

Qualitative Assessment of Democracy

I

Qualitative Assessment (QA) is one component of the larger project, which is an ambitious collaborative project involving scholars from the five South Asian countries, Bangla Desh, India, Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka. The project, State of Democracy in South Asia, engages in a thorough ‘assessment’ of democracy in the five South Asian countries. Cross-section survey, elite survey, case studies, dialogues and qualitative assessment are the five aspects of this assessment. They employ different methodologies but operate in the same intellectual framework.

The project visualizes five different levels at which the democratic experience can be evaluated. These levels are labeled as *Promise, Design, Working, Outcomes* and *Futures*. As the global debate about the meaning of democracy continues, we confront two initial difficulties: In the first place, we need to strike a balance between the minimalist and the maximalist conceptions of democracy. The former leads us to a standard liberal democratic notion tying democracy to a set of rules and regulations. The latter allows the concept of democracy to become a hold-all for all good wishes and lofty expectations. Our conception has to be sensitive to institutional requirements emanating from democracy as a principle of governance. At the same time, conception of democracy must take into account the tension between the formally democratic state and the potentially anti-democratic trends existing in the arena of civil society. Secondly, democracy has to be posited in such a manner that we can transcend concerns about political equality and extend them to social and economic field.

The other initial difficulty is the tension between received notions of democracy and indigenous ideological advances. This is the problematique of universal vs. the particular. The former has a homogenizing tendency while the latter has the risk of being reduced to exceptionalism. Our answer to this problematique would be that although the principles may be universal, their routes of reaching the public imagination would be country specific. It therefore, becomes a necessary exercise to probe what meaning is constituted by the notion of democracy, what images are derived from the invocations of democratic ideology. In this context, democracy does not remain a mere institutional arrangement, but a ‘promise’ by and to the people of a country. This exercise, however, needs to be cautious of the attempts to hijack the spirit of democracy in the name of indigenous ideas of democracy.

Therefore, the primary task is to locate ‘democracy’ as an ideology that has both universal and country specific salience. This implies that democracy reaches the public and the elite as containing a certain promise. Having thus located democracy in the realm of ‘promise’, we further need to assess the institutional imagination employed by the society in order to translate the promise into operational organizations and rules and procedures. This architecture of democracy may be described as the ‘design’, which is a purposive set of regulations and a concretization of goals and objectives in the form of ‘structures’. However, this architecture has to shape on the available terrain in terms of

the social and economic design, which is a pre-given. Therefore, 'design' includes the characteristics of the society in which democracy operates and the economic structures within which democracy is sought to be realized.

Design and Promise presuppose certain *modus operandi*. But the set of rules and regulations and the situational contexts produce different configurations. These need to be measured in terms of their distance from the promise and the design. Herein lies the tension between the proclaimed principles and their articulation through social and political processes. This invites our attention to 'working' of democracy. This dimension would have three reference points: the commitment of the 'working' of democracy to the formal statements of promise and design, the creativity of 'working' in evolving and expanding the scope of the promise and design, and the ability of 'working' to relate to supra-national norms. Working would, of course, include the distortions of the goal of democracy, both in its universal and country-specific context, and the deviations that enter into the working of democracy either due to socio-economic situations or as a result of political competition for power.

Next, we need to ask the question: where does democracy lead our society? Do we simply adopt the formal standard and stop there or does democracy keep expanding its meaning? In other words, assessment of democracy would take into consideration the process of democratization. Here, we are looking at the 'outcome' of democracy. One can posit a complex set of issues in the term democratization. Expansion of popular participation, more intensive role of public in decision-making, more accountability and transparency, are some of the issues involved in democratization. Democratization would also involve the diversification of the social bases of power. Further, it would refer to democratization of public policy in terms of the agenda and the manner of addressing that agenda. And lastly, democratization would refer to a more democratic (plural, equal and dialogical) civil society. Assessing the outcomes in terms of these different senses of democratization would involve the fourth dimension of outcome. There is one more sense in which discussion of outcomes becomes relevant: What are the internal processes of examining the democratic practice and institutional framework? Has there been a search for alternatives, improvements, reforms and ideological innovations, in the course of the country's political journey? Does that posit any special features as far the future of democracy in that country is concerned? In the near future, say in the next decade or so, what are the likely trajectories of democracy that may emerge from the experience so far? We call this, the fifth level of assessment, as 'Futures'. The assessment of futures would not just be futuristic, it would make an assessment of the possibilities hidden and the expectations generated by the working and outcomes. Instead of merely discussing the gap between promise and working, 'futures' would also take into account the institutional and ideological response by the country to its democratic experience and likely implications of this for the future of democracy.

Thus, we can treat 'promise', 'design', 'working', 'outcome' and 'futures' as the five levels at which our study would focus. Qualitative assessment would be strengthened by inputs from survey, case studies, dialogues, etc. Besides, we shall develop a set of specific questions to be taken into consideration by the assessment team. (These

questions are modeled on the IDEA questions and for good measure borrow many of the IDEA questions).

II

A team of scholars from each country has undertaken the assessment on a non-partisan basis. Participating scholars have taken into consideration all the available studies by other scholars of various ideological and theoretical persuasions. Therefore, the initial task of each assessor was to identify the body of literature available on the given subject. Having reviewed this literature, the assessors, then answer the specific questions raised by the QA framework. This response of the assessor, however, can take the form of a narrative. In other words, the assessment need not be in terms of questions and answers. Each such essay would ideally, have a bibliography. Draft of the assessment essays are peer-reviewed by experts and the authors were requested to take into account the comments of this group while revising the assessment essay.

The entire SDSA project is being coordinated by the *Loknit* (a programme of the CSDS, Delhi, India for the comparative study of democracy). Professors Peter R. De Souza, Yogendra Yadav (both at CSDS) and Professor Suhas Palshikar (University of Pune, India) are the three Principal Investigators of the project. Professor Suhas Palshikar has coordinated the Qualitative Assessment programme in association with Professor Imtiaz Ahmed (Bangla Desh), Professor Krishna Hacchetu (Nepal), Professor Mohammad Waseem (Pakistan) and Professor Jayadev Uyangoda (Sri Lanka). Ms Ritu Rao was the Project Officer who assisted in the work. The following framework was developed by Suhas Palshikar and Yogendra Yadav in consultation with Peter R. De Souza and Sakauntala Kadirgamar-Rajasingham and Leena Rikkilae (both of International IDEA) and the scholars listed above.

III

The Framework of Democracy Assessment

Qualitative Assessment (QA) of Democracy would address the questions listed in the following framework with reference to the five levels and the four domains listed below:

Five Levels

- I *Promise*
- II *Design*
- III *Working*
- IV *Outcome*
- V *Futures*

For each of these five levels (except Promise and Future), assessment would be made with respect to the following domains of public-political activity:

Four Domains

- A. *State institutional domain*
- B. *Party political domain*
- C. *Non-party political domain*
- D. *Economic, social and cultural domain*

I Promise

1. What does 'democracy' mean for ordinary citizens?
 - (a) What expressions are used in popular lexicon for 'democracy'?
 - (b) What proportion and kind of ordinary citizens understand the word 'democracy' in their language?
 - (c) What range of meaning do ordinary citizens associate with democracy?
 - (d) Does the awareness of and meaning associated with democracy vary among different social groups along gender, class and caste-community lines?
2. What promise does democracy hold for ordinary citizens?
 - (a) To what extent and among which sections is democracy seen as a positive value? How wide spread is support for democracy?
 - (b) What are the most common and acceptable justifications offered in support of democracy?
 - (c) What are the most commonly prevalent anxieties and doubts about democracy?
 - (d) To what extent and among which sections is support for democracy linked to a firm negation of non-democratic options: authoritarian, military rule, rule by experts etc.?
 - (e) Is democracy understood mainly in procedural terms (free and fair elections, rule of law etc.) or is it linked to substantive promises (social equality, economic well being, good governance etc.) as well?
 - (f) To what extent and for whom is the promise of democracy extended beyond the political domain to include relations within a family or caste-community?
3. How has 'democracy' come to acquire these meanings, justifications and emphases in popular imagination?
 - (a) When and in which manner was the expression 'democracy' first used in a systematic manner in public discourse? Which values and political positions was it then associated with?
 - (b) When and how did the concept travel from the elite to the popular public domain? Did it lead to significant change in its meaning of conceptual associations?
 - (c) Were there systematic attempts to offer indigenous elaborations for the idea of democracy or offer alternatives to the received theory of democracy? Did these attempts have any resonance in popular discourse?
 - (d) What were the central contestations around the idea of democracy, its meaning and justifications? When and how were those contestations settled, if at all?

II Design

A. State-institutional domain

1. How adequate are the constitutional provisions in providing for equal citizenship and rights to all the people including various minorities?
 - (a) How inclusive is the political nation and state citizenship of all who live within its territory?
 - (b) How adequate are the constitutional provisions for recognition of cultural differences and protection of minorities?
 - (c) How adequate are the constitutional provisions for providing right to freedom of expression, associations and assembly?
 - (d) What are the constitutional provisions for enforcement and protection against violation of above mentioned rights?
2. To what extent is the independence and accountability of the organs of national government ensured by constitutional provisions?
 - (a) To what extent is the legislature empowered to control law making, oversee policy formulation and scrutinize taxation and public expenditure?
 - (b) What are the provisions that make the court and judiciary independent from executive and legislative?
 - (c) Are there constitutional provisions establishing the supremacy of civilian governance over armed forces and safeguarding against army takeover?
 - (d) Are there any hindrances in the constitutional mechanism to continuation and functioning of democracy?
 - (e) How impartial are the procedures for amending the constitution?
3. How effective are the constitutional and legal provisions for self-governance at sub-national and local level?
 - (a) What are the provisions for division of power and resources between the national and sub-national governments, if any?
 - (b) What are the provisions for ensuring autonomous power and independent resources for local government, if any?
 - (c) What are the constitutional guarantees against encroachment of the power of lower tier by the higher?
4. How adequate are the legal-constitutional provisions to ensure the accountability of administration both to democratically elected governments and to the people?
 - (a) Are there provision to ensure equal opportunity and transparent procedures for entry into civic services?
 - (b) How effective are the provisions ensuring the control of political executive and legislation over administration?
 - (c) Are there legal provision that require public consultation on policy making?
 - (d) Are there legal provisions that require the administration to share information with public?
 - (e) How adequate are the legal provisions against graft and misuse of official position by any civil servants?

B. Party Political domain

1. What were the structures of organized political competition that the country inherited at the time of national independence/ introduction of universal adult franchise?
 - (a) Were there formally organized and widely recognized political parties at that time?
 - (b) If yes, what was the depth of their organization and the extent of their geographical spread?
 - (c) What, if any, were the patterns of political alignment of social groups with these parties?

2. How open and accountable is the system of party political competition?
 - (a) Are parties allowed to form freely and there any restrictions on their activity?
 - (b) What if any are the legal provisions to regulate the internal functioning of political parties?
 - (c) Are there any legal, systematic or structural barriers against new players entering the party system?

3. How adequate are the legal-constitutional provisions to provide for representation via free and fair elections?
 - (a) What are the provisions to ensure free and impartial conduct of elections?
 - (b) What are the provisions that make registration and voting procedure inclusive and accessible to all citizens? Are there any sections of society that tend to be left out of electoral rules?
 - (c) What are the provisions for ensuring adequate representation of all social sections including minorities and marginalized groups?
 - (d) What are the provisions for elections, candidates and elected representatives that prevent their subordination to dominant interests?

C. Non-party political domain

1. What are the structure of groups, organization and movements other than political parties that were involved in political mobilization and opinion making at the time of national independence/ beginning of universal adult franchise?
 - (a) What were the fields/ spheres of activity of these groups?
 - (b) What was their organizational depth and geographical spread?
 - (c) What was the social composition of the members and the leadership of these groups?

2. What are the constitutional-legal provisions to ensure free and independent working of these groups?
 - (a) Are people allowed to freely form trade unions, professional bodies, NGOs, initiate movements that are free to espouse political position?
 - (b) What are the legal provisions concerning the internal functioning and political affiliation of trade unions?

- (c) What are the legal provisions concerning the functioning and accountability of non-governmental organizations?
 - (d) Are there formal/ legal requirements for initiating or organizing political activity or mobilization?
3. What are the enabling and disabling conditions for the mass media imposed by legal-formal provisions and socio-economic structure?
 - (a) Are there constitutional guarantees for the free functioning of the media? Are there laws that compromise this freedom?
 - (b) Is there state ownership of media? If yes, in which sphere (print, radio, electronic) and to what extent does it control the market?
 - (c) What are the structural constrains (ownership, social composition) to independent functioning of media?
 - (d) Are there legal provisions to enable independent functioning of the media (restriction on monopoly, cross ownership regulations)?

D. Social, economic and cultural domain

1. What were the enabling and disabling conditions for the growth of democracy inherited from the socio-economic structure at the time of national independence/ inauguration of universe adult franchise?
 - (a) What was the impact of social inequalities and structure of social hierarchy based on gender, caste, class, religion and ethnicity on the growth of democracy?
 - (b) What was the nature of social cleavages as these were articulated in politics at that moment? Did it encourage exclusivist mobilization or cross-cutting mobilization?
 - (c) What was the role and influence of organized economic interest in the political arena?
2. How conducive or otherwise were the inherited cultural formations for the growth of democracy?
 - (a) How well entrenched was democratic ideology among the then political and opinion making elite?
 - (b) How open and adaptable was the structure of mass political beliefs to notion of democracy?
 - (c) Did social values, beyond formal political ideologies, support a culture of democracy?
3. What, if any, were the constitutional-legal or institutional provisions to intervene in the inherited socio-economic and cultural legacy?

III. Working

- (e) What is the relationship between mass media and political parties or organized political groups?

A. State institutional Domain

1. How representative have the various organs of the government been of the various social sections including women, minorities, ethnic groups and other marginalized groups? This question is to be asked with reference to the following:

- a) Legislatures at the national and the sub-national levels
- b) Political executive at different levels
- c) Higher and lower judiciary
- d) Bureaucracy
- e) Armed forces

2. How accountable have the different organs of the government been in practice to each other and to the public?

- a) How far have the legislatures succeeded in holding the executive accountable and retain its autonomy?
- b) To what extent have the sub-central (federal units and local level) governments retained their autonomy vis-à-vis the national (or the federal unit, in federations) government? How frequent are instances of conflict between these and the national government? How and to whose advantage are these resolved?
- c) What are the actual measures adopted by the legislature and the political executive for keeping the bureaucracy under control? How far have these been successful? To what extent does the bureaucracy uphold norms of public good and function in a transparent manner?
- d) How far have the different levels of judiciary been successful in retaining their independence from control by political executive? To what extent is the functioning of the judiciary transparent and open to public scrutiny?
- e) How far have the various constitutional bodies like civil service commissions or election commissions, etc. been able to function in an autonomous and transparent manner?
- f) Is the army effectively subordinate to democratically elected political executive

3. What kind of institutional innovations\ modifications have occurred over a period of time, say last fifty years?

- a) Which institutional innovations have taken place in the last fifty years?
- b) To what extent are the new structures enabling\disabling as far as popular participation is concerned?
- c) What are the areas in which new structures have evolved, legislative, executive, judicial, administrative or military?
- d) In what way, if at all, have the new structures changed the balance of power among the state institutions as originally posited in the institutional arrangements?
- e) What has been the emphasis of the institutional changes during the last decade?

B. Party political domain

1. What is the structure of party political competition in the country?

- a) How and on what bases did different parties emerge over the past fifty years? Has there been a closure in the party system or is it open to actual competition among parties?
- b) What has been the main pattern of electoral competition among the parties over period of time? How many parties have so far shared power at the national level? How many at the sub-central level?

2. What is the ideological spectrum traversed by the party system?

- a) What have been the various ideological positions adopted by different parties? What is the range of common ground in this respect?
- b) Is any ideology seen as less acceptable than the others?
- c) What have been the main arguments employed by different ideological positions?
- d) Does the present ideological contestation leave out any particular ideologies as illegitimate?

3. What are the social bases of the parties?

- a) Are there parties, which appeal exclusively to any particular social sections?
- b) Is there any evidence to suggest the pattern of social bases of various parties in terms of different social groups (rural\urban, male\female, etc.)?
- c) Is there any change in the social bases of parties over a period of time?

4. To what extent are parties well-organized and democratic in their functioning?

- a) What is the pattern of organization adopted by the parties? Are they cadre based?
- b) What are the strategies adopted by parties in order to recruit and train active members?
- c) What are the mobilizational strategies adopted by the parties? Do they rely on populist leadership, or on emotive appeals, etc.?
- d) To what extent is there intra-party democracy in the functioning of parties?
- e) Are political parties active only during election time or are they active between elections as well?

5. What function do parties perform in the political system?

- a) To what extent are parties alliances of interests?
- b) How far do parties represent the ideological polarization in the society?
- c) How far are parties alliances of social sections for purposes of power sharing?
- d) To what extent are parties systems of regime legitimation?

- e) How far are parties instruments of changing the government of the day?
- f) How representative is the party system of the existing social diversity and aspirations?

C. Non-Party Political Domain

1. What constitutes the non-party political arena?

- a) Which are the interests\social sections organized outside of the party system? Trade unions? Manufacturers' associations? Farmers' organizations? Students' unions?
- b) Which sections of the society are relatively less organized, unorganized? Have there been any attempts to mobilize these sections?
- c) How far is there a balance between the organized power of the entrenched sections as opposed to that of the sections having less resources? Such as women, slum dwellers, minorities, manual laborers, etc.
- d) What distinguishes the non-party organizations from the party political domain? Ideology? Form of activity? State power?
- e) What are the popular struggles outside the party political domain that the country has witnessed? How are they different from the action initiated by the parties?

2. What is the nature of the activity of the organizations in the non-party arena?

- a) How far are the strategies of collective action used by various non-party organizations? Which groups turn often to these strategies?
- b) To what extent do the non-party organizations engage in protest activity? Which organizations take an initiative in this respect?
- c) How broad is the scope of the non-party organizations? Are they successful in transforming the specific issues in more broad-based platforms for collective action? Do they remain 'single-issue' platforms?
- d) How effective are the non-party organizations in transforming the agenda of politics in the country?
- e) How far is the distinction between organizations based on movements and non-governmental organizations clear? Are there clear boundaries? What distinguishes one from the other?
- f) To what extent does the issue of funding of the non-party organizations (NGOs) matter in their social acceptability and in the issues they take up?
- g) Has there been a decline\consolidation of politics of mobilization?

3. What is the nature of relationship between non-party organizations and the political parties?

- a) How autonomous of the parties are the non-party organizations?

- b) To what extent do the non-party organizations intervene in the electoral process?
- c) Which organizations, if any, are affiliated to the various political parties?
- d) To what extent do the non-party organizations provide\ pursue the agenda of social transformation?
- e) Is there an ideological divide among the non-party political fora?
- f) How far have non-party platforms transformed themselves into contenders for political power?

D. Economic and Social-Cultural Domain

1. What have been the major developments in the field of the political economy?

- a) What are the main features of the economic policies adopted from time to time?
- b) How far have the economic policies been successful in achieving the objectives set by the planners\decision-makers? In terms of growth, poverty alleviation, etc.
- c) To what extent have the economic issues dominated the party political domain?
- d) Has there been any major departure in terms of the economic policies? What have been the factors responsible for this departure? How have the different social sections responded to these departures? What has been the response of the different political parties to the departures?
- e) What kind of stratification and social cleavage has the economy produced over a period of time?

2. What have been the major developments in the field of social relations and social stratification?

- a) To what extent has the society moved away from\ retained the social system inherited from colonial time?
- b) To what extent social inequalities have been addressed and what has been the effect of this on the social structure?
- c) To what extent has politics intervened in the shaping of social relations in the country? To what extent the social relations shaped politics? How far have social relations been resistant to changes enforced\ pursued by modern politics?
- d) Are party political domain and the non-party domain seen as instruments for improving social relations?
- e) To what extent new value structure is emerging\ has emerged and how do the different sections of the society respond to these changes?

IV. Outcomes

A. State Institutional Domain

1. How democratic have the state institutions been? Do they follow the democratic procedures?
 - a) To what extent has the integrity of the nation-state been effectively ensured?
 - b) To what extent have the state institutions been able to ensure\provide law and order on a regular basis?
 - c) Have there been free and fair elections in the country?
 - d) Do the people have voice in and information about decision-making?

2. How accessible and legitimate are the state institutions?
 - a) To what extent are the state institutions---legislative, executive and judicial-- are accessible to the public?
 - b) To what extent do the people look upon various state institutions as legitimate in the exercise of their authority?
 - c) Has there been any expansion of popular control over or participation in the functioning of state institutions?
 - d) To what extent has the legitimacy of the state and its various institutions increased\declined over a period of time, say, in the last ten years?
 - e) Has there been more\less reliance on the repressive measures on the part of the state? If yes, has this been done by legislative instruments or executive action?

4. To what extent\ How has the implementation of citizens' rights taken place?
 - a) Has there been expansion of citizens' rights or a decline in there implementation, including the rights of the minorities, women and weaker sections?
 - b) Has there been a differential implementation of rights for different sections of the society?
 - c) What has been the role of the legislature, executive, bureaucracy and military in the implementation\ violation of citizens' rights?
 - d) To what extent has the judiciary emerged as a center of power or as the main protector of the rights of the citizens?
 - e) Is the judiciary seen as being hyperactive? To what extent is this accepted as an institutional innovation?
 - f) Has the judiciary played any significant role in the field if protection of rights? Have there been any specific judicial pronouncements, innovations, interpretations, etc., that have implication for the practice of rights in the country?

B. Party Political Domain

Voices to be heard, interest articulation
Meaningful and effective range of choices

1. Is the party system exclusive or inclusive?
 - a) Do the parties tend to exclude unpopular\ less popular voices, views etc. or are all\ most views accommodated by the parties?
 - b) Do the parties take into consideration the views of the people while formulating their policies?
 - c) Do the parties operate as agencies of interest articulation or as agencies of legitimation and rationalization of the established order?
2. What is the nature and scope of party competition?
 - a) Do the people get a wide range of choices in terms of leadership, policy and ideology through party competition?
 - b) Does the party competition offer an effective choice to the voters? Can the voters expect different policy outcomes through party competition? Or, is the party competition only in numerical terms?

C. Non-party political domain:

1. Is there a free and fair flow of information?
 - a) Is there a free media?
 - b) Does the media accommodate views dissenting from the established consensus?
 - c) To what extent does the media actually reach all sections of the society?
2. Is there space in the arena of political contestation for articulation of minority or marginalized sections and their interests? If yes, do political parties articulate such interests or do non-party formations articulate these interests?
3. Are non-party formations seen as partners in governance or as supplements to parties?
4. How dependent are non-party organizations on assistance from foreign sources and to what extent are they indigenously supported?

D. Socio-economic domain

1. Is politics seen as an activity reducing the polarities of inherited social hierarchies?
2. Do democratic governance and the political process provide citizens with a sense of self-respect and personal dignity?
3. Does democratic governance result in a sense of social security?
4. How have access to resources and opportunities been distributed across the society?
5. Has a democratic culture of dialogue and tolerance of difference evolved? Has there been an extension of the democratic culture beyond the political domain? In inter-group relations? In intra-group relations? Among different cultural, linguistic groups? In the family?

V FUTURES

1. In what way and to what extent are the various forces/factors likely to influence the state of democracy and its likely trajectory? For instance, globalization, demographic changes (from rural to urban, the rise of middle classes), geo-strategic compulsions and the pressure of retaining the existence of the nation-state?

2. What is the likely trajectory of democracy in foreseeable future?
 - a) In terms of design, what major changes in the constitutional or socio-economic design are likely?
 - b) Can we look forward to improvement in key aspects of the working of democracy?
 - c) Is democracy likely to deliver more or better for the ordinary citizens?
3. What is the possible trajectory of democracy with reference to the state of the debate on political reforms?
 - a) How has the debate emerged? What are the salient positions and its ideological orientation? What are the major silences in the debate?
 - b) What are the specific proposals for reform in the following aspects:
 - Constitutional design including the electoral system
 - Electoral practices to ensure free and fair elections
 - Institutionalisation and regulation of parties
 - Civil service and administrative reforms
 - c) How widespread is the demand for reforms?
4. What is the future of the promise of democracy?

How has the promise of democracy undergone a change, if any, in recent times? What is the likely trajectory? Towards radicalization or domestication?

Are there attempts to recover, redefine and enrich the promise of democracy in popular imagination? How robust are these attempts? What are their likely effects?