

zu, vom Entstehen einer homogenen Zivilgesellschaft zu sprechen? Diese Kernfrage behandelte Prof. Neera Chandhoke (Delhi) und kam zu dem Schluß, daß eine Übertragung der in Indien sehr populären Kategorien von Jürgen Habermas oft zu leichtfertig vorgenommen wird. Sie wurde hierbei weitgehend von Prof. Javeed Alam (Hyderabad) unterstützt, der betonte, daß es in Indien viele Formen der Verständigung (oder auch Nicht-Verständigung) gebe, die mit dem begrifflichen Instrumentarium der Kommunikationstheorie nicht zu fassen seien.

Die Abschlußdiskussion des Workshops, die vor allem von Prof. D.L. Sheth und Prof. Ashis Nandy geprägt wurde, griff noch einmal die Frage auf: „What it means to be an Indian today?“ Während Sheth lediglich bereit war, diese Frage als eine politische zu akzeptieren und zu diskutieren, wurde sie von Nandy in einen breiten kulturellen und historischen Kontext gestellt. Vor einhundert Jahren hätte die Beschreibung *des Inders* noch als ein reines Kunstprodukt bezeichnet werden müssen, und zum Zeitpunkt der Unabhängigkeit wäre sie so breit angelegt gewesen, daß sie für eine nationale Bestimmung untauglich war. Je mehr sich die Diskussion der Gegenwart näherte, um so weniger waren die Teilnehmer bereit, sich in dieser Frage festzulegen.

Helmut Reifeld

The Indian Parliament: A Comparative Perspective

New Delhi, March 25–27, 2002

The year 2002 will no doubt go down as an important signpost in the history of independent India as the Indian parliament celebrates its 50th anniversary. Moreover, it is also an opportune moment for a meaningful introspection. When independent India began this long journey not many were convinced that democratic institutions could take root and survive in what seemed to be alien conditions. They have not only taken root but have also survived. However, survival and longevity alone are neither fair nor adequate indicators of the functioning of these institutions. How well have these institutions performed, have they fulfilled or are they fulfilling the goals that they were entrusted with, have they lived up to the challenges, the changing needs and aspirations of the people, have they functioned according to the rules and regulations that govern them, and finally, what lessons can be drawn and where do we go from here? These questions with respect to the parliamentary system were addressed at a workshop organised by the Centre for Public Affairs in collaboration with the India International Centre and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation in New Delhi.

The six themes around which the workshop was structured included parliament and democracy, parliament and representation, the role and functioning of parliament, the relationship between different institutions and the future course or the road ahead. The papers were distributed in advance and therefore the presentations focussed on the salient points. As is the nature of workshops this ensured that there was a lively discussion from the floor. The framework used in most papers was as follows: statement of problem followed by analysis, and a conclusion, which usually put forward some suggestions about reforms as to the way ahead. The workshop had two participants from Germany while the rest were from India. The participants included representatives from academia, media, bureaucracy, politics and the non-governmental sector. The focus was predominantly on India. The German parliamentary system has received widespread attention in both academic circles and the media in India in recent years. It was therefore natural that the German participants Dieter Umbach and Clemens Jürgenmeyer were called upon in almost all sessions to offer clarifications.

The Vice President of India, Mr. Krishan Kant set the ball rolling with his inaugural address. He noted that the parliament of India has been a "microcosm of India", reflecting its changing demographic profile, societal composition, urges and aspirations, besides vividly mirroring the varied moods in the country. Based on his experience as Chairman of the Upper House of Parliament, the Rajya Sabha, he made an interesting observation about there being two faces of parliament. The visible face has been the often dramatic, noisy, and highly partisan one, where the game of politics is played out. The other face has functioned away from the limelight quietly in the chambers of the presiding officers, committees, and other informal institutions that have developed over the years. In this less visible face, according to him, parliamentarians discharge their functional responsibilities with "zeal and commitment". Finally, the most interesting point was that much of the "action"—walkouts, disturbing the house and so on—is actually 'scripted' in the other face and after due permission from the presiding officers, "enacted" in the visible face. These observations coming from someone who has seen parliament function from very close quarters surely provide new leads to understanding parliamentary functioning.

The first session on "Parliament and Democracy" had three presentations. Balveer Arora and Dieter Umbach concerned themselves with the Indian and German parliament respectively. Arora highlighted the changing composition and the progressive democratisation of the Indian parliament. The paper also noted that some of the undesirable elements in the functioning of parliament arose from the fact that the requirements of federal power sharing had been underestimated. He concluded that the emergence of federal coalitions necessitates a "mode of shared sovereignties" which neither par-

liament nor the constitution have established in a formal sense. Umbach's paper focussed on features of the German parliamentary system and its development in the last fifty years. It also cast light on some of the "German Specialities" like the "constructive vote of no-confidence" and also specified the similarities and the differences between the two countries. Jürgenmeyer's paper, the only theoretical presentation in the workshop, pointed to the futility of attempting to fit India into fixed categories like the Westminster or the consensus model of democracy. Contrary to both Brass's and Lijphart's characterisation of the Indian system he concluded that India oscillated between the two models depending on the circumstances prevailing in the country. He then characterised the Indian political system as highly flexible with a "phenomenal" capacity to continually adapt to changing situations.

The second session on representation had two papers. Jayaprakash Narayan's paper on elections and representational legitimacy pointed to the representational distortions that have taken place and their impact on parliamentary politics. The three major sources of distortion that were put forward were the failure to evolve a democratic culture, flaws in the electoral system, and the high degree of centralisation in the governance system. These were empirically backed up with survey-based results from different parts of the country. In the other presentation S.N. Jha presented an interesting research agenda on how parliamentary questions could be used as an indicator of representation. A correlation of the nature of issues raised and the changing socio-economic and political complexion of parliament could be a new way of making sense of politics not only in India but also elsewhere.

The third session focussed on the role of parliament with Abu Ahmed directing attention to the foreign policy arena and Madhav Godbole critically examining the role of parliament in the supervision and control of the executive. Godbole highlighted some of the failures of the parliamentary system and the weakness of surveillance mechanisms. He referred to, with empirical evidence, the time wasted, the increasing costs of conducting parliamentary business, the farce of committees, and the weak financial control. He then presented three case studies of the "outstanding failures" of the Indian parliament in the last few years. These included the Joint Parliamentary Committee on the Bofors and stock market scams, and the impeachment of a Supreme Court judge. The failure of parliament in each of the above cases to fix proper responsibility was a display of ineffectiveness and ineptitude. This incompetence has contributed to the erosion of confidence among the people and also increased the role of judicial activism in the country. He also shed light on nine areas in need of urgent reform, particularly interesting was the suggestion to have an "opposition day" in parliament.

The fourth and fifth sessions spread over two days and covered wide areas with regard to the functioning of the parliament. They included the functioning of presiding officers (Vijay Kumar), and parliamentary committees (Sandeep Shastri), parliamentary control over budget and finance (M. Govind Rao) and parliamentary privileges in India (O.P. Sharma). A. Surya Prakash's presentation brought to light the use and misuse of questions, an important mechanism of accountability in parliamentary democracies. A comparison with the "Cash for Questions" scandal that erupted in the United Kingdom a few years back was drawn, thus highlighting an area requiring urgent reform. Prakash suggested the implementation of the Report on Ethics presented in the 11th Lok Sabha as a starting point.

The Department Related Standing Committee System (DRSC), started in 1993, was the object of study in Shastri's paper. Based on the review of 11 DRSCs he described the various limitations in the functioning of institutions that are intended to ensure accountability of the executive. Among other things, he noted the marked absenteeism in committee meetings, the failure to discuss reports submitted, the non-implementation of previous recommendations. To increase their efficacy it was suggested for example that specialists from outside be involved with the committees and meetings be open to the public as is the practice in some other systems. From an economist's perspective Rao argued that though there are numerous control systems which enable parliament to control the budget and the financial system, they have rarely been effective. He lamented that parliament has rarely had the courage to make hard and unpopular but financially prudent decisions, choosing instead the easier populist line.

The sixth and seventh sessions on the framework of relationships had two sub themes, one on coalitions and parliament and the other on federal institutions and parliament. Prakash Nanda brought out the changing role of the opposition in parliament. In Pran Chopra's presentation on floor management in times of coalitions, the basic contention was that it is almost impossible to conceptualise and theorise on floor management, an important function of parliamentary democracy, given its fluidity especially with the emergence of multiparty coalitions. He also opined that it is likely to become more unmanageable in the future unless certain corrective steps are taken. One interesting suggestion offered was that the leader of the house/government be elected in parliament. If this were to be combined with a minimum voting requirement at the constituency level, it would ensure that the "democratic credentials of the government will be stronger".

Harish Khare's presentation on accountability in the age of coalition governments suggested that the classical *primus inter pares* position of the Prime Minister has been eroded. Examples from the United Front (1996–98) and the Vajpayee coalitions (1998–onwards) were cited as evidence.

The dilution of the Prime Minister's authority has led to a farcical situation where the Prime Minister cannot "make demands on ministers in terms of performance". Almost echoing Lawrence Lowell, he was harshly critical of coalition governments and concluded that only a strong and stable executive, headed by a strong and stable Prime Minister can be accountable, in "letter and spirit" to parliament.

A much neglected institution, the Rajya Sabha, was the focus of Ajay Mehra's presentation. Its dual role as a federal chamber and as an upper house was highlighted. Bidyut Chakrabarty focussed on the adaptation and evolution of parliamentary federalism in India. On the same lines as Jürgenmeyer, he too expressed the difficulty of conceptualising India in fixed categories and terms. The "hybrid system of governance" – British parliamentary system and American federal legacy – which developed in India, has been, so he concludes, the result of the "peculiar unfolding of socio-political processes in the aftermath of India's rise as a nation state."

The final presentation by Shibani K. Chaube put forward some suggestions for reform of parliamentary government in India. He dismissed the need to introduce a "constructive vote of no-confidence" similar to the German model on the ground that it can produce an "unholy alliance between a President and a Prime Minister", who has lost the confidence of the House, "to stay in office through inter-party manoeuvre". He further noted that there is no need to push the panic button in the case of frequent elections. This opinion was, however, vigorously criticised in the discussion that followed, its being pointed out that frequent elections led to greater rent-seeking among politicians, which in turn leads to a whole bag of undesirable consequences.

The workshop had a rather large number of presentations, which at times necessitated the curtailment of time meant for discussion. The papers are likely to be published in book form by the end of the year and will definitely be a window to the functioning of the Indian parliamentary system since Independence. A few papers (it must be noted) brought out the limitations of using concepts and theories that have been developed elsewhere and highlighted the need to construct the same based on Indian experiences.

If a balance sheet were to be drawn based on the conclusions, it would be a mixed one. A pervasive air of pessimism and cynicism marked almost all presentations and the discussions that followed. The two main functions of parliament are representation and ensuring accountability of the executive. The Indian parliament gets high marks on the representational function, as there has been a progressive democratisation of the representational base of parliament. However, on the accountability function it fares rather poorly, having fulfilled it neither adequately nor satisfactorily. The work-

shop concluded optimistically that with necessary reforms the existing state of affairs could be improved. The presentation by Sandeep Shastri used a sample survey which showed that an almost similar feeling of disappointment prevailed among the citizens of the country too. The workshop was thus reflective of the sombre mood prevailing in the country. What is heartening is that the above-mentioned survey also showed that despite feeling disappointed and let down, citizens continued to have a high level of expectation about the performance of parliamentary and governmental institutions. Therefore there is "hope on the horizon" and all is clearly not lost.

K.K. Kailash

Indonesia after the Asian Crisis – Plural Society between Reform and Disintegration

Munich, October 29, 2001

Two years after the first democratic elections since 1955, the Herbert-Quandt-Stiftung, Foundation of BMW, in cooperation with the Department of Political Science of the University of Freiburg gathered a round of experts from academia and business to discuss the achievements and prospects of the new democratic regime in Indonesia. At this conference, the second of its kind after last year's expert round on China (see Vol. 32, No. 1–2, pp. 181–186), the immediate and mid-term future of the Indonesian archipelago was at question in view of a prolonged economic crisis, the still looming threat of disintegration and a democratization process that is losing its dynamics. Establishing a link between domestic stability and international security issues, the events of September 11 have added an extra momentum to the Indonesian case and the workshop itself.

Speaking on the sustainability of the democratization process, Prof. Theodor Hanf, Arnold Bergstraesser Institute, Freiburg, gave a two-sided account of institutional and attitudinal issues. The unresolved question of amending or rewriting the constitution and decentralization, the immense project-in-progress, both reflect the anxiety of the elite about losing control of its monopoly of power, resources and symbols. Whereas decentralization is essential for a pluralistic Indonesian society, Hanf emphasized its evident drawbacks which are the loss of the state monopoly of the use of force and the emergence of various types of conflicts.

On a more positive note, Hanf affirmed the existence of a significant majority of the populace with clearly democratic attitudes. While the proportion of reliable democrats is positively correlated to rising incomes and