

Dialogue on Democracy (North India - Delhi) 15<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> April, 2004

## **State of Democracy in South Asia**

### **DIALOGUE ON DEMOCRACY**

**North India, Delhi**

**Dates: 15<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> April 2004**

**Venue: Rajendra Bhavan, New Delhi**

## INTRODUCTION

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The dialogue on Democracy was organised in Delhi to record the views of the activists and academicians belonging to the Eastern and Northern States of India. The states that were represented included: Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal and Orissa (Eastern India) and Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Uttaranchal, Chandigarh and Delhi (Northern India). The dialogue was held on the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> of April, 2004 amidst the hectic activities for the 14<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha elections. Due to this reason some of the participants were unable to attend the dialogue. A total of 41 activists and academicians attended the dialogue of which 7 were women. A significant number of the participants were from dalit, backward caste and minority communities.

The Dialogue was divided into three broad themes so as to facilitate a focussed discussion. These three themes or topics were as follows: (1) The promise and design of democracy in India, (2) The working of Democracy in India and (3) Outcome and future of democracy in India. Two of the themes were discussed on the first day of the dialogue and the third on the second day. The first topic - 'The promise and design of democracy' was spread over two sessions. Under this theme it was expected that the activists and academicians would reflect on the following questions: What has been the promise of democracy in India? How have different social and ethnic groups like women, dalits, minorities, the labour movement and other stakeholders relate themselves to the promise of democracy? What are the main sources that have contributed to shaping the meaning of democracy in India? What constitutes a common ground for democracy in the context of competing expectations? What are the main themes of contestation? What has been democracy's promise of transformation and emancipation? Participants were also expected to critically review the institutions and processes of democracy as evolved since independence. The second topic for discussion was 'The working of democracy in India' and it was expected that the participants would speak on whether discrimination based on religion, caste, ethnicity, sex, class etc has been remedied or reduced? To what extent do

democratic institutions represent the diverse social, ethnic and gender composition of society? In other words has the working of democracy in India for the past more than five decades been satisfactory from the point of view of the common people? The third topic, 'Outcome and future of democracy in India' which was deliberated on the second day of the dialogue was intended to discuss what is the level of public confidence in the democratic institutions and processes including the rule of law and the Judiciary and also to discuss whether political participation itself has been democratised? Participants were expected to also speak on the future of democracy in India in the backdrop of intense contestation, expectations and disappointments. Does democracy have anything new to offer to the deprived sections of Indian society? Should there be some re-envisioning of the promise, institutions as well as practices of democracy? It was expected that the participants would reflect on these and other similar questions and share their views in the dialogue.

## THE DIALOGUE

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### Day One, 15<sup>th</sup> April 2004

#### Inaugural Session (10:00 am to 11:00 am)

*The Dialogue began with a welcome address by Prof. Peter R. deSouza, Principal Coordinator of the State of Democracy in South Asia project. After the welcome address, Prof. deSouza gave a brief introduction about the project.*

**Prof. Peter R. deSouza (Professor and Senior Visiting Fellow, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), Delhi):** He said that in many respects the different countries of South Asia share a common thinking and way of life and that is why such a study was designed. He said, “The objective being to study how people of South Asian countries look at and think about their democracy. Another of the project’s objectives is to look at Human security and non-traditional security issues by talking to people of different ideologies and socio-economic backgrounds. The project seeks to know peoples’ attitudes and understanding of their own future under democracy. Different methodologies will be used as ways of studying democracy and one of the ways is through the method of dialogue. Dialogues present an important method for activists, journalists and policy makers to express their views on democracy. He said that the dialogue is not a seminar where experts present their papers and other comment on them. The dialogue is meant to allow for the exchange of views and ideas on democracy. Generally after the research study is completed the findings are brought before the public, the activists, other academicians and opinion makers to share the knowledge with them but in order to take into account the opinions, suggestions and views of the activists and academicians in the beginning of the study the dialogue was being held at the beginning of the study”. He said that this was the third dialogue in India, the first one was held at Bangalore for participants from South Indian States and the second one for participants from North-East India was held at Manipur.

*Ms. Bela Bhatia translated Professor deSouza's speech in Hindi, as a significant number of activists could not follow English. This was followed by a brief self-introduction by each of the participants.*

**Session I (11:30am to 1:15pm )**

The First session of the dialogue was on the theme of 'The promise and design of democracy' and was chaired by Mr Subhash Bhatnagar, an activist who has been working for more than two decades among the unorganised workers especially construction workers.

**Prof. Peter R. deSouza (Professor and Senior Visiting Fellow, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), Delhi):** Prof. deSouza introduced the theme of the first session and started with the following questions: what is democracy and what does it mean to different sections of people and what does it promise? He explained that democracy as organising politics came to India during the colonial period and has become part of the imagination and aspiration for freedom, justice, equality and many other things. "For academicians democracy is a mechanism where people elect a government. Is it the only functions of democracy or people expect something more from democracy? What do people think democracy will and should do? What does democracy mean to dalits? Is justice or freedom from discrimination a democracy? Is it the job of democracy to produce dignity for dalits? Why does one need democracy? If democracy means all these things then what are the institutions, which will bring all these promises? What do our institutions think of democracy? We want different perspectives of what is meant by democracy?"

*Mr. Subhash Bhatnagar translated Prof. Peter's speech in Hindi. Mr. S.K. Biswas, Mr. Shamsher Singh Bisht (S.S.Bisht), Mr. Rajendra Chaudhary, Mr. S. Singha Chowdhury, Mr. Hemant Kumar, Com. Daleep Singh, Mr. Sajjan Kumar, Dr. Ms. KK Sidhu, Ms Anita*

*Bharti, Mr. Kishori Das, Ms. Gauri Dey, Mr. Paramjit Singh and Mr. Rajeev Godara spoke on this topic until lunch. The discussion on this topic continued after lunch for another one hour, which was chaired by Mr. S.S. Bisht. The Following participants spoke in the post lunch session: Mr. Des Raj Kali, Mr. Lallan Singh Baghel, Mr. Karu, Mr. Sukhdev Singh, Mr. Kishori Das, Mr. Rajeev Godara, Mr. S. Singha Chowdhury and Mr. SS Bisht. The following is a brief note about what these participants spoke in this session:*

**Mr. S.K. Biswas (Dalit activist from West Bengal and also associated with some central government dalit employees associations):** “Gandhi, Lohia or Nehru were not individuals, they represented communities. According to Dr. Ambedkar democracy is a form of government where there are no kings and all are equal. But in our democracy of more than 50 years we have had the dynastic rule of the Nehru family and now we are having ‘Sangh Parivar’ rule. In West Bengal too a group of upper caste people are ruling since independence. Except for the reserved constituencies 90 percent candidates are brahmins. Dalits and backward caste people who are in a majority in West Bengal and in India are in politics at the mercy of the upper caste”.

**Dr. Shamsheer Singh Bisht (Active in Uttranchal for the past 25 years. Has led and participated in a number of movements in this area including movements for the formation of a separate Uttranchal State):** “In 1974 we had gone to the hilly areas of Uttranchal where people did not know what are M.L.A.s. They thought that M.L.A.s are some kind of animals. Upper castes are dominating the politics of Uttranchal. If I had to stand in the election in Uttranchal, just to go to the different areas in a jeep would mean a minimum expenditure of Rs. 10 lakh. Basically contesting election means spending a lot of money. Even dalits leaders have become a part of the game of loot. They use Ambedkar’s name to further their personal vested interests. They use Ambedkar’s name to get wine shops and ruin the lives of dalits by selling them the wine. The election manifestoes of different parties do not talk about the fundamental issues concerning the people. It is money and higher caste politics. Dalits, who have not sold themselves to such people, do not have any chance. The media is also serving vested interests.

Politicians are freely moving from one party to another without any shame or guilt and it is a dangerous trend for our democracy”.

**Mr. Rajendra Chaudhary (Teaches Economics at Maharishi Dayanand University, Haryana and also actively associated with many other social movements):** “We are not talking about what do we expect from democracy. We should stick to the topic”.

**Mr. S. Singha Chowdhury (Dalit activist from West Bengal and President, Dalit Unity Centre, West Bengal):** “Caste is the main problem of India. If this is abolished all the rest of the problems will be solved”. He quoted Marx and Dr. Ambedkar to prove his point. He said, “Because of the caste system our society is an unequal one and democracy cannot take roots in a society based on inequality. ‘Upper caste people even consider Muslims as another caste. They do not consider untouchables as human beings’”. He was of the view that Gandhi wanted only caste to go but Varna to remain. He also said that when Ram did not represent dalits why should dalits fight for Ram Mandir?

**Mr. Hemant Kumar (Socio-political activist from Karnataka):** Wanted to know from Mr. Singha Chowdhury why in spite of the Bengal renaissance and the fact that literacy among dalits in West Bengal is relatively higher and they are better educated, still Bengali dalits are not occupying higher political positions in different political parties.

**Mr. S. Singha Chowdhury (Dalit activist from West Bengal and President, Dalit Unity Centre, West Bengal):** replied that the Bengal renaissance was an upper caste affair and it did not affect the dalits of Bengal.

**Com. Daleep Singh (Worked with Hind Majdoor Sabha (HMS) for many years and presently associated with Sampooran Kranti Manch, Haryana):** “Democracy in India is discussed only in big cities and in air conditioned rooms. There is no internal democracy in any political party. Thirty years ago a man with black money was looked down upon but today he is either a king maker or a politician. In ancient India in every five years the money belonging to the king and the temple was divided among the poor

and every 12th year people would go to Kumbh for spiritual cleansing. But in today's democracy there is no accountability anywhere. The editor of a big newspaper like Mr. N. Ram of The Hindu can get relief from the Supreme Court but editors of local small newspapers are harassed every now and then and are kept in jail. There is no legal equality for the poor and the deprived. All the so-called democratic institutions are there to help and promote the interests of the rich and the powerful. There is no justice for the weak and the poor. Around 5000 M.L.A.s and M.P.s behave like new Rajas and Maharajas. The Haryana Assembly session is held only once in six months and that too for one or two days. First and foremost we need a democratic culture among our people, only then we can build a democratic society”.

**Mr. Sajjan Kumar (A socio-political activist from Rajasthan for more than two decades. Presently active in Nature Human Centric People Movement. Rajasthan):**

“The meaning of democracy is people's power. But in India people's power is subverted by the representative democracy, which we are following for more than five decades. Our democracy allows the citizens once in five years to cast their votes to one of the candidates put up by the political parties or from among the independent candidates. I do not call it democracy, I call it representative democracy. The people only have the right to elect their representatives through an electoral process. Beyond that the people have no right and our representatives have the right to rule over us for five years. In a country where the per capita income is only around 20,000 and more than 60 percent of India's per capita income is much less than this, from where can they spend Rs. 25 lakh (the prescribed limit for a Lok Sabha candidate which s/he can spend during election process). Generally those candidates who are in the race to win, spend around one crore rupees. This shows that only a small fraction of Indian citizens can afford to contest and win elections. We need direct democracy, where people can directly represent themselves, and the role of political parties should be minimised. Today our democracy is hijacked by the political parties. Ninety percent of our people do not know what is democracy. Moreover, our concept of democracy should not be limited to one country. This type of democracy creates enmity among the people of different countries and allows the use of force against people of other countries and those 'sympathetic towards the enemy country'. This

creates admiration for armies and arms, which are maintained by denying the basic requirements of life to the citizen. We have to think about the whole world as one, where people's democracy is pro-nature and human centric'.

**Dr. Ms. K.K. Sidhu (Editor of Hindi and Punjabi edition of Dalit Voice):** “Dr. Ambedkar has repeatedly said that if we do not have a democratic form of society, we cannot have democracy. In our society some people are born as super humans and others are born as sub humans. The discrimination starts with the birth of a child in a low or scheduled caste family. Democracy cannot work in a society which believes in graded inequality and treats one section as subhuman. During Buddha's time our society was more equal than it is today. Without annihilation of the caste system democracy cannot work in India”.

**Mr. Des Raj Kali (Journalist and Dalit activist from Punjab):** “Although the constitution of India guarantees the right to live with dignity to all in India, some Indians are denied even the right to life and some are enjoying life with all the benefits of development. For the past five years, I have been working in Punjab. I will talk about living in Punjab. The green revolution has made some people very rich and others have become extremely poor. In Punjab as water and electricity was made available free to the farmers by the Akali government and the Congress government is continuing the same policy, there is large scale misuse of water and electricity in Punjab. Due to the rice crop in Punjab the ground water level have gone down. Now farmers are digging bore wells that cost around Rs. 1 lakh. The taps of the poor dalits are getting dried because they cannot afford to dig bore wells that cost around Rs. 1 lakh. Dalits who are mainly agricultural workers are also being exposed to deadly chemicals during the work in the field. All the governments in Punjab since independence, whether Akali or Congress are working for the rich”.

**Mr. Kishori Das (General Secretary, Bihar People's Union for Civil Liberty (PUCL) and President, Most Backward and Deprived Caste Action Committee, Bihar):** “It was only due to democracy that Mr Laloo Yadav, Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav and Ms

Mayawati could become chief ministers. They may have become corrupt or are degenerated today, but no other political system of governance could have given the opportunity for people like them to become rulers”.

**Ms. Anita Bharti (Teacher by profession and also working among Dalits for the past 20 years in Delhi):** “I want to speak about how our democratic institutions are being misused to deny the poor and downtrodden their right to live with human dignity. In our area a slum was demolished in the month of December at mid night, when the stay on the slum demolition was vacated. These slum dwellers were forced to go many miles away where there was no work for them. Their children were forced to drop out from their schools because no school will give them admission in the middle of the academic year. Although the right to education up to the age of fourteen years is a fundamental right the children of this slum were denied the right to education and were forced to dropout from the schools”.

**Ms. Gauri Dey (Worked for more than a decade with many socio-political movements):** “There is a need for political activists like us to work among the deprived sections of our society and to fight for their rights which they are entitled to under our democratic system. There is a need to consider why we the activists have become so indifferent to the sufferings of the common people”.

**Mr. Paramjit Singh (Actively associated with the All India Backward (SC, ST, OBC) And Minority Communities Employees Federation (BAMCEF) and many other Dalit associations in Delhi):** “Democracy is an important idea and concept and there is no better alternative to it. But when we talk about democracy in the Indian context it failed to take roots because of brahminism. The ideology of the ruling class is brahminism, which is against equality and fraternity. Democracy cannot exist in a place where graded inequality is the ideology of society. As Dr. Ambedkar had said social revolution is a must before political revolution. We have to change the ideology of the ruling class and the attitude of the people, which promotes inequality. Only then democracy can take roots in India”.

**Mr. Rajeev Godara (Advocate at Punjab and Haryana High Court and associated with All India Lawyers' Union, Chandigarh):** “Democracy gives the chance to express one’s views and opinions freely. It is the only system that gives a chance to think, organise and the right to live with dignity. In a democratic society there is a freedom to criticise even the rulers. I can criticise and challenge a rule or law which is being considered in my state Assembly or in the Parliament if it hurts my fundamental rights. It gives me the freedom to religious faith and expression. If some politicians or bureaucrats are not following the rule of law they can be held responsible and punished. In a monarchy or in other political systems it is not possible. Democracy is a much better system of governance than any other system of governance although our democratic system could not achieve what was expected from it”.

**Ms. Anita Bharti (Teacher by profession and also working among Dalits for the past 20 years in Delhi):** “To know whether democracy is good for India, or for the deprived sections of India, we must see the history of India and the position of the socially and economically deprived sections. Generally speaking dalits, the community to which I belong, were denied the right to live in better houses, to get higher education and to hold higher public posts. Our caste system was worse than the apartheid regime. It became possible only because of Dr. Ambedkar who thought that democracy could improve the quality of life for dalits with the provision of reservations for them in education and public employment. Although democracy has still not entered the doors of a majority of dalits, it is the only system which can give dalits the right to live with dignity. We must keep faith in democracy and work among the dalits and other deprived sections to improve their living and working condition”.

*The above discussion was followed by a lunch break. In the post lunch session, the discussion continued for another hour on the same topic, ‘The promise and design of democracy in India’ and was chaired by Mr. Shamsher Singh Bisht.*

**Mr. Des Raj Kali (Journalist and Dalit activist from Punjab):** Spoke about how the dalits in Punjab are denied even drinking water and how the democratic system is helping in this process. He said, “To facilitate greater production from the land chemical fertilizers, pesticides and fungicides are being used in a large scale which requires large amounts of water for irrigation. Political parties in power by giving heavy doses of subsidy on electricity for irrigation are allowing the misuse of water by big farmers as they can only spend over Rs. 1 lakh for digging bore wells. The poor dalits with no land or with small pieces of land cannot dig a bore well, and as the water level is going down due to the digging of bore wells, these dalits and the poor are being denied the right to water. Even those dalits who were elected as sarpanchas of the panchayats are being harassed and humiliated. In 15 villages there was a social boycott of dalits and the chowkidars even refused to register the names of newly born children of the dalits”.

**Mr. Lallan Singh Baghel (Activist from Chandigarh and working among the students for the past seven years):** “It looks from Mr. Des Raj’s intervention that the democratic system in India is a hurdle in the way of dalits. But if we see the ground realities in Punjab, dalits are organising themselves against exploitation and injustice. The most remarkable protest of dalits in the Tallahan village in Punjab shows that democracy is providing space for dalits to unite, organise and protest”.

**Mr. Karu (Active in Bihar for more than two decades and has taken part and led many movements in Bihar. At present active in Dalit Chetana Trust, Bihar):** “The hope and expectation from a democratic system is that it will provide 'roti, kapada, makan and ijjat' (food, clothing, shelter and respect) which is more than that from the earlier 'manuvadi' system. Although democracy in India is not perfect, still dalits and the poor have got the right to get education, shelter and property and are in a better position today under a democratic system. There are weaknesses in this democracy also. Dalit MLAs and MPs do not open their mouths in State Assemblies and in the Parliament. Dalits and the poor are afraid of going to the police station to lodge a complaint even when serious crimes are committed against them. They have no faith in the police system. Gujarat is

also happening in this democracy, but still dalits and the poor have a lot of expectations from democracy”.

**Mr. Sukhdev Singh (Activist from Punjab working with the Nature Human Centric People Movement, Punjab):** “Our concept of democracy is vague and confused. This democracy has helped corrupt, criminalize and allow those having bags of money to spoil our biosphere and environment. The practice of democracy for the past 200 years has spoilt the environment and destroyed our common and natural resources. The green revolution in Punjab has threatened the lives of all Punjabis and not only dalits. Chemical fertilizers, pesticides and fungicides are used in a big way in Punjab. This requires more water. This is polluting our water, air and soil. If our democratic system does not take into account our environment and human resources it will create havoc for the people in the near future. By saying all this it does not mean that I am opposed to a democratic system. What we want is public led democracy rather than the representative democracy of today. Today’s representative democracy is mainly responsible for the environmental hazards and if it continues we will be in for an environmental disaster”.

**Mr. Kishori Das (General Secretary, Bihar People's Union for Civil Liberty (PUCL) and President, Most Backward and Deprived Caste Action Committee, Bihar):** “Among all the political systems in the world, the democratic system is the best political system. Indian democracy is only around 53 years old and we underestimate its importance because we got it suddenly and without any effort. But the people who are holding responsible posts in the Judiciary, executive, legislature and the press are also not fulfilling their responsibilities properly. Other Backward Castes (OBCs) and dalits have started getting a share in the system. We cannot evaluate the performance of a democratic system in India in such a short span of time. If there is something wrong in our democratic system it is not because of the system of democracy but because of the people who are running this system. If all of us reform and change ourselves this democracy can do wonders. Roti, kapada and makan are still away from millions of Indians. Lakhs of Biharis have to go out in search of employment and education facilities in other states of

India in spite of the fact that backward caste people have been chief ministers for more than a decade in Bihar”.

**Mr. Rajeev Godara (Advocate at Punjab and Haryana High Court and associated with All India Lawyers' Union, Chandigarh):** “Parliamentary democracy is the best system. But in this democracy we do not want carnages like Mahim and Gujarat or incidents like Lucknow. We want a democratic system where people are not purchased or influenced by money. The problem of our democracy is that people do not question the elected representatives. Our representatives are not responsible towards the people. In Punjab, politics is done not in the name of people but in the name of ‘Panth’ (The Sikh community). In Haryana, caste Panchayats behaves like ‘Talibans’. Only people’s movements can get good results from our democracy”.

**Mr. S. Singha Chowdhury (Dalit activist from West Bengal and President, Dalit Unity Centre, West Bengal):** “My higher caste friends say that I am anti-brahmin, anti-Bengali and anti-Hindu. I accept all these criticisms. I think it is my duty to expose whatever wrong is happening in my locality or state. All of us should expose the wrong things happening in our society. Dalits should think of how to improve the conditions of dalits. Higher castes will not fight the caste system as they are the beneficiaries of this caste system”.

**Dr. Shamsher Singh Bisht (Active in Uttranchal for the past 25 years. Has led and participated in a number of movements in this area including movements for the formation of a separate Uttranchal State):** “While discussing the promise and design of democracy, we raised certain questions and also got some answers. Democracy is the best, most progressive and simple system. But in spite of the 55 years of democracy we are still miles away from real democracy. Our democracy is not taking care of the deprived sections. We can strengthen our democracy only through people’s movements and make it work for the deprived sections”.

*The discussion on ‘The promise and design of democracy in India’ ended with the above comments.*

**Session on the working of democracy in India (3:30pm to 5:30pm)**

*The theme for discussion in his session was 'The working of democracy in India'. Prof. deSouza introduced the subject, this was later translated by Ms Bela Bhatia in Hindi. Those who spoke in this session were: Ms. Bela Bhatia, Mr Lallan Singh Baghel, Mr Dipankar Ray, Mr. Pradeep Kr. Singh, Dr. K.K. Sidhu, Mr. Kishori Das, Ms. Anita Bharti, Mr. Des Raj Kali, Mr. Subhash Bhatnagar, Mr. Debasis, Mr. Sukhdev Singh, Mr. S.S. Bisht, Mr. Sajjan Kumar, Mr. Rajendra Chaudhary, Mr. Karu, Mr. S. Singha Chowdhury and Mr. Rajeev Godara. Following is the summary of what they spoke in this session:*

**Mr. Hemant Kumar (Socio-political activist from Karnataka):** Spoke about the assault on the dalits and the rise of the criminals and corrupt contractors in politics who are undermining the democracy in India. He asked, "How do we counter these vested interests?" He was also critical of Mr Singha Chowdhury when he (Mr. Singha Chowdhury) said that he had doubts about others taking up the cause of dalits and the downtrodden. "If this is so then what about Buddha and Basavanna who fought against the caste system?" He was of the opinion that we should try and evolve a more cosmopolitan agenda, rather than a sectarian line.

**Ms. Bela Bhatia (Associate Fellow with CSDS, Delhi):** Introduced the topic of the session – The working of democracy in India and raised some questions like what has been the overall outcome of the democratic experience in India? To what extent has discrimination on the basis of religion, sex, caste etc. been remedied or reduced? How far has there been equitable access to and redistribution of public resources? To what extent do democratic institutions represent the diverse sections of society? What is the level of public confidence in democratic institutions, including the police and the Judiciary? Has political participation itself been democratised? "These are some of the questions, and we could of course take on other questions as we go along".

**Mr. Lallan Singh Baghel (Activist from Chandigarh and working among the students for the past seven years):** “We need to understand the manifestations of democracy in its very different contexts. To my mind any kind of discussion on woman, dalits... the discourse should not be seen in isolation. There is an emerging consciousness called Jan Andolan or people’s movement”.

**Dr. Dipankar Ray (Teaching mathematics at Jadhavpur University also doing research work on voting system and democracy and involved in many social activities in West Bengal):** “The elite used to say that the poor people do not care for democracy but I am of the opinion that democracy does matter to the poor people. The poor people go out in large numbers when elections come whereas only a small percentage of the elite and middle class people go to vote. The experience of 1977 is clear evidence that the poor have a stake in democracy”.

**Mr. Pradeep Kumar Singh (Teacher and activist from Bhagalpur, Bihar):** “India was once an agricultural society but is now a problem ridden society. During the French Revolution there were two classes: the oppressors and the oppressed and since that time there is a continuous struggle between these two. The democratic system in itself is not wrong neither are the policies of democracy wrong. It is the people manning the democratic system who are wrong? If our representatives become better and pro-people everything will change for the better. I am a college teacher in Bihar. Our education policy is against the poor and the marginalized. The rich people go to other states for higher education and even for school education”.

**Dr. Ms. K.K. Sidhu (Editor of Hindi and Punjabi edition of Dalit Voice):** “The central point is that there is discrimination. Being a Sikh, I know what discrimination is all about? In most of the meetings or get togethers, Sikhs are singled out for dirty comments. How do we bring about changes in the behaviour of this type of people who are out to insult some castes and communities? Among the upper castes, Sikhs are always an object of jokes. The media is also actively promoting stereo-type images of Muslims, Sikhs and dalits and this type of discrimination is on the increase”.

**Mr. Kishori Das (General Secretary, Bihar People's Union for Civil Liberty (PUCL) and President, Most Backward and Deprived Caste Action Committee, Bihar):** “The existence of feudalism is the core reality. The Naxalite movement is a progressive development. It is another matter that Laloo Yadav’s RJD (Rashtriya Janata Dal) does not recognise it as such. But the Naxal movement has enabled the dalits to take up the cudgels against their oppressors. In Indian democracy there have been some negative developments too, take for example the pervasive influence of caste in our political parties today. Caste, criminalisation and money are three important factors which influence the elections in India. Even Ramvilas Paswan and Mayawati are encouraging criminals in politics. So we need to recognise that the dalit movement which is being led by Ramvilas Paswan and Mayawati have to remedy itself too. The most backward castes (MBCs) have not been given any tickets, either by Laloo in Bihar or by Mayawati in UP. The representation of dalits in Bihar’s Panchayati Raj Institutions is very low. There are no dalit sarpanchas”.

**Ms. Anita Bharti (Teacher by profession and also working among Dalits for the past 20 years in Delhi):** “Upper caste people say where is casteism? Show it to us? The caste discrimination is insidious and people use it quietly but very effectively. An invisible wall exists the moment they know that we are not of the same caste or are from the dalit community. Discrimination is quite and invisible and we need to go beyond the surface to understand this discrimination. Even among NGOs the caste question is not as forcefully discussed, as it should be. Caste discrimination is present in the government bodies as well as in the NGOs”.

**Mr. Des Raj Kali (Journalist and Dalit activist from Punjab):** “I will talk in the context of Punjab. The political leaders of all parties are very cunning whether they are from the Akali Party or the Congress. The Akali government introduced a scheme for dalit girls named ‘shagun’ in which dalits girls were given Rs 5000 at the time of their wedding. But this was done at the cost of their free education scheme. The Congress government is doing the same thing in the name of ‘ashirvad’ scheme. Both these

schemes shagun and ashirvad are brought in place by using the stipend that would have enabled dalit girls to study”.

**Mr. Subhash Bhatnagar (Political activist for more than three decades and for the past 20 years working with the unorganised workers):** “There are more than three crore construction workers in India. There is a need for a comprehensive legislation for these workers. A major proportion of India’s total workforce is in the unorganised sector and they are denied all the benefits of being workers and only a handful of workers belonging to the organised sector are getting all the benefits. There is no one to speak or fight for the right of the unorganised workers who are the most exploited lot among workers. All the big trade unions are fighting only for the rights of those workers who are the best paid in India or the organised workers. Although a majority of the construction workers are dalits, still dalit organisations have not really recognised this fact. They will never come to any programme of our construction workers union. Perhaps if we had called ourselves Dalit Construction Workers Organisation, then these dalit organisations might have more readily joined our programme. Workers even go and vote for those big parties (in Delhi it is Congress or the BJP) in the Assembly or Lok Sabha, which do not care for their problems”.

**Mr. Kishori Das (General Secretary, Bihar People's Union for Civil Liberty (PUCL) and President, Most Backward and Deprived Caste Action Committee, Bihar):** He was of the view that the voters Subhash Bhatnagar was talking about were only urban voters. He said, “In the villages lower caste voters vote in exactly the opposite manner to the way the upper caste voters vote”.

**Ms. Anita Bharti (Teacher by profession and also working among Dalits for the past 20 years in Delhi):** “The voters from the lower castes and dalits understand their responsibility. Even after getting money and liquor, they would cast their vote for the candidate of their choice. It is wrong to suggest that lower castes and dalits vote for those parties which give them money and liquor”.

**Mr. Lallan Singh Baghel (Activist from Chandigarh and working among the students for the past seven years):** “In south India, especially in Tamil Nadu, the Dravidian movement could demolish the supremacy of upper castes. But the entry of film stars into democratic politics has been dangerous in that state and this is something to be concerned about”.

**Mr. Debasis Baidya (Dalit activist from West Bengal):** “I will speak about my own village. There are around 1000 people both Hindus and Muslims. Out of these 1000, there are 700 Hindus and 300 Muslims and not a single graduate among the Muslim community. Of the 700 Hindus, 600 belong to the scheduled castes. Until we go to the remote areas we cannot understand the situation of dalits and also how they behave with the other dalits. The behaviour of dalits against other dalits is also discriminatory due to the graded inequality of the caste system. Some dalits think that they are superior to other dalits. Education and medical facilities are not reaching a large proportion of our population, especially the poor and the dalits. We also need to solve the problem of poverty, for democracy to work. MPs and MLAs, even when they belong to dalit community never visit our place”.

**Mr. Sukhdev Singh (Activist from Punjab working with the Nature Human Centric People Movement. Punjab):** “There has been a commercialisation of politics as the CSDS report itself shows that a minimum of Rs. 70 lakh is spent by each candidate who gets the number one or two position in the constituency. 90 percent of the people cannot participate (as candidates) in this democracy. Politics has become a playhouse of the wealthy. Just as more than 40 percent of the people (living below the poverty line) have no stake in the market, 90 percent of the people have no stake in this democracy. Now criminals have also started coming openly to contest elections and some of them are even winning with big margins. With defence expenditure going through the roof, the basic needs of a large proportion of our people are not being met in our democracy”.

**Dr. Shamsher Singh Bisht (Active in Uttranchal for the past 25 years. Has led and participated in a number of movements in this area including movements for the**

**formation of a separate Uttranchal State):** “In Uttranchal the hotel and transport industry is mainly in the hands of the upper castes. Through the entry of the multinational corporations (MNCs) whatever jobs are generated are going to the upper castes. The situation of dalits is getting from bad to worse. These questions are not being raised by any mainstream political party, only extreme leftist organisations are raising these issues. Some beneficial change has also come through the ‘total revolution’ movement and also because of the big push given to the backward classes movement by Mr. VP Singh’.

**Mr. Sajjan Kumar (A socio-political activist from Rajasthan for more than two decades. Presently active in Nature Human Centric People Movement. Rajasthan):**

“Indian democracy is part of world democracy and the limit of this democracy is that it would always be a representative democracy. Human population is globally fully interdependent and it is one world. But we still have not understood this. When we talk about democracy, we talk about our nation and then about our caste and our community. This concept of national democracy is a fallacy. We need to think on a broad level. In today’s global politics; might is right. If we have to respond to this one world society, people’s movements has to include 600 crore people of the world, otherwise in the next few decades human-kind will await its end. Therefore it is important to think in a global frame”.

**Mr. Rajendra Chaudhary (Teaches Economics at Maharishi Dayanand University, Haryana and also actively associated with many other social movements):**

“The image of the politician in the minds of the people has completely fallen. There are no exceptions to this. Everybody is corrupt, is what people think. While there might be some specific demands, there are no ideals in present day politics. The upper castes and dalits are mobilising their castes, no one is challenging the idea of development that has created large-scale inequality among different groups of people. Without questioning the path of development that our rulers have chosen since independence, we will not be able to reform our democracy for the better”.

**Mr. Karu (Active in Bihar for more than two decades and has taken part and led many movements in Bihar. At present active in Dalit Chetana Trust, Bihar):** “We are being asked to think globally and not to think in small or local ways. I do not think caste is small or a local issue. In fact it is very significant and imperative. Caste has not come only today; it is with us for centuries and is a medium of oppression even when there was no threat to our globe from environment and when politics was not so dirty. As caste oppression and discrimination is there in India for centuries, it is not a small issue, it is a big issue”.

**Mr. S. Singha Chowdhury (Dalit activist from West Bengal and President, Dalit Unity Centre, West Bengal):** “Hindutva and Brahminism is a conspiracy to keep people divided and caste is also a divisive ideology. It is the strategy of Brahminism to keep the people of India divided. Caste begets castes. In 1950 there were 30,000 castes, it is now 50,000 castes. The Vedas say that the brahmins would like to increase the number of castes and this will make them more secure. In fact brahminism is surviving by making the other castes fight against each other. The higher castes in India are presenting a unified front whereas Mayawati and Mulayam (dalits and backward castes) are considering each other as their number one enemy”.

**Mr. Rajeev Godara (Advocate at Punjab and Haryana High Court and associated with All India Lawyers' Union, Chandigarh):** “Even in economically well-off states like Punjab casteism is rampant. Love marriages are not tolerated. This is an issue related to human rights and women's rights. Is this because of political democracy? The influence of JP's (Jayaprakash Narayan) movement and the call of the BSP (Bahujan Samaj Party) to the dalits to organise and fight for self respect and dignity are the significant developments in the context of Indian democracy. People's movement is perhaps the only way forward’.

*The end of the first day of the dialogue.*

**Day Two, 16<sup>th</sup> April 2004**

*On the second day of the dialogue the theme was 'The outcome and future of democracy in India'. It was spread over two sittings, one pre lunch (from 11:30am to 1:00pm) and the other post lunch (2:30pm to 3:30pm). Two films were also screened. Ek Minute Ka Maun (A minute long silence) directed by Mr. Ajay Bhardwaj was screened in the morning (10:00am to 11:00am) and Vikas Bندوق Ki Naal Se (Development Flows from the Barrel of the Gun) directed by Biju Toppo and Meghnath in the after noon (3:30pm to 4:30pm).*

**Session I (11:30 am to 1:00 pm)**

*The pre- lunch session was chaired by Dr. P.K.Basant. Prof. Peter de Souza spoke about the topic of discussion for the day. Those who spoke during the second day of the dialogue were: Mr. P.K. Basant, Com. Daleep Singh, Mr. Vijay Pratap, Mr. Des Raj Kali, Dr. Rajaram Tolpade, Mr. Hemant Kumar, Dr. K.K. Sidhu, Mr. Lallan Singh Baghel, Mr. Sajjan Kumar, Mr. Shamsher Singh Bisht, Mr. Sukhdev Singh, Mr. Rajeev Godara and Mr. Karu.*

**Prof. Peter R deSouza (Professor and Senior Visiting Fellow, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), Delhi):** While introducing the subject for discussion (The outcome and future of democracy in India) Prof. deSouza said, "Some difficult stories on democracy have emerged since yesterday. Some people said that some voices (of dalits) could never have been heard without democracy, other people said that Indian democracy is a mask to hide the inhuman living and working conditions of hundreds of millions of Indians who are socially and economically deprived and there were others who said that without taking up the problem of environmental degradation and the international efforts to save our environment, no national democracy can work. One could gather from yesterday's discussion that democracy in India is not a completely dismal story as it has also improved the lives of the deprived and of dalits. Today we want to know from you as

to what is happening in your areas of activity and also what should be done if democracy has to work for the socially and economically deprived sections of Indian society. Let us relate our experiences of democracy with the future of democracy”.

*Mr. PK Basant translated Prof. Peter de Souza's introductory remarks on the topic in Hindi for the benefits of those activists who could not follow English.*

**Com. Daleep Singh (Worked with Hind Majdoor Sabha (HMS) for many years and presently associated with Sampooran Kranti Manch, Haryana):** Spoke about the way in which democracy in India is understood by the common people and is practised by the political leaders and parties. According to him, “There is a total lack of democracy in the party structure where the leaders run their parties like a private enterprise. A lack of accountability of the top leaders of the parties is a common feature of almost all political parties. He also highlighted the issue of widespread corruption in politics”.

**Dr. P.K. Basant (Teaches History at Jamia Milia Universtiy, Delhi and is also associated with many social movements):** Spoke about the need to stick to the topic for the day that was ‘The outcome and future of democracy in India and also requested all the participants who wanted to speak to try to relate their personal experiences of democracy in India while speaking and on the basis of those experiences they were asked to reflect on what they think is the future of democracy in India and how it can be made relevant to the lives of the ordinary people.

**Mr. Vijay Pratap (Socio- political activist for the past 30 years and involved in the activities of a large number of socio-political organisations and movements):** Objected to the above suggestion of the chair and said that it is not good to guide or direct the activists who had spent a significant proportion of their lives in working with the people. He said, “The activists should be allowed to speak on the topic of the day in whichever way they liked to speak. They should not be forced that they should only speak about their personal experience of democracy, they should be allowed to speak on

theoretical issues also if they want to. The academicians should not consider that speaking on theoretical issues is only their domain”.

**Mr. Des Raj *Kali* (Journalist and Dalit activist from Punjab):** Spoke about the ‘Deras’ (or sects) politics in Punjab. He said, “today the politics of Punjab is revolving around the Deras. Different castes in Punjab have their own Deras and these Deras control the vote bank of their castes or sects. Dalits are have their own caste Dera and Jat Sikhs and others their own. These Deras have their own uniforms and set of rules. The votes of these Dera followers goes to those persons or parties, which get the blessings of the Dera chief. This is how Bibi Jagir Kaur, former chief of the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee SGPC could defeat the Congress candidate in the State Assembly elections. The entire state of Punjab is divided among these Deras and democracy is being run by these Deras. It appears that the future of democracy in Punjab is in these Deras which is not a good sign”.

**Dr. Rajaram *Tolpade* (Visiting Fellow with CSDS, Delhi):** “It was disheartening for me yesterday when I watched the activists speaking cynically about democracy in India. It is true that there are many problems in Indian democracy and there is a need to resolve those problems of Indian democracy but we must have spiritual faith in democracy. If as activists, we also started reflecting middle class viewpoints that democracy is useless in India, it is disheartening. We as activists should not get trapped in this cynicism. We must hold spiritual faith and trust in democracy and try to find solutions to the problems and ways to improve the content of our democracy”.

**Mr. Hemant *Kumar* (Socio-political activist from Karnataka):** “We do need a spiritual faith in democracy and should carry it to the people. We have seen many movements in the past such as the dalit movement, the peasant movement, the working class movement, the women’s movement. Many political movements gained power or became strong because of these movements. These movements were used by the political parties for their own ends and agendas. We should evolve a cosmopolitan agenda that cuts across region, religion, caste etc. to give teeth to these movements. The internal

functioning of all mainstream political parties is not democratic. Activists are being ignored by all the political parties. Criminals and those who are corrupt are getting position and power with tons of money. There is a need to organise people on the basis of their occupations rather than on the basis of their caste or religion”. He gave the example of how even five Yadava chief ministers, who gained power in the name of backward classes, failed to provide tangible advantages to the ordinary backward class people or even the Yadavas themselves. “But if we see the example of Mr. V. Kurian who organised the occupation of Yadavas (milk) we can see that millions of people are benefiting from it who are mainly Yadavas and other villagers. The annual budget of the National Dairy Development Board (NDDB) runs into thousands of crores of rupees. Similarly if we organise our farmers who, in spite of all the hurdles created in their way by our rulers, have still been able to produce more than 200 million tons of food grains and make our country self-sufficient in grain production. In this way by organising the farming community we can improve the quality of life for almost half of the population who is engaged in agricultural activities”.

**Dr. Ms. K.K. Sidhu (Editor of Hindi and Punjabi edition of Dalit Voice):** “We can clearly see from the discussion since yesterday that there are two groups among us. One group is very sentimental about the fate of our national political parties and the nation and the other who are talking about caste politics and regional politics. The supporters of national parties and the nation are worried about the emergence of the politics of caste, politics of local language, politics of region, etc. We must understand that those who were bypassed by the national political parties in the name of the nation have not got their due share in this democracy and are now harping on caste, language and region because they think that this is the only way they can get their due share in power”.

**Mr. Lallan Singh Baghel (Activist from Chandigarh and working among the students for the past seven years):** Spoke on the problem of vested interest in our democracy and the near consensus among the political parties in which they allow these vested interests to gain from democracy, which Mr. Hemant Kumar had also referred to in his presentation.

**Mr. Sajjan Kumar (A socio-political activist from Rajasthan for more than two decades. Presently active in Nature Human Centric People Movement. Rajasthan):**

Spoke mainly about the link between democracy, environment and global crisis in the contemporary context and ‘how do we evolve the pro-people and pro-nature democracy?’ He also said, “We cannot have spiritual faith in democracy because of our experiences of the functioning, working and outcome of Indian democracy for more than five decades. Indian democracy gives only one right to its citizens in 5 years, to vote for the candidate selected by the political parties or the independents. After voting they have no right in this democracy and the elected representatives have all the rights. If this democracy has some positive features it also has negative features. Under this democracy, parties having no faith in internal democracy are becoming strong and the people are becoming weak. How can people living below the poverty line under subhuman conditions have faith in this democracy? How can one think of contesting election when he is not sure of getting his or her next days meal (and there are around 400 million people in India who are living below the poverty line as per some UN agencies)? In this democracy only people belonging to the top 10 percent of the population can think of contesting elections. To win or to stay in the race one need at least Rs. 1 crore for Parliament elections and most of the winning candidates spend much more than Rs. 1 crores. This means that winning elections is beyond the reach of almost 99 percent of India’s population as they cannot spend Rs. 1 crore or more to win an election”.

**Dr. Shamsher Singh Bisht (Active in Uttranchal for the past 25 years. Has led and participated in a number of movements in this area including movements for the formation of a separate Uttranchal State):**

“We are only focussing on the Parliament or Assemblies, we should also think about the Panchayats and give them their due powers. When the basic unit of our democracy (The Panchayat) is not strong how can we strengthen our democracy? We must think of how to strengthen the decentralised democracy in India. Today neither teacher nor doctor wants to work under the village panchayat because then they have to come regularly and do their work honestly, whereas today under the state or central government they do not have to come to the village for

work as they can get their salaries by bribing some official in the state capital. Today it is the MPs and MLAs who decide where to dig a tube well or which scheme or project to start where, and the village panchayats have to follow them. Village panchayats should have the resources and the right to decide where to open hospitals or schools or dig a tube well and all those working in the village should be totally accountable to the village panchayat. But there are problems in the village panchayats also where the husbands of women sarpanchas are taking decisions and even chairing meetings. There is also the need to strengthen inner party democracy in all parties and the functioning of NGOs has also to be democratised. The way in which the committed workers of all parties are ignored and the film personalities are encouraged by giving party tickets is not a good sign for our democracy. But in spite of all these weaknesses of our democracy, there are positive things also. People are voting and electing their representatives. We have to work hard to strengthen our democracy and to fight against the vested interests who have hijacked our democracy”.

**Mr. Sukhdev Singh (Activist from Punjab working with the Nature Human Centric People Movement. Punjab):** “There are positive and negative points of our representative democracy. This democracy has also produced two world wars in the twentieth century. Although it says that we will solve all our problems through dialogue but ultimately it relies on the strength of its arms and armies. Peasants of Punjab lost their crop when the army took over their land (during the one year stand off with Pakistan after the terrorist attack inside the Parliament complex) and put anti-personal mines in their land. More than 300 peasants were killed or injured in Punjab due to mine explosions after the land was returned to them once the army withdrew. The role of arms and armies is increasing day by day in democracies, whether it is the USA or India. This is the outcome of representative democracy. We can safeguard the future of democracy by converting this representative democracy to people’s democracy; by abolishing the special position of political parties, by curbing the role of money in our democracy and by state funding for elections”.

**Mr. Rajeev Godara (Advocate at Punjab and Haryana High Court and associated with All India Lawyers' Union, Chandigarh):** Spoke about his hope in the future of democracy and said that it was possible only because of democracy that the BJP was forced to remove Mr. D.P. Yadav (an accused in many criminal cases) whom they had taken into their party fold a few days before. It was possible only because of democracy that Mrs Indira Gandhi was removed in 1977 after the emergency. “In spite of the weaknesses of our democracy we are able to change the rulers frequently in the past three decades”.

**Mr. Sukhdev Singh (Activist from Punjab working with the Nature Human Centric People Movement, Punjab):** “We are not against democracy or in favour of dictatorship. We want to improve upon this democracy which is a representative led democracy to a direct, people led democracy”.

**Mr. Karu (Active in Bihar for more than two decades and has taken part and led many movements in Bihar. At present active in Dalit Chetana Trust, Bihar):** “We are speaking only about one component of democracy that is elections, political parties etc. We should also keep in mind that a large number of people’s movements are there in India and most of these people’s movements are on the margins. The hopes generated by the 1974 movement for total revolution led by Jayaprakash Narayan are dying. Today political parties, whether it is BJP, Congress or RJD have no faith in democracy. People like Shahabuddin, who are facing many criminal cases including murder are gaining importance and are trying to subvert democracy. The future of Indian democracy lies in people’s movements. We can fight these vested interests, who have hijacked democracy in India, only through the people’s movements”.

*Session I ended here and was followed by lunch.*

**Session II (2:30 pm to 3:30 pm)**

*The post lunch session was chaired by Ms. Anita Bharti and it continued for one hour. Those who spoke in the post lunch session were: Ms Anita Bharti, Ms Gauri Dey, Mr. Vijay Pratap, Dr. Rajaram Tolpade, Mr. Lallen Singh Baghel, Mr. J.S. Toor, Ms. Navpreet Kaur and Mr. Hemant Kumar. The following is a brief note about what these participants said in this session:*

**Ms. Anita Bharti (Teacher by profession and also working among Dalits for the past 20 years in Delhi):** “Since yesterday we are talking about democracy and have seen emerging different views on it. All of us are working among different sections of society and people’s movements. All these people’s movements are playing an important role in society. But there is a new trend in these people’s movements and that is to belittle the role of other movements. I think there is a need for all of us, who are part of one or the other movement, that we should also think about other movements and come together to coordinate all these movements so that we can make some impact on the outcome of our democratic system in favour of the deprived and the marginalized sections of our society”.

**Ms. Gauri Dey (Worked for more than a decade with many socio-political movements):** “There is a radical change in the perspectives of people’s movements today. Today those who are associated or are leading people’s movements are not living like ordinary people for whom they claim to be working. The living and working style of the present day leaders of people’s movements is no way different from those against whom they claim to be fighting. The activists should learn to live like ordinary people and break hierarchical structure of leaders and workers if they want to bring radical changes in our society”.

**Mr. Vijay Pratap (Socio- political activist for the past 30 years and involved in the activities of a large number of socio-political organisations and movements):** “Dr. Rajaram Tolpade spoke about the need to have spiritual faith in democracy. I myself take democracy as a faith. In democracy everyone has the right to say that the ‘king is naked’. But why are people especially the activists losing faith in democracy. What are the pitfalls

of Indian democracy? Faith cannot be demanded, it has to come from within. I think the more one criticises democracy, the more our democracy will improve. We should understand as to why those people who are fighting for the right to information (like Ms. Aruna of Rajasthan and Mr. Jaiprakash of Hyderabad) are making an impact on the people. But it is also true that the right to information is being used more by the corporate sector. They (Ms. Aruna and others) are doing great things but they should also think about the dalit and Muslim artisans. When our democracy is not taking care of the issues or problems due to which our peasants are committing suicides, issues of self respect of dalits and the issues of why Muslim artisans are losing their livelihood system, how can they have faith in democracy?”

**Dr. Rajaram Tolpade (Visiting Fellow with CSDS, Delhi):** “Elections in democracy is only one aspect of democracy but it should include other things also about which Mr. Vijay Pratap has spoken. Spiritual faith in democracy does not prohibit criticism of democracy”.

**Mr. Lallan Singh Baghel (Activist from Chandigarh and working among the students for the past seven years):** Spoke about the cultural understanding of democracy and religious notions of democracy and how these are related. “Do we need to differentiate these on the basis of priority, when religious aspects take a front seat in the realm of real political affairs of Indian democracy? On the other hand the cultural aspect is intellectually articulated and normatively being explained in the academic discourses but in practice, we hardly have any negotiation between these two aspects of democracy. The issue is, how to resolve these questions, which exist in the form of dilemmas of democracy or paradoxes of democracy of which Indian democracy cannot be devoid of”.

**Mr. J.S. Toor (Advocate from Chandigarh and associated with All India Lawyers Union and Civil Rights movement):** Spoke mainly on the legal dimensions of democracy and its impact on the fundamental rights of the people. He said, “We have to fight the myth that the Indian Constitution is a sacred book. The Constituent Assembly, which was elected in 1946, had only Congress Party members since the Muslim League

boycotted it. All the decisions of the Constituent Assembly were taken in the All India Congress Committee AICC and then they were brought to the drafting committee. Ambedkar could only include the reservation for the scheduled castes and the scheduled tribes. The Indian Constitution is the result of the class character of the members of the Constituent Assembly. This was the reason that a primary right to live like the right to food and employment etc were not granted under the fundamental rights chapter of the Indian constitution. It is because of this that even after more than five decades of the existence of the constitution and democratic rule, people in India are still dying of starvation and easily preventable diseases. Even the freedom granted under the fundamental rights in the constitution were curbed in the very first year of the existence of the constitution when the Preventive Detention Act (PD Act) was brought to keep political opponents in jail without trial”. He also gave some suggestions by which the shortcomings of the present democracy can be remedied: “At present there is no way to remove any judge from the High Courts or the Supreme Court however corrupt s/he may be. The elected candidate must get more than 50 percent of the votes and people should have the right to reject all the candidates. Voters should also have the right to recall their representatives. If elected members break the oath s/he shall be debarred from contesting any election in the future”.

**Ms. Navpreet Kaur (Research Scholar, Dept. of Political Science, University of Delhi, Delhi):** “Democracy is not only elections and party affairs. It should be treated as a way of life. Democracy should also be a part of our social and personal affairs. For example, women have got reservation in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) but decisions of women sarpancha’s are taken by their husbands, fathers’ brothers’ or sons’. Even in this dialogue very few women are seen”.

**Mr. Hemant Kumar (Socio-political activist from Karnataka):** “When I spoke about the cosmopolitan agenda I was also talking about all other things about which Mr. Vijay Pratap spoke”.

----- END OF DIALOGUE -----

**List of Participants**

**Delhi**

**Dates: 15<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> April 2004**

Ajay Bhardwaj, Documentary Film producer

Aminu Rehman, Uttrakhand Sangharsh Vahini

Anita Bharti, Teacher and working among Dalits for the past 20 years in Delhi

Atul Kumar, Journalist , Hindustan

Bela Bhatia, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi

Daleep Singh, Sampooran Kranti Manch, Haryana

Debasis Baidya, Dalit activist West Bengal.

Des Raj Kali, Journalist and Dalit activist from Punjab

Dinesh Singh, Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, Delhi.

Dipankar Ray, Jadhavpur University West Bengal.

Gauri Dey, socio-political activist

Hemant Kumar, Socio-political activist Karnataka

J.S.Toor, Advocate from Chandigarh and associated with All India Lawyers Union and Civil Rights movement

K.K. Sidhu, Editor Hindi / Punjabi edition of Dalit Voice

Karu Dalit Chetana Trust.

Kishori Das, General Secretary, Bihar People's Union for Civil Liberty (PUCL) and President Most Backward and Deprived Caste Action Committee, Bihar

Lallan Singh Baghel, Activist from Chandigarh

Mahesh, Managing Editor , Samayik Varta, a Hindi monthly from Delhi.

Mehar Singh Dabbas, Social activist Delhi

Navpreet Kaur, Research Scholar, Dept. of Political Science, University of Delhi, Delhi.

P.K. Basant, Jamia Milia Universtiy, Delhi

Paramjit Singh, BAMCEF ,Delhi

Peter R de Souza , Senior Fellow, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi

Pradeep Kumar Singh, Teacher and activist from Bhagalpur, Bihar

Rajaram Tolpade, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi

Rajeev Godara, Advocate at Punjab and Haryana High Court and associated with All India Lawyers' Union, Chandigarh

Dialogue on Democracy (North India - Delhi) 15<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> April, 2004

Rajendra Chaudhary, Maharishi Dayanand University, Haryana

Rakesh Kr. Yadav, Samajwadi Jan Parishad

Ramesh Sharma, Gandhi Peace Foundation, Delhi.

S. Gupta, Journalist from Delhi.

S. Singha Chowdhury, President Dalit Unity Centre, West Bengal

S.K. Biswas, Central government dalit employees associations.

S.S. Manhas, Activist from Delhi

Sajjan Kumar, Nature Human Centric People Movement, Rajasthan

Shamsher Singh Bisht, Active in Uttranchal for the past 25 years

Subhash Bhatnagar , Political activist for more than three decades and for the past 20 years  
working with the unorganised workers

Sukhdev Singh, Nature Human Centric People Movement

Vandana Joshi, Uttrakhand peoples' movement