five countries as a political region. This political discourse, we hypothesized, shared a political commonsense, about what was wrong with the political order and what could be done improve it. It was this political commonsense that we hoped to recover and to reconstruct in our study.

The next big hurdle, which also needed side-stepping, was the issue of ‘path-dependency’. We needed to examine the consequence of a particular choice of institutions - presidential or parliamentary, unitary or federal, theocratic or secular - for the subsequent unfolding of the democratic process. Path dependency holds that the timing and historical sequence of contingent events matters in shaping the basic direction of political development and that choices at formative conjunctures are more important than those at later conjunctures thereby locking the polity into a certain path of development which increases the cost of switching from one alternative to another. Not only are there increasing costs of switching but there are also increasing returns of staying within the existing path.<sup>2</sup>

...this combination of some contingency at the front end and some degree of determinism at the back end of path dependent processes is what gives rise to the most interesting features of path-dependent social and political processes. These include unpredictability (i.e., outcomes cannot be seen ex-ante), sensitive dependence on initial conditions (i.e., early events are more important than later events), nonergodicity (i.e., contingent events do not cancel out), and inertia (i.e., once in motion processes tend to stay in motion until an equilibrium or final outcome is reached).<sup>3</sup>

When the events and choices at particular conjunctures in South Asia are seen in terms of these arguments, of path dependency and increasing returns, then the possibilities for the deepening and expansion of democracy should be seen as varying within a limited set in each country because of their different constitutional histories. Choices for political agency, of individual or groups, are constrained and not as open as commentators are inclined to suggest. The significant of these different constitutional histories lies in the different political dynamics that they produce. A

democratic audit must, therefore, when it attempts evaluation, recognize this issue of path dependency.

Another issue that must be recognized upfront is that of scale. South Asia is a large region with one of the countries existing at a level of a magnitude not found elsewhere. The large scale of the polity tempts one towards engaging with the science of large processes, where tools such as probabilistic theorems and ideas such as chaos theory would need to be considered. These ideas have, till date, not infiltrated the discourse of democracy and hence we have to rely on theoretical tools that have been crafted for smaller polities. Perhaps the issue of governability would look very different if it were seen through the lens of chaos theory. In addition to this factor of scale - the region has approximately 1.3 billion people aspiring for better futures through the political process - is the issue of diversity. These 1.3 billion people of South Asia are divided along significant, and diverse, ethnic, religious, linguistic and regional lines. Identity politics is becoming very active in South Asia. Democracy, because of its mobilizational logic, both encourages political expression along identity lines and also the accommodation of the political dynamics this produces. To complicate matters further in the region can also be found the largest number of people who, in absolute terms, live below the poverty line. A democratic audit of South Asia has thus to immediately confront two of the most the intractable issues of democratic consolidation, that of the internal diversity of the population and of the high level of absolute poverty. These features in any society often lend themselves to conflict and discord rather than consensus and harmony. And yet this is a region where there is significant aspiration for democracy.

To get a sense of this aspiration the study, relying on a cross sectional survey (about which more later), sought the attitudes of the people of South Asia on the issue of 'support' and 'satisfaction' with democracy in the five countries.<sup>4</sup> Using a funnel method for processing the specific responses into a composite response (see endnote for the method and the meaning of the categories - strong believers, weak believers, skeptics) we found that the strong believers in democracy were about 35 % in India, 32% in Sri Lanka, 20% in Bangladesh, 18% in Nepal, and only 8% in Pakistan. This low in Pakistan is supported by the high number of skeptics, 32 % as compared to the corresponding figure of 13% in both India and Sri Lanka. Pakistan seems to have

a low belief in democracy. Combining responses on satisfaction with the performance of democracy in the country to indices of support adds more details to the emerging picture. In India those who were very satisfied or satisfied were about 78%, in Bangladesh 84%, in Nepal 43%, in Pakistan about 56% and in Sri Lanka curiously about 55%. So while clearly there is high support for democracy in Sri Lanka there is also high dissatisfaction. The figure of those totally dissatisfied is 27% in Pakistan, 20% in Nepal, 18% in Sri Lanka, 7% in Bangladesh, and 8% in India. Possibly we can trace a correlation between the experience of democracy, and the attitude to democracy revealed by the survey. This initial reporting of the responses to two questions in the survey is intended to underscore the point that, in spite of the difficulties mentioned earlier, democracy has become a part of the popular commonsense in South Asia, except in Pakistan. And herein lies the challenge. How has democracy become a part of the popular commonsense?

While there are several routes for the arrival and domestication of the idea of democracy in South Asia, and while there are several causal processes through which we can map its emergence as a major moral and intellectual resource for regulating collective life, it is necessary for us to recognize that its place in the popular imagination signifies its status as a driver of change. Democracy's presence in South Asia produces a social upheaval in these societies. *It begins to demand new ways of organizing collective life. It initiates a new process of 'social interpretation' and produces a vibrant 'public sphere' where contestations at several levels are regularly played out.* This process of expansion of democracy takes place in tandem with the consolidation of the nation state and, as the history of the last 60 years of the countries of South Asia has show, the latter is sometimes at odds with the former. The presence of these two robust discourses in South Asia, of the consolidation of the nation-state and of the deepening of democracy, and their dual character of being both autonomous and complementary to each other is often ignored, or underplayed, in the study of democracy in South Asia. The interplay between these two discourses, which was always a characteristic of the post-colonial world, has now become, since 9/11, a characteristic of the global discourse on democracy.

**The elements of democracy:**

In the light of these considerations the audit had to return to first principles. What should be our working definition of democracy? What were the attributes to be audited<sup>5</sup>? Here the IDEA Handbook on Democracy Assessment was invaluable<sup>6</sup>. Setting out the relationship between the normative and the institutional the Handbook distinguishes between core principles, mediating principles, and institutions. This three level structuration of the idea of democracy is very helpful since it allows comparative studies such as ours to navigate the eddies that are found in the global discussions on politics, about true and suspect universals, about ethnocentric biases which demand a ‘one shoe fits all’ evaluation, about the lexical prioritizing of political objectives, and about explanations which have to be sensitive to the particularities of history and context. These three levels are able to accommodate the diversities of practice and institutions that one encounters in democracies globally.

The auditing challenge is hence about distinguishing more from less democracy in contrast to distinguishing between democracy and non-democracy. While the former binary is intellectually the more productive the latter binary should nevertheless not be treated as irrelevant since it is, in fact, the starting point for any audit. We must begin by distinguishing democracy from non-democracy and then proceed by distinguishing more from less democracy. The core principles in the IDEA framework, of popular control of power, and political equality, give us the standards by which to make this distinction. *They provide the evaluative choice of the last instance*. Not only do they provide us with a basis for adjudicating between several desirable values which maybe in conflict in real world situations, i.e., they help us choose those which are consistent with ‘popular control’ and ‘political equality’ over those which are at odds with them, but they also help us in choosing appropriate institutions for bringing about these desired outcomes.

The mediating principles of accountability, responsiveness, participation, authorisation, representation, transparency, and solidarity<sup>7</sup>, serve as the basis for the institutional design. They also show that a single mediating principle may endorse more than one institutional form and hence a wider choice of institutional forms becomes available. This allows for a wide choice of institutions. Those that are appropriate to the needs and constraints of a particular context can then be selected. The choice of institutions is however a political choice not a rational one, made by political elites pursuing interests and displaying imaginations that are part personal, part

national. The auditor, however, just needs to ensure that these institutions satisfy the conditions set by these mediating principles, ie., that they pass what can be called the democracy test. The institutional history of South Asia shows that the institutions chosen have both passed and failed this test.

This, however, is a difficult test to administer. Determining which institutions meet the conditions, and which do not, is not easy since it involves a judgment about what is appropriate. This word is the gateway into the world of contestation with questions such as appropriate for whom? with what purpose? and with what sacrifices? beginning to get asked. The audit here slips seamlessly from looking for moral reasons to looking for political reasons for choices, behaviours, and outcomes. The Assessment tool developed by IDEA, in a sense stands between these two domains of moral and political reason. We must recognize this since what may be considered morally deficient may be politically acceptable, what is logically indefensible may be politically robust.

These issues of design, of the architecture of democracy in a particular place, take us to the next stage in the audit, the actual working of these designs and the outcomes of their working. Where the emphasis of the audit, at the level of design, is largely at what Weber would term the legal-rational, the emphasis at the level of working is at the political-sociological or political-economic. It is here that politics becomes the main text of the audit, where its key attributes of adaptation, accommodation, and adjustment needs to be mapped. If South Asia shares a common idiom of politics the word 'adjust' is one of its keywords. 'Adjust' signifies many things. It could imply compromise within rules and also compromise outside rules, it could suggest a temporary dilution of principles for later gains, it could indicate a healthy pragmatism in opposition to a strident ideological posturing, it could point to the trumping of value-rationality by instrumental rationality, it could illustrate the accommodations made by groups in a plural context. In South Asia 'adjust' is both a request and a ruling, a plea and a direction, depending on from which direction in the locus of power the suggestion is made. The empirical exploration of democracy in South Asia is replete with instances of 'adjustment'. The auditor has to decide how to view them. Are they strategically defensible or are they normatively unacceptable? This is a task at once most challenging and most exciting, since it requires us to have not just measurement tools but also a

clear sense of the march of democracy. And this requires a social theoretical imagination. Such an empirical journey will bring one into contact with several paradoxes of democracy such as the expansion of women's rights in Pakistan during military rule, or the growth of the family in politics with the spread of democracy, or the heightening of identity politics and the concomitant risks of majoritarianism, that have increased with the deepening of democracy.

One really intractable paradox is with respect to the core principles. As we steer the polity towards greater political equality, we formulate more rules to ensure that decisions are more impersonal and less discretionary and partisan. But the more rules we have the more power we transfer to the deciding authority. Since all the rules do not cohere into a consistent whole - an engineering feat where nuts, bolts, brackets, and spans, fit exactly together to produce the Eiffel tower (this is the rationalist's myth which persists in our democratic thinking about the rule of law only to be punctured by political anthropology) - the increase in the number of rules actually results, inadvertently, in a reduction in the popular control of power. *More political equality may actually translate into less popular control.*

### **Methodological Pluralism:**

It is in this challenging historical location that our **State of Democracy in South Asia (SDSA)** audit was to be done. Aware of the challenges ahead the audit began with the assumption that a single research method would only give access to a slice of reality. The study, to use a Chinese sloganeering style, was based on three recognitions: that reality is both intensively and extensively infinite, that knowing this reality requires an acceptance of epistemic and value pluralism, and that therefore a methodologically plural strategy would need to be adopted for the audit exercise. To access the different dimensions of democracy that were mentioned earlier it was necessary to look at the state of democracy in South Asia along five axes: (i) promise, (ii) design, (iii) working, (iv) outcomes, and (v) futures. As will be discussed later, the actual report will of course have to integrate the findings at each axis.

Keeping these cautionary notes in mind, the study adopted four research pathways: (i) A cross-sectional attitudinal survey, (ii) Dialogues, (iii) Case studies, and (iv) Qualitative assessment.

Each would provide insights unavailable to the others while also having certain constraints specific to itself. In what follows I shall briefly describe the reasoning behind the four research pathways chosen.

### ***The Cross Sectional Attitudinal survey.***

The cross sectional attitudinal survey provides the steel frame for the SDSA study. It is the first study in South Asia to canvas, region wide, ordinary people's attitudes to a range of political questions. The survey, because it is administered to a sample of respondents who are similar in their characteristics to the whole population, gives us a region wide snapshot of political attitudes. Since the sample is large, in excess of 19,000 respondents (See Appendix A), the aggregate data allows us to examine these attitudes in terms of at least eight relevant parameters: gender, place of residence (rural or urban), age, education, income, religion and ethnicity. This provides with a treasure trove of data and although it is only a single snapshot, being the first such study, it gives us the initial contours of the political landscape. We are able to report on the attitudes of different sections of the population of this region on a range of political issues.

### ***Dialogues.***

The dialogue component of the SDSA study was planned to supplement the data produced by the cross sectional survey, case study and qualitative assessment components. Dialogues were specifically chosen because of the belief that there exists, in a particular social and political domain, a pluralism of knowledge universes that should be recognized and recovered. Because of the way in which it is structured, and the attention given to ensuring the participation of varied interests, the dialogue is a valuable way of recovering this diversity of voices.

It is important at this point to distinguish the dialogue method advocated here from the dialogue method used in situations of conflict to achieve reconciliation. While both have as their goal the promotion of understanding the latter seeks through this understanding to establish a consensus between the dialogue partners, to build trust between the parties in conflict, and thereby to develop a shared sense of purpose. The unstated assumption here is that the differences that we encounter are differences based on a misunderstanding of each other's position, as a result of

limited knowledge of the other's views, and that once this is overcome, and understanding achieved, these differences would disappear. In contrast to this position of the possibility of consensus the assumption in our dialogue is the recognition of the essential plurality of knowledge universes and the further recognition that such plurality may be incommensurable. It is to appreciate this pluralism, and to incorporate it into our narration, that the dialogue as an instrument was adopted. (see Appendix 2 for the method of the dialogue)

By following this methodology, and recovering a plurality of perspectives, the dialogues gave us insights into other viewpoints that would not otherwise be accessible. They allowed a range of views, especially those of vulnerable groups, to be placed on the discussion agenda. The dialogues helped build up stakeholders in the project since participants could respond to the frame of the project, and sometimes change and improve upon it. Through these face to face exchanges we were able to expand the universe of associates of the study and to build up goodwill and produce some understanding of the plurality of viewpoints. The dialogues challenged the conventional wisdom of democracy since some of the critiques voiced were of a fundamental nature and concern a conflict over primary values. It was therefore difficult to philosophically adjudicate between these different viewpoints thus endorsing the appreciation of epistemic and value pluralism.

### ***Case studies.***

The case study was chosen, as one of the four research pathways since it offers an opportunity to probe more deeply the dimensions of a chosen case. As one of the investigative instruments available for developing a deeper understanding of an issue, the case study allows us to explore the web of interconnections that constitute the slice of reality being studied. To make sense of these interconnections the case study, therefore, needs to prioritize these interconnections, in terms of their importance and in terms of the intensity of their impact on the political process. Such prioritization allows us to appreciate the forces and drivers of change that are producing the new political realities. Our choice of 16 cases address some key ideas in democratic theory. For example our case study on the family in politics looks at dynasties and, given their increasing prevalence and prominence in South Asian politics, compels us to ask whether we should look at

the family in politics differently not as nepotism but as a form of social capital. Another set of case studies look at the rule of law. They complicate different aspects of such rule. For example: (i) Law that facilitates corruption and rent-seeking, e.g., Collusion in Government and Corruption, (ii) Law that is inaccessible to the common man and therefore new institutions need to be created to fill the void, e.g., *jan sunwai* (public hearings) (iii) Law that is used to seek personal gain, e.g., ethnography of a law court, (iv) Law that is seen in terms of denial of citizenship, e.g., Madhesi people in Nepal, and (v) Extraordinary law – construction of the other, e.g., the existence of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) , in Manipur in spite of continued popular opposition to it.

The 16 case studies done were deliberately chosen to complicate and problematize the discourse on democracy. Their *raison d'être* was to confront the prevailing discourse of democracy with several 'inconvenient facts' . While a case study is often used to illustrate an argument, or to provide empirical detail concerning the attributes of a concept, the strategy in our choice of case study was different. Here we sought not to illustrate but to complicate an argument, to confront the conventional wisdom on democracy with an analytical or a moral puzzle. The presence of the 'inconvenient fact' requires the discourse on democracy to devise responses to it. It has either to accommodate the 'inconvenient fact', and thereby modify its own claims, or to reject it and thereby provide reasons for this rejection. The choice of ignoring the 'inconvenient fact' is, however, not available since the case of the study is too compelling from a democratic point of view.

An additional advantage of the case study method is that it encourages the use of different approaches. For example the use of *analytical studies* to engage with the general normative and theoretical issues in the democracy discourse as was done in the case study on 'Collusion in Government and Corruption' . In another case a *political anthropological* approach was used to detail the actual dynamics of an institution and/or a process in a working democracy as was done in the 'Life of a File' that traces what happens when a citizen seeks his/her entitlements from the state. While a case study, by itself, does not offer a basis for generalization, since it is an examination of a unique case, it offers insights into the dynamics of a working democracy. These insights supplement what surveys and dialogues have to offer.

### *Qualitative assessment.*

The fourth research pathway chosen, to supplement the other three, was the IDEA democracy assessment methodology. We have given it a different name since we see the whole exercise, encompassing all four methods, as Democracy Assessment. Because it is based on the expert's assessment of democracy we have called it qualitative assessment. There are several well known advantages of this method which however bear repeating here. The first is its insistence that the assessment is to be done by the experts from the country itself. This ensures that the assessment benefits from knowledge available only to locals, akin to the diagnosis of the family doctor who knows family medical history as well as the relationships between members to determine whether the reported illnesses has a psychosomatic or a physiological basis. The second is that it is amenable to adaptation and modification. The fact that it is not cast in stone allows it to incorporate aspects that are relevant to the democracy under study. Although the instrument itself is comprehensive it is flexible enough to accommodate new issues of significance.

The third is that it does not attempt to rank countries on some democracy index. The comparative exercise is intra-country, between provinces, if at all, and not inter-country. This makes it more acceptable to countries since it is not about shaming them but about identifying democracy deficits. The fourth is that it looks at factors at each of the levels of government within the country and also at factors from outside that impact democracy within the country. The IDEA instrument, comprising a four-part grid, (i) Citizenship, Law and Rights, (ii) Representative and Accountable Government, (iii) Civil Society and Popular Participation, each of which had a large number of questions, was modified by us. We too used a four-part grid but identified them differently as, (i) promise, (ii) design, (iii) working, and (iv) outcomes and futures. This too had a large number of questions and these too were sent to experts in each country for assessment. Several problems were experienced in the administration of this instrument which I shall discuss a little later. In this paper I shall dwell only on the difficulties of the qualitative assessment, and not the other instruments, since this session is specifically about sharing the experience of the use by different countries of the IDEA instrument.

### *Difficulties of the Qualitative Assessment methodology.*

For the benefit of a clear discussion I shall list these difficulties sequentially.<sup>8</sup>

- (i) The Qualitative Assessment (QA) of democracy meant that there will be a common theoretical perspective and similar framework for assessing democracy in a country. But we realized that unless there is intra-country consultation and monitoring, QA simply becomes a series of independent essays by individual scholars.
- (ii) It is necessary to orient scholars who are participating in QA. The SDSA experience is that most scholars tend to ignore the real import of assessment. The project did not have the resources to bring the participating scholars and give them a more personal briefing on the whole exercise.
- (iii) In many countries there is a very weak tradition of scholars coming together for brain storming and evolving an assessment based on this collective exercise. Thus, assessments tend to be purely personal rather than reflecting the general sense of the academic community. It may be a worthwhile idea to form smaller groups of scholars around each theme and ask them to spend at least a couple of days together forging a consensus on the theme.
- (iv) The SDSA tried to involve scholars in different capacities. One such attempt was to involve scholars as peer reviewers. In the case of India and Nepal this method helped immensely. But in some cases we also found two related but opposite practices [OR trends] wherein essays were either endorsed without correction or demolished completely. Such reviews are not helpful to the authors.
- (v) Most essays stop short of taking note of and explaining the range of analyses on the issues involving QA. It may be advisable to involve middle level scholars rather than senior scholars in the assessment work as the senior scholars rather than summarizing the existing state of scholarship tend to present their own views as the only valid viewpoints.
- (vi) QA is a good opportunity to (a) summarize the state of the existing literature, (b) compare the prevailing range of opinions, (c) initiate intra-country and inter-country comparisons, (d) make a scholarly assessment of the functioning of democracy. This, however, requires more commitment and frequent interaction among scholars from the country itself. The QA exercise if it is to be institutionalized will require a practice that encourages the

networking of scholars from within the country and also a commitment to higher and stricter standards of analyses. Mission must be introduced into the method. Auditors must already have had some engagement with democracy issues before joining the project. A training in mainstream political science alone is hence insufficient.

These issues take our reflection in the direction of the pragmatics of the project. We need to incorporate into the methodology these practical issues or else we would be building our castle upon sand. One could, I believe, quite legitimately argue that the practical is also political and so what may appear to be issues of management and efficiency are in effect issues of knowledge and power. Which brings the discussion to another issue that is quasi managerial and quasi political.

### **Operational Structure:**

To carry out this multi-country exercise it is imperative that I mention, however briefly, the administrative system we set up to both oversee and execute the study. Although these details do not quite fit into an academic reflexive exercise, for they appear quite boring, I have chosen to mention them here because setting up the collaborative and the oversight systems requires one to make decisions that are not just management issues but political issues as well. This political aspect, often ignored, needs to be recognized and accepted. Collaboration exercises, involving teams from many countries, are often conducted within a locus of power. The structure of international knowledge production takes place within a power asymmetry whose attributes can be spelled out but this I shall not do here since it would take us on a long detour. It is sufficient for us to recognize that such collaborative excises, ironically, must also be subject to the democratic test of ‘popular control’ and ‘political equality’.

The project began with the identification of a country coordinator from Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal and India. These coordinators, together with the three principal investigators, and members from IDEA, constituted the coordination committee of the project where all major policy decisions, from the deciding on the calendar of activities, to evaluating the questions to be asked, to assigning responsibilities, to developing a story-line, to working out its structure and

sequence, to even working out remuneration and honoraria, were taken. Hence the Principal Investigators, all of whom came from India where the project was initiated and where it was housed, at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, were constrained in terms of their executive freedom. Such consultation took place at regular meetings of the Coordination Committee, and also electronically, a strategy that produced trust among the scholars involved. This may be a given for many experienced collaborationists globally but in the context of perhaps a first collaborative study on Democracy, by scholars in the region, it was a huge advance. More consensus building could perhaps be attempted but with the limited resources of the project for such meetings, and with the difficulty placed in the way of such projects by the governments in the region, particularly of India and Pakistan, staying the course and building trust was very important for the success of the project. What was lost in terms of executive efficiency was gained in terms of political trust.

The different stages of the study were also discussed with an International Advisory Committee. Aspects of the study were in addition also placed for discussion at the dialogues held across South Asia. Other than the point made above discussing the other operational details would not be very productive. A working consensus on these issues was easy to arrive at with a little 'adjustment'. What was more difficult to achieve was a consensus on how the data should be interpreted and how the story should be told.

### **Concluding reflections:**

Three issues proved particularly difficult to maneuver around. The first was with respect to epistemic and value pluralism. Since the authorial responsibility of the report rested equally on several persons, principal investigators and country coordinators, building an overlapping consensus on the way the data should be interpreted, in a situation of many contending comprehensive perspectives, was very difficult and at times impossible. The limits of rationality were regularly met. Since a consensus on interpretation required several levels of agreement, in terms of the attributes of the nodal concept, in terms of the value slope of the explanatory theory, in terms of the shared imagination of what was being attempted, in terms of the sequencing of argument with more significant arguments (what are they) getting disproportionate attention

within the limits of the study, etc the study retreated from its maximizing strategy of forging a shared imagination and settled instead on a satisficing strategy of building a coherent story. The risk of entering the zone of incommensurability, and hence of communicative breakdown, often meant that strategic compromises on argument, of the one step forward two steps back kind, often won over unrelenting challenges over its validity. This in a sense is the essence of democracy itself, where in a world constituted by an epistemic and value pluralism, compromise is often the best and only basis for advance. The rationalist's claim that intellectual agreement, in the academic world, is based on reason and evidence, all else being unacceptable, is overstated. Democratic theory must amplify this aspect of the process of arriving at an agreement. It perpetuates the myth that agreement is arrived at as a result of presenting arguments and facts before the court of reason. Compromise, bordering on appeasement, is also at play.

This becomes most evident when a nationalist (or for that matter gender or ethnic) lens is introduced into the deliberations. This brings me to the second issue that is to be considered. Democracy, as a concept, belongs to the class of essentially contestable concepts. The contest can be many layered. The IDEA framework has helped limit the area of disagreement since it identifies both core and mediating principles and thus limits the disagreement to the attributes of these principles. In South Asia thinking about democracy is inevitably linked with issues of 'social justice' and with 'protection against tyranny' as much as they are with 'popular control' and 'political equality'. But while these can be negotiated around, the big challenge is the parallel discourse about state formation. The nationalist lens limits the range of possible explanations. A failed state, or a repressive state are, for example, not available explanations. The potential audience and the public discourse within which it is located, described by Ernest Renan as the nation's daily plebiscite, influences the way in which the story will be told. Reports, after all, are not written by disembodied authors for disembodied audiences but by authors for audiences that are located in time and that have personal and collective histories. In South Asia this factor, of the discourse of the nation-state, is particularly evident. It, in fact, runs parallel with the discourse of democracy and hence the political contest between the nations of South Asia, particularly India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, over a range of issues from militancy, to minority rights, to migrants, infects the discourse of democracy.

The third issue is on the intellectual class, ourselves, the authors of the report. The intellectual, in today's post-colonial globalized world, is constituted by multiple selves, has multiple interests, and carries multiple responsibilities. This means that the author can give only fragmented attention to the task at hand. This in turn produces the many problems associated with collective action. It is more acute in South Asia since it is a region attempting several transformations simultaneously, from hierarchy to equality, from a command economy to a liberalized economy, from a largely agrarian to an increasingly industrial economy, from an ethnically divided society to a polity based on common citizenship, from a centralized power structure to a more decentralized one etc. In this whirlpool is located the vexed relationship between religion and politics. It is in such a world that the auditing must be attempted. Auditing democracy requires multiple selves but with a single responsibility. This is just not available. The tasks remain, nevertheless, carrying with it responsibilities that we cannot shirk, either as citizens or as intellectuals. It is my hope that these reflections may, in howsoever small a way, help to ease the loneliness of others engaged in similar journeys.

## **Appendix 1: Survey**

### **Methodological note on the SDSA Survey Methodology**

The SDSA survey was carried out by using a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire contained the following levels of questions: 1) Global questions: questions that have been asked in many parts of the world and would allow a regional profile of South Asia in comparative terms. 2) South Asia specific questions: these are questions standard for the whole of South Asia but designed keeping in mind the specificity of the regional context. 3) Country/Area specific questions vary from country to country and in some cases from area to area within the same country. 4) Background and demographic data of the respondents. On the basis of pre-testing it was found that the initial questionnaire was too lengthy, therefore two sets of questionnaires were framed: Set A and Set B. Both Set A and Set B contained common questions related to democracy but Set A contained questions related to security and Set B contained questions related to the economy. Either questionnaire: Set A or Set B was administered to respondents with odd or even serial numbers. Since the principal units of analysis were the five nations, the survey aimed at a national representative sample of the electorate in each of the five democracies. To do this the survey adhered to strict sampling techniques. A note of how the sampling was carried out in each of the five South Asia countries is provided below:

#### **Bangladesh**

In Bangladesh the sampling was carried out at three stages: There are 300 electoral constituencies in Bangladesh. 1) In the first stage from the 300 electoral constituencies, 60 constituencies (20 percent) were selected using the probability proportionate to size (PPS) method. 2) In the second stage 3 villages/wards (in case of cities: corporations or *pouravas*) were selected using the systematic random sampling (SRS) method, 3) In the third stage 20 respondents from each village/ward were selected using SRS.

In order to achieve sufficient representation from the ethnic minorities, a booster sample of 200 respondents, from each of the three ethnic minorities: Hill people, Biharis and Garos, was taken. Similarly a booster sample of 200 Hindus, who represent a religious minority, was also undertaken.

#### **India**

The SDSA-India sample was a sub sample drawn from a bigger sample of the National Election Study 2004 (NES 2004). This was done so that the representative-ness of the respondents in each state in terms of their social profile could be checked with the figures provided by the state-wise census. The NES 2004 sample was drawn using a four-stage stratified random sampling method: 1) In the first stage, 420 of the 543 parliamentary constituencies (PCs) were selected. In large states having more than 40 PCs, simple circular sampling was used to sample the PCs. In the remaining states all the PCs were selected, 2) In the second stage assembly constituencies (ACs) within the selected PCs were sampled using random circular sampling again based on the PPS method of the electorate in each constituency as per the last available election records for the

state), 3) In the third stage polling stations (PSs) were sampled within each selected AC using the systematic random sampling (SRS) method, 4) In the final stage the respondents were sampled from the latest electoral rolls of the selected PS by circular sampling with a random start (SRS).

It was decided to have a national sample of 5,500 respondents for the SDSA survey. Keeping in mind the sample size (5,500) using back calculation the number of ACs and PSs was arrived at. The ACs that were already a part of the NES 2004 were then sampled using the random circular sampling procedure. From the sampled ACs the PSs for each state were sampled from within all the PSs that were sampled in the NES 2004. Finally the respondents were sampled from the same set of respondents approached or interviewed in NES 2004. The number of interviews allotted to each state was in accordance to the proportion of state population to that of India's population.

Considering that security concerns was one of the themes of the SDSA project booster samples were selected from the states of the North East and Jammu & Kashmir as these are states having high security concerns and the normal sampling used in the project would not yield a sufficient sample for these states. After the survey additional booster samples of Sikhs and Schedule Tribes were taken as it was observed that the respondents from these communities was not enough for the study.

## **Nepal<sup>1</sup>**

A systematic random sampling technique was used in Nepal in a three stage sampling design. 1) In the first stage of the total of 205 parliamentary constituencies (PCs) in Nepal 41 PCs were selected using the systematic random sampling technique. This method ensured the probability of inclusion of all the parliamentary constituencies, over the three ecological zones in Nepal (mountain, hill and tarai) and five development regions (Eastern, Central, Western, Mid Western and Far-Western). 2) At the second stage 4 polling stations (PSs) were selected from each of the 41 sampled PCs using the systematic sampling technique. Two extra polling stations were also selected in each sampled PC using the same technique. The extra sampling was done in the anticipation of armed conflict in Nepal where the surveyors might not be allowed to work in some polling stations. 3) At the third stage respondents were selected from each of the sampled PSs with proportionate allocation (PA). These respondents were selected from the electoral rolls, prepared and updated till 2002 by the election commission, using the systematic sampling technique. The targeted respondent number from each PC was 100, making for a total of 4,100 respondents.

In addition the Nepal survey interviewed 982 respondents from 10 marginalised/vulnerable groups through a booster sample (82 Thakalis and 100 from each other group). These 10 groups included: displaced persons, liberated bonded labourers, Chepangs, Rajbanshis, migrant labourers, commercial sex workers, restaurant workers, Tibetan refugees, squatters and Thakalis.

## **Pakistan**

In Pakistan a two-stage cluster PPS sample was used. Using the 1998 census data, in the first stage 150 PSUs (Polling Station Units) or clusters comprising villages in rural areas and circle numbers (a block of two to three thousand people) in urban areas, were selected, using the PPS

---

<sup>1</sup> State of Democracy in Nepal Survey Report

method. In the second stage, after visiting the selected cluster, the enumerators built a list of approximately 220 respondents starting from a household chosen through a random procedure and then following the right hand rule to enlist all the eligible voters (aged 18 years and above) in the adjacent households. From the list of the eligible voters, approximately 22 respondents were chosen through a systematic sample with the random start under 10.

### **Sri Lanka**

Sri Lanka has a total of 196 parliamentary constituencies spread across 25 districts in 9 provinces. As some areas in the Northern and the Eastern provinces were not under the control of the Government of Sri Lanka the Sri Lankan survey team decided to survey 75 parliamentary constituencies in 21 districts of the country. The number of constituencies per district was decided based on the proportion of the population and the socio- political diversity of each district. A total of 6 polling booths were chosen from the selected constituencies using the Simple Random Sampling (SRS) technique. The latest voter’s lists were used as the sampling frame to select the respondents within a polling station and the selection was done using the SRS technique. A total of 25 people were selected from each polling booth and the interviewers were advised to interview 15 of them.

The survey fieldwork was carried out by investigators trained for this particular purpose in special training workshops. The sampled respondents were surveyed in a face-to-face interview at their normal place of residence. The interview was based on a written and largely pre-coded schedule, translated in the local languages. Once the data was collected, it was sent to the CSDS where a professionally trained team checked the same and entered in and analysed the data. The table below indicates the sample size for each of the respective countries. The sample size for the human security related survey are listed under the column titled ‘Set A (Human Security)’.

**Table : SDSA Sample Size**

<b>Country</b>	<b>Total SDSA</b>	<b>Set A (Human Security)</b>
Bangladesh	3301	2061
India	5389	3334
Nepal	3249	1669
Pakistan	2681	1357
Sri Lanka	4616	2373
Total	19236	10794

### **Appendix 2: Dialogues.**

The dialogue methodology goes through the following stages:

- Each dialogue is planned over a whole day, sometimes two days if the budget permits. This duration is valuable since it gives the participants time to get to know each other, and

- to share personal thoughts and experiences, both in the formal meeting and, more importantly, in an atmosphere of informality outside the meeting.
- Such a meeting of two day's duration, produced trust between participants, created an atmosphere of easy exchange and thereby reduced the psychological burden that intervention normally carries in formal settings (a view regularly expressed by those who have little experience of seminars). Such informality was empowering, since it encouraged participants to speak and thereby facilitated an understanding of each other's concerns.
  - The invitees were from a cross section of interests, ideologies, social strata, and groups in society. This diversity ensured that no particular perspective dominated the discussion and also that participants got an opportunity to listen to, and to consider, in an enabling atmosphere, perspectives other than their own.
  - A special effort was made to get minority viewpoints to attend. Minority was here defined in terms of gender, ethnicity, class, caste, and community. This insistence was to ensure that minority viewpoints are heard, and placed on the discourse agenda, since in the normal course of things they get little attention in the face of dominant discourses.
  - Particular attention was paid to selecting the chair for each discussion session. Such a chair was requested not to dominate the discussion, not to make an opening statement that others would then feel compelled to respond to but to only function as a facilitator. S/he was requested to encourage minority voices, draw out emerging concerns that required more discussion, identify the possible areas of contestation, and invite comments on issues not raised.
  - The dialogue was deliberately loosely (or minimally) structured. Other than deciding on the themes for each session, and choosing the chairs, whose were tasked to regulate the flow of the discussion, the dialogue encouraged informality so that the unlettered felt encouraged to speak.
  - The dialogue was clearly regarded not as a seminar, a conference, or even a workshop and hence did not carry the burden of formal discussion procedures. No complete presentations were required. No well worked out positions were demanded. One merely sought reactions to ideas as they emerged. The assumption here was that these reactions are articulations of positions that have, over the span of the participant's political life, been thought through and so receiving them in the context of a dialogue gives one a glimpse of, and therefore possible access to, the larger body of arguments. The intervention was seen as only the tip of the iceberg.
  - The dialogue was recorded to create an oral archive and also to be later available for report writing.
  - The dialogue report was prepared as per the following format: (i) a brief introductory note on the theme of the dialogue, (ii) the views of each speaker were summarized and presented sequentially in the order in which they had intervened, (iii) speakers organizational address were given to connect their positions with the interests they represent, and (iv) a summary statement, at the end of the report, of the main themes and concerns that had emerged.

Two types of dialogues were organized. (i) General dialogues where wide ranging views from participants on the **state of democracy** in the country were solicited and (ii) thematic dialogues on (a) **human security**, and (ii) on **majorities and minorities**.

## Endnotes:

---

I should like here to record my gratitude to International IDEA for their support in enabling me to attend the IPSA Congress. I would also like to thank them for their partnership in the SDSA study. The study has been very generously supported by Ford Foundation, EU-India Cross Cultural Programme, and IDEA. I also wish here to acknowledge the help of my colleagues, Yogendra Yadav, Suhas Palshikar, Jayadeva Uyangoda, Mohammed, Waseem, Imtiaz, Ahmed, Krishna Hachhetu, Sanjay Kumar, Harsh Sethi, D.L.Sheth, V.B.Singh, Anindo Saha, Phillip Oldenburg, and the numerous research assistants, field supervisors, data assistants, and administrative staff who have worked on this project. Anindo Saha has also been very helpful with comments on this draft. I, however, am solely responsible for the opinions in this paper.

<sup>1</sup> This point was strongly argued for by Anindo Saha is the weekly meetings of the group called to interpret the data.

<sup>2</sup> Pierson, Paul. 2000. 'Increasing returns, Path Dependence, and the Study of Politics', **American Political Science Review**, vol 94, 2, 251-267.

<sup>3</sup> Thelen, Kathleen. 2003. 'How Institutions Evolve: Insights from Comparative Historical Analysis', in James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschmeyer, (eds) **Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences**, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p219.

<sup>4</sup> A composite result was prepared by assessing responses to four questions. There are different ways in which a country may be governed. I will read out some suggestions. For each of these would you say that you strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree? (a) the country should be governed by the army, (b) the country should be governed by a king, (c) the country should be governed by those chosen by the people in a fair election and (d) which one of the following three statements do you agree with most: democracy is preferable to any kind of government, in certain situations a dictatorship government is preferable to a democratic one, it doesn't matter to people like me whether we have democratic or non-democratic governance. The composite responses were then grouped into four groups (i) strong believers of democracy, (ii) skeptics, (iii) weak believers in democracy and (iv) not sure can't say. This was according to the following principle of selection. **Strong believers** are those who prefer democracy and strongly disagree or disagree with army rule and with monarchy and who strongly agree or agree with electoral democracy. **Skeptics** are those who prefer dictatorship dictatorship or for those for whom dictatorship does not matter, and strongly agree or agree with army rule or Monarchy or who strongly disagree or disagree with electoral democracy. **Not sure/can't say** comprises those who have no opinion (including those who could not understand the question) on whether they prefer democracy or dictatorship or democracy and dictatorship does not matter to them and have no opinion (including those who could not understand the questions. **Weak believers** are those who do not fit any of the above categories.

<sup>5</sup> Munck, Gerardo.L and Jay Verkuilen, 'Conceptualizing and Measuring Democracy; Evaluating Alternative Indices', **Comparative Political Studies**, vol 35, no 1, Feb 2002, 5-34.

<sup>6</sup> **Democracy Assessment: The basis of the International IDEA assessment framework**, IDEA, Stockholm, 1997.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> This list of difficulties is provided by Suhas Palshikar the PI who was responsible for the Qualitative Assessment component.