DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNANCE

Democracy and Governance

After Independence, India adopted a democratic system of governance which was articulated within the framework of the Constitution of India. It is pertinent to note that the founding fathers and mothers of the nation preferred democracy over other forms of government in spite of the Indian peninsula having a long history of being ruled by monarchs, kings and queens in several princely states. In order to fulfil the aspirations of a large and diverse population, democracy was the only way in which legitimate demands of the people can be taken into account in decision making at all levels of government. It was hoped that Indian democracy would fulfil the ideal of the government being "of the people, by the people, and for the people". On the one hand, democracy ensures representation of all diverse sections of society in local, state and national legislative bodies, thus making them inclusive. On the other hand, democracy is a form of government that has the capacity to govern the people by accommodating the voices, concerns and legitimate demands of all sections of society. India was fortunate to have a stable government for over a decade under the leadership of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, who built resilient democratic institutions and traditions that has sustained Indian democracy over the years. Over the last seven decades, Indian democracy has stood the test of time and has grown into the largest democracy in the world governing over 1.3 billion people. Sixteen national elections have taken place with smooth transitions between different governments belonging to different political parties and political alliances. The dance of Indian democracy continues this year as General Elections are due to be held in the middle of the year that will constitute the 17th Lok Sabha (The Lower House of Parliament). Through these elections, the people of the country will choose their representatives in the Parliament as well as some States. Elections every five years puts people's representatives on notice, that if they do not govern and perform by working for the welfare of the people of the constituency and for the nation, they will be voted out of power in the next elections. The process of elections has evolved over the last seven decades. Initially, ballot papers were used for elections, but after over two decades of trials, Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) were used for all General Elections and State Assembly elections from 2004. In order to improve the transparency in the election process voter verified paper audit trail (VVPAT) system will be introduced in for the first time in the General elections this year. The electoral process in a country with over a billion people always poses great challenges, such as

credibility of the Election Commission, EVM tampering, hate speech, use of money power, political violence, bribery of voters, voter intimidation, misuse of social media, fake news, use of religion, caste and ethnicity for gaining votes, and so on. In spite of these challenges, the electoral process has been largely free and fair and the elected representatives have come from different sections of society that mirrors the diversity in the country. However, ensuring free and fair elections at periodic intervals is only one aspect of democracy. The other aspect of democracy is governance, which is participative, adheres to constitutional framework and fulfils international commitments as well as the hopes and aspirations of people of diverse interests in a fast changing global scenario. Good governance is the hope of every citizen and the promise made by most political parties during the election season. Broadly, the goal of governance is to ensure that the State guarantees the fundamental rights enshrined in the Constitution to every citizen every community in the country. Every elected government needs to strive to promote a secular democratic society that cherishes the values of justice, liberty, equality and fraternity. Specifically, governance also needs to focus on providing for the basic needs and civic amenities to all citizens. Access to education, health, food, nutrition, housing, employment, sustainable livelihood, markets, civic authorities, financial institutions and justice are important aspects of governance that needs to be taken into account by every government. More importantly, good governance in a democracy implies that the State machinery, Constitutional bodies, the judiciary and other democratic institutions work smoothly at the service of the country and all its people.

The articles in this issue of *Social Action* highlight different aspects of democracy and governance in the country. The first article by Dinoo Mathew on "Criticality of the Local in Evolving Peaceful and Inclusive Society in Kerala" argues that our commitment to promote peaceful and inclusive societies should help build a narrative of inclusivity, accountability and justice through the centrality of the local. The article illustrates how local governance in Kerala has facilitated rich local spaces, practices and processes that bring about social change and build inclusive societies. The article titled "Regional Disparities in Health Care Facilities in North-East India" by Farhat Hossain analyses basic health parameters of the eight states of North-East India and shows that though the health indicators of North-Eastern states are better than the national average, there are wide regional disparities between the different states which needs to be addressed. Saroj Rani presents the struggle of women, who have political aspirations, to

enter local politics in her article, "Gender in Local Governance: legalities and State Dynamics". Basing her arguments on the testimonies of women panchayat members from Sirsa District in Haryana, she argues that though women have the capabilities in local governance at the panchayat level, they have to face several challenges from a patriarchal society. The article on "The Politics of Making of an Insurgent" by Vani Xaxa and Krishnaswami Dara deals with the politics of labelling of people's struggles against poor governance in colonial terms as 'insurgency'. In particular, they point out to conceptual contradictions of academic representations of Adivasi struggles for their rights. Siji Chacko's article titled "Eroding Lives of Musahars: Lived Experiences in the Context of Flood and River-Bank Erosion" describes the vulnerabilities of the Musahar community living on the banks of river Gandak in West Champaran District of Bihar due to frequent floods and soil erosion. The author tries to capture the uncertainties and insecurities of the Musahars as well as their traumatic experiences of survival and their long wait for rehabilitation and resettlement. Pradeep Panda presents an analysis of the findings of an inclusive cashew livelihood model in his article titled "Inclusion and Economic Empowerment of Rural Tribal Women in Cashew Value Chain and Market: A Case Study of Navrangapur District in Odisha". He shows that inclusive strategies, scientific technologies and participatory approaches in cashew based livelihoods can lead to social and economic inclusion of tribal women in the mainstream of society and economy. The last article on "De-jure and de-facto Rights of property Ownership of Women: A Feminist Review" by Ashim Shil discusses the barriers that hinder women from accessing property rights, which is an essential prerequisite for women's empowerment.

These articles present different dimensions of democracy and governance. It is hoped that Indian democracy may mature so that elected representatives and governments will be able to provide governance that will be able to fulfil the hopes and aspirations of all citizens of the country.

Denzil Fernandes

Criticality of the Local in Evolving Peaceful and Inclusive Society in Kerala

*Dinoo Anna Mathew**

Abstract

Goal 16 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) calls for the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies and for people's interests to be at the core of the inclusion and peace agenda. The challenge before national governments the world over is to work towards its effective implementation through localization of the SDGs. Situating the concept of the local in the current discourse and discussions in peace building, this article argues that, from the perspective of the SDG 16 and in the efforts towards localization of its stated objectives, there is a need to amplify the narrative of inclusivity, accountability and justice through the centrality of the local. Based on the field study in Kerala, the article highlights the criticality of the local in contributing to transformative changes and in fostering agency and resistance in society.

Keywords: Peace building, Inclusion, Local, Agency and Resistance.

The promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies globally is a commitment made by national governments to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). According to SDG 16, promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, providing access to justice for all and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels is the responsibility of every government (United Nations and German Cooperation, 2016). It is intended that through SDG 16, people's interests will be at the core of the inclusion and peace agenda, and that everyone, even those who are not living in conflict-affected areas should be able to lead peaceful lives without the fear of insecurity and violence (UNDP 2016). Today there are concerted efforts towards advocating the localization of SDGs especially through sub-national and local governments. Therefore, this paper looks at the concept and potential of the local and how it is evolving in the current discourses on peacebuilding. In this context, the paper, based on a field study, analyzes how Kerala has emerged with rich local spaces, practices and processes which are critical for social change and building of inclusive societies.

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*PhD Scholar, United Nations mandated University for Peace, Costa Rica. Thesis submitted in September 2018. email: dinooana@gmail.com

The Local

The local has a transformative potential for building peace because it is at the local where citizens survive, where they confront discrimination or non-discrimination, experience inclusion or exclusion in society, where they can intermingle on a daily basis with people of other religions, castes, gender or class, where local peace formation or violent tensions can emerge. It is at the local level where women and the subaltern groups find greater avenues to exercise their agency and resistance, and the confidence to work collectively for transforming their social and economic conditions. Hence local practices and mechanisms that foster inclusive peacebuilding are pertinent.

The concept of local in peacebuilding has gained significance in academic discourses. In this context, the work of some social scientists mentioned below becomes highly relevant. For instance, John Paul Lederach argued that the greatest resource for building peace is to be found in local people in their local settings. Roger Mac Ginty, in a discussion on the local, points out local to be a site of construction and reconstruction and underlines that it can be viewed as tied to a geographical space or in terms of activity or what people do. Thus, local is "the social, political and economic worlds in terms of networks, relationships and activities" (Mac Ginty, 2015, p.850). In a literature review of what constitutes the local in peace building, Leonardsson and Rudd captures two dimensions: the first refers to local as a "means of effective peacebuilding" and the second dimension refers to local as a "means of emancipation expressed through the emphasis on voices from below" (Leornardsson and Rudd, 2015, p.826). Where emancipation and autonomy are the highest stakes of peace, Oliver. P. Richmond argues that it is but natural that "contemporary peacebuilding displays such tendencies in its translations to the local" (Richmond, 2012, p.125).

Emergence of the Local – The Case of Kerala

One of the processes identified by Roger Mac Ginty as having led to de-localization trends has been that of empire, colonialism and globalization (Mac Ginty, 2015, pp.840-856). He highlights that "colonial projects involved delocalizing the local" and "taming the local and incorporating it into an empire or under the umbrella of a 'mother state'" (ibid., p.842). When this framework is applied in the case of the princely states of Travancore and Cochin and the old Malabar area (the state of Kerala was formed in 1956 with the merger of the two princely states of Travancore and Cochin, and Malabar that was part of the Madras Presidency governed directly under British India), the colonialist project of modernity did consider the

local to be backward, harboring "exclusive identities", "a site of conflict and underdevelopment", and so requiring "peacebuilding and development intervention to help modernize it, connect it, and pacify it" (ibid., p.842)[i].

In Kerala, local social and political processes and struggles for an egalitarian and inclusive society gained momentum with its local roots. Its potential for building and strengthening inclusive societies had historical underpinnings and was initiated even before experiencing the British colonial rule[ii]. Over the years, the state emerged as an interesting case for understanding the local, its agency and resistance.

The historical analysis of local process in Kerala shows that local agencies reconstructed itself, negotiated with the modernity processes, resisted domination and appropriation by colonial powers. An analysis of the local processes during this time reveal that they were confronting oppressive structural conflicts and were mediating an inclusive peace in the context of the modernity narrative and liberal peace of the British colonial powers which were weighed more towards proselytization, 'modernization', and trading interests. The field study and secondary sources show that some of the key local processes were: the agency and resistance by women belonging to various castes, the fostering of local agencies by social reformers, shaping of local agencies through social movements, formation of political ideologies, the mass mobilization of the subaltern classes, the emergence of a Malayali identity and so on. Moreover another key component in the local process was the birth of a new resistance, especially from among the subaltern sections of the society (Velayudhan, 1999, p.486)[iii]. Thus through the local process, as in the framework narrated in the writings of Hanna Leonardsson and Gustav Rudd, the conditions for a *"context-specific, home-grown and bottom-up"* peace were being built up (Leonardsson and Rudd, 2015, pp.825-833). The local processes were challenging and weakening the oppressive social inequalities of caste, class and gender and creating a ferment that could be used for building inclusive peace. That was what happened in Kerala. The vital tool that was used in Kerala for these local processes was education and conscientisation of the masses for emancipation from the traditional caste and gender restrictions and oppressive practices[iv]. Education was thus providing voice and platform for the subalterns to negotiate their needs and rights.

According to Lederach, transformative platforms, are "ongoing social and relational spaces, in other words, people in relationship who generate responsive initiatives for constructive change" and which form the building blocks for supporting constructive social change over time (Lederach,

2010, p.47). The transformative nature of the platforms is more than the symptomatic addressing of the problem; it is the creation of a social moment wherein deeper change can be pursued in the relational context (ibid., p.48). In this context, Kerala is a classic example. In the years following the formation of the state of Kerala, various local space, processes and platforms emerged as a result of a range of participatory social justice - based development programs followed by the state. In fact, this paper underscores that the creation and fostering of the 'local' and its transformative nature have been the most significant factors in Kerala's efforts towards inclusivity. This has not only fostered agency and resistance but has over the years led to the continuous engagement of citizens across religious, caste and gender lines on issues of development, lending a transformative characteristic to the local. Such local transformative platforms could be seen for example, in Kerala's experience in their educational initiatives from the mid-1980s that was leading to profound changes in society. Through fostering civil society initiatives and people's campaigns in the building of education and literacy, transformative platforms emerged, leading to pursuance of deeper changes in society. The *Kerala Shastra Sahitya Parishad* (KSSP) or the Kerala People's Science Movement, Literary writings by women, Total Literacy Campaign in Ernakulam district, the Total Literacy Program in Kottayam, were path breaking initiatives by the enlightened groups. The KSSP and the total literacy programs were in the nature of campaigns and movements that emerged from civil society and engaged the government and mass mobilizations of women and men. They opened up the potential of the people to self-organize and build inclusive societies. Women's agency in all these initiatives and movements was an extremely significant factor. Moreover women's literary writings in Kerala were challenging patriarchal and traditional norms in the Kerala society and that brought subaltern voices to the fore and in public discourses[v].

Another transformative action was the decentralization process through the Panchayats which took place in the state since 1960s. The Panchayati raj movement created numerous platforms and fora for engagement of citizens across class, caste, gender, region and religious lines. These intertwining local platforms had immense promise and potential with regard to the building of an inclusive society. The potential of these platforms among others, varies from being local sites of handling local problems and issues to providing a forum for collective action and solidarity. For a majority of the elected representatives interviewed during the field study, the various fora like *gram sabha, ward sabha, ayal sabha* (neighborhood groups), *the Kudumbashree* (literally meaning the prosperity of the family), and