

# Democracy in the Non-West: Facts, Fictions and Frictions

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## Introduction

Political systems, like other social institutions, are products of time and place. Democracy is one such system, one of many. Human history is as much a story of better or worse, as it is of more or less power - there is nothing more constant than change and nothing more potent in affecting change than the creation of teleological narratives which make the past seem inevitably to lead to the present and the present seem a mere stage in progression on to a future whose promise was ingrained in the past all along. In other words, when we tell the story of history (in a Whiggish manner) as a progressive dialectical unfolding - we are ignoring the necessary counterfactuals, the discontinuities. Let me explain.

In our times, the discourse of democracy by the end of the 20th century has acquired a universalist ethos and become associated with modernist notions of Progress and Popular representation. It is the ideal type against which the non-democratic systems are judged, evaluated and mostly found lacking. Moreover, there is a popular association of democracy with the West. The standard narrative of democracy, that begins with the ancient Athenian assemblies and is traced to the modern emergence of the West with the Enlightenment fostered political changes in Britain, France and over time the free-world domain with America at its head, is flawed for many reasons.

For the purpose of the discussion here, we need to be aware of assumptions, myths and forgettings through which 'democratic West' is imagined by its proponents as well as critics. This is because the biggest fiction around about democracy is that democracy emerged in the West (starting with ancient classical Greeks and later British parliamentary system) and then spread to the non-West through different waves of democratisation. Even though a range of scholarship has challenged this myth, for instance by pointing out to the Afro-Asiatic roots of the

Classical Greeks (Bernal's *Black Athena*) or the polyvalence of democracies as done recently by my colleague John Keane in *The Life and Death of Democracy*<sup>1</sup>, the fiction of democratic West as a natural category which can then export democracy persists.

It forgets how the democratic West till recently did not see a contradiction between democracy within and exploitation, racism, and authoritarian rule abroad in their colonies. It forgets that ingenious experiments with violence to discipline, control, punish and exterminate subjected populations was not only a characteristic of non-democratic Western powers (say the genocide of Herero and Nama peoples by Germans in South West Africa at the start of the 20th century)<sup>2</sup> but also of democratic Western states (for example, the first concentration camps set up by the British during the Boer Wars in South Africa<sup>3</sup>, or Churchill's exasperation at the 'squeamishness' to use 'poisoned gas against uncivilised tribes' of Iraqi Arabs and Kurds - see <http://www.globalresearch.ca/articles/CHU407A.html> - or extensive use of torture by the French in Algeria). The only reason I mention these historical instances is to remind ourselves the chequered history through which democracies have emerged as well as functioned. Without going into the intricacies of the 'democratic peace' debate (the contestable idea that democracies do not go to war with each other in general), a study of history shows that there is no necessary connection between democratic political system within and a more peaceful foreign policy outside (see Rosato 2003).

The naturalisation of 'democratic West' today works by paying only tokenistic recognition to the revolutionary antecedents (for instance in

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<sup>1</sup> Keane (2009) provides a comprehensive history of democracy, tracing three epochs - the period from 2500 BCE to 900 CE as the age of assemblies, the next ten centuries as the ascendancy of representative democracy, and the present as the beginning of an era of 'monitory democracy'.

<sup>2</sup> In the period 1904 to 1907, tens of thousands of Herero and Nama people of what is now Namibia were exterminated (starvation, poisoning) by German generals as they revolted against German colonial rule.

<sup>3</sup> During the second Boer war (1899-1902) Kitchener instituted these camps, which included women and children. The Combat policies included scorched earth, poisoning water sources etc.

France or the United States), violent defeats (for example in Germany and Japan), gradualist compromises (Britain), or anti-colonial struggles (Ireland) through, in summary, the numerous struggles through which ordinary people forced the elite to share power. It ignores the corruption of democratic systems in the West through money, politics of fear, and a culture of conformity. The well-recognised and oft-commented upon practices of gerrymandering, pork barrelling, lobbying in the United States of America are often seen as inevitable. A recent survey of economists (Davis and Figgins 2009) across the range of political affiliations (democrat, republican and libertarian members of the America Economic Association)<sup>4</sup> reveals that they have no great confidence in American democracy. The authors suggest that an appropriate story line for describing the survey results might read as follows:

Politics in America: A place where special interest groups exert influence over politicians who use creative public discourse with economically incompetent or ignorant voters in an effort to be re-elected, and where the eventual policy consequences are often not beneficial, except to special interests and politicians.

We have similar examples of corrupt practices in democracies elsewhere, as the 2009 Expenses scandal in the British Parliament revealed. Yet, there seems to be no strong will to bring about a change to the corruptions of the practices, what is often called 'democratic deficit', in the established democracies<sup>5</sup>. For the most part, the

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<sup>4</sup> See Davis and Figgins (2009: 3) for details: The survey was mailed to 1000 randomly-chosen members of the American Economic Association in late April of 2006. The survey was pre-tested among a small number of economists to assess the appropriateness of each proposition, minimise bias or ambiguity, and maximise response rate. Over an eight-week period, 302 completed surveys (and 87 undeliverable surveys) were returned, yielding a response rate of 33 percent, similar to many other surveys of AEA members. Of the 302 respondents: 87% were male, 13% female. 65% employed as university faculty, 13% in government, 11% in business or industry, 11% other. 47% received their highest degree prior to (or in) 1980, 53% after (or in) 1981.

<sup>5</sup> A short-hand definition online: "A democratic deficit is considered to be occurring when ostensibly democratic organisations or institutions (particularly governments) are seen to be falling short of fulfilling the principles of the

population in the democratic West has been depoliticised as the revolutionary and radical spirit that had inspired popular struggles in the past has been subdued in the prevailing consumerist democracies. The lament about disillusioned voters or non-voters notwithstanding, the bulk of the system's desires and energies are invested in fostering a managerial and technocratic rule where the population, except for occasional voting, leaves all matters of governance to those in power while indulging in a culture of consumption. We also have examples of democratic politicians stoking fear and anxieties of the voters by making immigration and multiculturalism an electoral issue. The emergence, rather re-emergence of far right parties such as the BNP in the UK and their ability to transform the political agenda by allowing mainstream parties to adopt the far-right vocabulary in the name of containing the far-right parties, scavenges upon democratic mechanisms but subverts the democratic ethos of pluralism and tolerance.

This preface about the problematic association of the West and democracy does not imply that similar forces of depoliticisation do not exist in the non-West. It merely reminds us that democratisation - the process through which a democracy comes about and entrenches itself - neither natural nor inevitable but a product of love, tears, sweat and hard work. In fact, it is better to see it not as an end-product but a process through which peoples' participation in governing their own lives is affirmed. A process that is always fragile and needs to be guarded. A deepening of democratic consciousness, in my view, requires an awareness that is not exhausted by choices offered for capitalist consumption, or nationalist conformity since both may lead to the concentration of power in the hands of the few, unless the people are vigilant.

### **Facts**

In this paper, I have chosen to structure my thinking around 'democracy in the non-West', but as stated at the outset, this gesture is not a validation of the commonly held association of the West as the natural home of democracy and the non-West as having a contested

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parliamentary democracy in their practices or operation where representative and linked parliamentary integrity becomes widely discussed".

and varied relations with it. Categories of the West and non-West are not always as self-explanatory as they seem. I would defer to Derrida's formulation of the West as "the non-empirical site of a movement". The West and the non-west are not so much geographical or empirical sites, as they are terms within a discourse. What is seen or designated as Western within a certain discourse, is that which is privileged (and by which its 'other' is defined), is a function of power and history<sup>6</sup>. While critical and postcolonial scholarship, such as Edward Said's *Orientalism*, has gone a long way to deconstruct any notion of 'the Orient' (associated with large parts of the non-West), and reveal the politics of cultural constructions of spatial categories, the 'West' or even 'democratic West' as a cultural category remains popular. Thus, when I speak of the non-West, I am trying to reclaim a certain privileged position in the discourse of democracy for the non-West. The non-west is not only that which is defined by the experiences of the west; it exists within and alongside the west.

I have argued that the hegemony of democratic discourse is based upon a forgetting of its own history and politics, how it has come to be. This hegemony establishes itself through a particular narration of systematised, secularised, civic knowledge that manages to put forward its particularity as universalist and encourages all affected by it to re-read and re-present their own historical and cultural specificities as conforming. Liberal democracy, Radical democracy, Social democracy, Communal democracy, Cosmopolitan democracy, Asian democracy, Western democracy, Sovereign democracy, Participatory democracy, Guided democracy, Socialist democracy, Authoritarian democracy, Grassroots democracy, Islamic Democracy, Secular Democracy - most existing systems claim to be democratic in the sense that they are genuine representations of the political will of its constituent people. But what explains the hegemony of the democratic discourse? It is not the worldwide acceptance of democratic political machinery, leave alone a celebration of democratic values. Nor is it a direct product of Western dominance of the international order - the possible emerging

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<sup>6</sup> This refers to the poststructural deconstruction of binaries; what needs to be seen as 'outside' for the inside to make sense. The non-west is defined as the excessive 'other' of the west. This binary structuring of discourse leaves as unquestioned the defining privilege of the west.

powers and competitors like China and Russia challenge the Western prerogative of dictating policies in the name of democracy promotion, but they do not argue for any alternative systems. In fact, the resurgent Russia emphasises upon Sovereign Democracy while President Hu Jintao's keynote speech to the 17th National Congress of the CPC was peppered with the Chinese characters for democracy (Minzhu) more than 60 times. It is a complex suite of external and internal factors which explains democracy's attractions, one of which is the protean forms it can take (many scholarly writings on democracy and democratisation deal with this).

In the non-West, there is an important historical link democracy and nationalism, colonialism and imperialism. The process and project of nation-building in many countries in the non-west was shaped by anti-colonial nationalisms. In India, the demands for self-rule (*swaraj*) did not necessarily need to imply rule of the people (democracy); but they did, and this was the reason for the strong moral force of Indian anti-colonial nationalism, a moral force that came from the claim of indigenous representation. While we should be clear that colonial rule in any form cannot be democratic (so that an empire run by a democracy is as harmful as one run by old imperials), self-rule can equally be narrow in replacing one set of foreign elite by another set of indigenous elite, and without a commitment to open up the power-sharing and governance architecture to the democratic majority. In early 20th century China we saw the movement for Republicanism as not always coincidental with a desire for rule of the people through elections<sup>7</sup>. Political formations emerged that claimed to embody the popular will either through their vanguard role in the anti-colonial struggle or as the sole repository of wisdom to implement collective sovereignty or as the clearest expression of a putative national spirit. The virtues of responsibilities and duties were extolled over those of rights and entitlements.

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<sup>7</sup> Notwithstanding the San-Min Zhuyi Doctrine, or the Three principles of the People, developed by Sun Yat Sen/ KMT. These are Minzu, Minquan, and Minsheng: Nationalism, Democracy and People's Livelihood. For a general overview of the usage of concepts of republicanism and democracy in China over the period 1840-1924, see <http://www.xschina.org/show.php?id=4927> and <http://www.xschina.org/show.php?id=4928>

We should not underemphasise the rupture between colonial and post-colonial rule - decolonisation is a necessary precondition for democratisation. A massive change in expectations that took place at different points in time in different countries, but became stark everywhere with decolonisation was to do with the question of why pay taxes? Revenue and tax collections in the past were payments made to be 'left alone' - a farmer paid revenue to her landlord or a trader to the customs collector so that they be allowed to do certain things. However, with anti-colonial movements (the American Revolution and its 'no taxation without representation' is an early example) the expectations of and from the state shifted. By the middle of the 20th century, taxes are primarily paid not only to be left alone but to contribute in order to secure certain rights and entitlements from the state. At the same time, as plethora of examples from recent history shows, one needs to be sceptical of an easy equation of nationalism with genuine expression of democratic will. Postcolonial states, for instance in Indonesia under Suharto, often in the name of developmentalism (the idea that the state exists as a developmental actor), national unity and anticommunism, reneged on the democratic promises of the anti-colonial struggles and experimented with various forms of authoritarian and semi-authoritarian rules.

While the evolving norms of international society, international organisations, transnational movements, and global civil society may play a vital role in fostering democracy and even supporting the establishment of democratic political machinery, sustainable and stable democracy is dependent primarily on a deepening of democratic consciousness and values. A democracy is a skeletal democracy when it claims to represent the will of the majority through its political apparatus but does not have the widely shared consciousness that Legitimate Power exists to serve the people, that in lieu of legitimacy transferred up, people have the right to expect the system to work for their collective welfare. This transfer of legitimacy to rule from the collective to the few representatives is like a ritual that has to be performed regularly. For a democracy to function as itself, the legitimacy has to be renewed systematically and frequently, with the population having the right and the capacity to change who they choose for representation. In this sense, a one-party state cannot be

truly democratic unless there are real and meaningful alternative choices to the voters who can exercise them without fear and intimidation. These empowering and legitimizing aspects explain the attraction of democratic ideals in the face of numerous challenges it faces and the real and perceived problems associated with actually-existing democracies.

Different systems will claim to better represent and embody the political will of the people, but they might enforce the interests of certain elite individuals or groups or communities as the national interest and the nation's political will. The actually-existing democracies are not immune from this (see Cox 2008). But at a conceptual level, democratic system by requiring regular renewal of legitimacy and by offering the people opportunities to change those who represent and govern them, offers the best available opportunity for balancing impulses of liberty and egalitarianism in a society. In Parliamentary democracies, the Representative body (Parliament, Assembly) 'acts for' (*vertreten*) as well as 'stands for' (*darstellen*) the represented; democratic institutions. Moreover - and this is relevant in the context of legitimate power and representation - there are many reasons to see a semiotic continuity between the way in which the transubstantiation of power takes place from a collective body to its mise-en-abyme, in a theological and in a democratic context. In symbolic terms, just as an individual might choose to place their trust in divine beings to whom they pray in the inner sanctum of a temple, undertake pilgrimages, and in whose wise judgement they trust. Similarly, the individual chooses to undertake the ritualistic pilgrimage like act of voting every few years, and in the secret and sacred privacy of the voting booth, they cast their opinion and live with the consequences. But, the mechanism of accountability, change, and transfer of power is what makes a democratic system different ultimately. I do not intend to merely emphasise the libertarian aspect of democracy; in fact, the conspicuous characteristic of democratic values for me is an egalitarian impulse. Nothing could exemplify this more than the act of voting - at the precise moment when an individual voter presses a button or ticks a box to vote, she affirms herself as equal to everyone else.



Whether a system works or not for the people is not known from how power and authority is gained but from how it is lost, that is, the right of the people to reject those who govern them without risking the viability of the system. In theory, the strategic advantage of democracy as a system lies in the division of risk, the sharing of expertise, the lowered constraints on optimal decision making in an environment of increased policy complexity. In practice, however, this could very well lead to a division of responsibility and the competition for alternatives may encourage the pursuit of populist lowest common denominators. Therefore, the establishment of democratic institutions should be seen as a test of democracy and not the victory of democracy - a test that requires the inculcation of certain mode of thinking and behaviour about legitimate power. One that sees legitimacy and power as requiring frequent renewal and as ultimately residing in the ruled and not the ruler. Without democratisation - here conceived as the process of infusing a strong democratic consciousness amongst all - it is easy for states with skeletal institutions of representative democracy to turn quasi-authoritarian. Installing democratic procedures and institutions without democratic consciousness makes the system an easier prey to the corrupt influence of money, muscle or religious extremism. The relationship between a democracy and democratic consciousness is complex, but ideally, the latter should precede the former (in my work, I take the example of a transition most familiar to me, see Kaul 2008a-d. Elaborate my analysis on the Bhutanese context)<sup>8</sup>.

## **Fictions**

The first fiction is that which I began with: the Fiction of the Democratic West, its teleological origins, and its natural affinity for democracy.

A related fiction is that of Export Packet of Democracy with its economic strings. This is a composite fiction that democracy can be exported in the manner of commodities, and usually is accompanied by the other desirables of capitalism, free market, secularism. To me, there is no prefigured mix of property rights, monetisation and commercialisation that needs to be a necessary component of democratic system. There are egalitarian and regressive impulses in

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<sup>8</sup> These remarks will draw upon a separate paper on Bhutan I have written for Stanford workshop on the monarchic transitions to democracy.

every social context and it is fallacious and detrimental to try and export democracy. The main problem with the notion of exporting democracy is that it uses the language of commodities and not of ideas. Ideas are fungible and contested, while commodities have a fixed identity. Language of 'exporting democracy' is politicised - it assumes that the exporter has democracy in the first place, that it possibly has a surfeit of it. It ignores the main strength of democracy which is that it renews the legitimacy of political rule through an interaction between the people and their rulers they themselves elect. Democracy in this sense is about self-determination and the fiction of export undermines the self-determination aspect of democracy (see Archibugi 2009).

The large literature on waves and reverse waves of democracy (Huntington), like that on stages of growth (Rostow), is often bolstered by mechanistic analyses which see countries as unified actors, and speciously cast historical developments in absolute terms (for an older comprehensive overview, see Diamond 1997). Many examples from around the world illustrate how democracy 'exports' become heightened in line with vested interests at specific points in time<sup>9</sup>. The toxic geopolitical legacies of grafting and imposition of democracy in large parts of the non-western world have set up perverted incentives which will take time to undo (Coyne 2008 provides an American argument against such exports, for a discussion in the context of Africa, see Mafeje 2002)<sup>10</sup>. In the cold war years in particular, much democracy promotion happened without context sensitivity of goals, or economic and political problems of the decolonised non-west, or a basic respect for human life or beliefs.

Another fiction is that of alluding to postcolonial or cultural difference as a reason for collective conformity over individual rights and to locate this difference in certain parts of the world. A criticism of the fiction of western export of democracy should not come from a native culturalist

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<sup>9</sup> These days, an updated discussion is that of East Asian exceptionalism (to the third wave of democratisation), and something at issue is the question of how and when overtly democratic changes will come to China, and to what extent is there an 'authoritarian resiliency'. See Yun-Han 2003.

<sup>10</sup> For more on issues of democracy in Africa, see <http://worldviews.igc.org/awpguide/democ.html>

position (on this, I agree wholly with Sen 2006). The arguments made, most often in the case of the Middle East, that certain cultures (say Islamic) are incompatible with democracy or human rights associated with it. Islam and Democracy is a thriving arena of politics as well as scholarship and I don't have the space to go into it here. All I'd like to say is that cultures are not a stagnant product, cultures are organic and ever evolving, cultures are arenas of contestation and debate. If Islam and democracy were really incompatible, how does one explain thriving experiments with democratisation in Indonesia, Turkey or Iran but not in Saudi Arabia or Kuwait?

We saw this also with the debate over the so-called 'Asian values' where a certain discourse of conformity was prized over critical questioning. Without going into the conceptual, empirical and ethical dubiousness of such attempts (for critiques, see Lawson 1995, Tatsu 1999), we need to recognise that individuals and differences do matter in a democracy. While one can agree with former PM of Malaysia Mahathir's exasperation at Western modes of democracy promotion ('But is there only one form of democracy or only one high priest to interpret it?' - in Esposito and Voll 1996: 141), subsequent developments in Malaysia show how serious discriminations along religious, ethnic and individual lines get papered over in the name of community oriented democracy. Without fetishising either the sovereign individuals or the collective, there is the need for a democratic consciousness that guards against such forcible imposition of conformity in the name of culture, tradition or even nationalism. One that defends the rights of the Self as well as of the Others to be. It is easy to talk of a harmonious collective if one ignores individuals - it is more difficult but also more productive to construct a system that brings together a collective without suppressing the individuals.

### **Frictions**

As I have argued elsewhere (Kaul 2009), being a democracy means a commitment to freedom of expression, but it also involves a certain level of commitment to individualism. Democracies reconcile values: procedurally, by elections and elaborate governance mechanisms through which administrative power can operate, and substantially, by facilitating discussion and allowing for individuals to have their say in the system. Post-colonial non-western democracies have had to define

the appropriate individual rights along with simultaneously structuring the expectations of a new people-state relationship. For instance, when India became free at the proverbial stroke of midnight in 1947, there was a desire to define its purity in opposition to the moral decadence of the colonising West. The postcolonial entity India, created with a rupture and greeted with rapture, sought to create unity in diversity by appealing to a sense of civic morality springing from emergent nationalism. But this civic ethic in India did not evolve alongside the coming-into-being of democratic principles at the level of the nation-state (unlike England, for example, where the two grew together). Democracy in India had to shoulder a greater responsibility (and this it is still remarkable) in bringing people and their conflicting views together. To put it simply, unlike places where the relationship between people and state and between people and people co-evolved over long runs of time, in postcolonial India, the relationship between people and state had to itself be the basis for developing the relationship between people and people. In such a scenario, when people feel disappointed in the expectations of their hierarchical relationship with the state, they try to forcibly replicate their values in the civic domain, and the people to people relationship becomes the target of a violence which is legitimised by claims to preservation of culture.

Democratic systems in the non-West face a number of challenges and a deepening of democratic system will require addressing these frictions. The list here is indicative and not exhaustive, and wherever possible I highlight examples of ways forward.

Many countries face the issue of indigeneity in one or another form. To the extent that this is a population group or demographic issue, it can partly be addressed over time by democratic change that gives a voice to indigenous groups (for example, the case of Shigeru Kayano, the Ainu leader in Japan). However, indigeneity is also about a way of life. Unlike the earlier pogroms of extermination that decimated the naive Americans, the aboriginal Australians, and many others, the question now is how to harmonise the desires and interests of disparate collectives of people, sometimes with irreconcilable worldviews? For instance, while for the modernist technocratic mindset, land is a resource available for exploitation, for many indigenous, tribal and

traditional communities land is not only a source of life and livelihood but also sacred. Struggles over land and environment, for instance in parts of India, is one of two different modes of being. One that has the weight of Science, Technology, Enlightenment, Market, and Developmental State behind it. On the other side of this rule by metaphors, there is the other argument which has the prior claims of history, tradition and sacrality of their lived environment. In this struggle between the People (represented by the elected government) and the Peoples (those who may be part of the electorate but see their primary identity as that of a distinct indigenous community), democracy faces a vital test. One interesting step<sup>11</sup> is that taken recently by Ecuador whose Constitution has a Rights of Nature (RoN) provision, so that nature is given legal rights and “any Ecuadorian citizen is now entitled to represent nature in a court of law in a defense of bio-integrity and a redefinition of wealth away from capital accumulation and towards bio-capital protection” (Hilton 2009, also Loudis 2008).

Then, there are the challenges posed by the need for international co-operation in the face of the global public goods (GPGs) provision. Moreover, the notion of ‘contested commons’, or strategic frontier zones such as air, sea, cyberspace are increasingly transforming the role and reach of the democratic state itself (see Sullivan and Elkus 2009). Domestically too, the questions of striking the right balance between environmental preservation and economic development (delivery of services, access to resources) become even more acute for non western democracies that often need to build appropriate long term domestic consensus on policy issues amid technological constraints and relative capital scarcity (see Lijphart 1999). The role of non state actors (NSAs) is an important one in deepening democracy and giving voice to those who may not necessarily be heard within the cacophony of politics. However, they are not elected or representative. Big powerful NGOs, especially when having access to foreign funding in otherwise poor developing countries, may distort democratic politics. These include secular developmental NGOs as well as religious organisations. The debate in Bangladesh over the influence on democratic politics of

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<sup>11</sup> There are other precursors of innovative approaches to community development, such as Timothy Kennedy’s SkyRiver project which enabled a form of communication between remote native Alaskan villages.

developmental, often secular, NGOs as well as religious networks funded through money from countries such as Saudi Arabia is a case in point. A democratic system, unless checked by democratic consciousness, creates incentives for political contestants to focus on short-term private gains. Based on electoral calculations, especially in a system where Simple Majority is required and there are many candidates, politicians may invest more energy and resources in securing a cohort of assured voters than in promising change for everyone. In a society where identity politics along confessional, ethnic or sectarian lines, play an important role, we often find a spectrum ranging from outright violence between communities (recent reports tell us that Kikuyu and Kalenjin Kenyans are arming themselves for the 2012 elections, see <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/8293745.stm> - a clear case for the significance of 'rule of law' to democratic processes) to politicians subtly playing vote bank politics. While beneficial to individual politicians and parties, vote bank politics is undemocratic for various reasons - it creates and reifies fissures in society; it takes the agency away from individuals and invests them in communities; it transforms, through recognition and competition, a fluid fuzzy community into a fixed one. As we have seen in India for instance, vote bank politics have led to various types of minority-isms as well as majority-isms, both detrimental to democratic politics.

When majoritarian rightwing nationalists argue that the majority identity group must have dominance in governance, they conflate political majority with cultural majority. The idea of political majority is fundamentally based on individual's choice in every election, while cultural majority is one that is based on communal politics. A healthy democracy is based on political majorities, people can change who they vote for and should not be subsumed under their cultural identity.

Faith and religion can be a source for aligning people's cultural values with the political system (see Gillespie 2008 for an argument about the theological origins of western modernity). For instance, one may argue that Islamic notion of *Shura* (translated as consultation, deliberation), rather than a liberal secular democracy, offers a way of reconciling democratic values with faith in Islamic societies. Or that faith-inspired notion of morality, community and compassion can make a democracy

more humane. But in a pluralist society, and most societies in the world are pluralist in one or the other form, democratic system has to ensure that is not dominated by only one set of values alone. Who takes the role of interpreting what the religion says? How can different faith-based values, be reconciled? How can one ensure that the tolerance, compassion and understanding aspects of a religion is 'allowed in' while intolerance, chauvinism or sectarianism is 'kept out'? Each democracy has to have its own debate on how to reconcile traditions, religious values, modernities, and differences. Bhutan is an excellent example of such a faith-based translation during the democratic transition.

Another crucial role is that of the educated elite<sup>12</sup> and the unelected wings of the government. Powerful civilian, military and intelligence bureaucracies have to be under strict control of the democratically elected government in order for democracy to be sustainable. As examples from Pakistan and from many other non-Western states show, democracy is fragile and prone to coups, interference and distortions. The vigilance against the dominance by unelected bureaucracies is required not only in new but also in established democracies. Note how a main plank of the victorious Democratic Party of Japan in 2009 was to tackle head-on the powerful bureaucracies. While elite rule may be more 'efficient' in dealing with a developing societies' problems, it cannot be acknowledged as authentically representative of people's desire. See Chua (2004) for a discussion of the Singaporean experiment with 'guided democracy'; a communitarianism without competitive politics.

While a positive nationalism - one that cultivates a sense of unity and harnesses peoples and communities' creative energies toward mutually agreed goals without suppressing their plurality - can consolidate democratisation, a negative nationalism - one that promotes xenophobic patriotism, instils a sense of pride in the Self by denigrating

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<sup>12</sup> The educated elite in non western states - democratic or not - often has remarkably similar life pathways (institutional interaction and sociocultural encounters dictated by the sociological advantages of price discrimination), which may have the effect of insulating them from the real problems in their own societies.

others - has to be watched out for. The process of enemy-creation in politics is based on an intolerance that can easily be misused by the political elite to suppress dissent, individuals and groups all in the name of national unity within the country and even wage wars with the neighbours deemed as enemy. Wars and violence are corrosive of democratisation; in fact, they epitomise a failure of democratic values.

Even a one-party dominant state, unless checked by a thriving internal party democracy, a responsible but free media, an effective opposition, and a strong democratic consciousness in the wider population, can acquire powers to limit the democratic options for the people.

Finally, a remark about the culture of accommodation. As I have said before, the true test of a democratic system is not in how power is won but how it is lost. If the losers have strong doubts about the fairness of the electoral outcomes and feel that their only recourse is through protests, civic struggles and even violence, democracy is indeed weak. An independent body to plan, conduct and oversee elections is an important benchmark for a consolidated democracy (see Trebilcock and Chitalkar 2009). As the recent examples from Iran, Kenya, Mongolia, and Afghanistan show, where there is a lack of faith in the election body's neutrality and a strong suspicion of ruling party's manipulation, people's faith in the legitimacy of the government as well as the system is eroded. Democratic system per se offers no blueprint for stability. In fact, it often leads to an exaggeration of differences and rivalries and encourages a bitter struggle for power, thus leading to a disenchantment with the system amongst people. It is a democratic consciousness within the population as well as the rulers that deepens democratic system and makes it sustainable. It is as much the people's responsibility as it is the political class's duty to nurture and foster this consciousness.

## **Conclusion**

Democratisation requires constant dialogue and exchange as well as continual imaginations, revisionings and translations of visions of a good society. This hard work of democratisation should not stop at the national boundary. Issues of justice, equality, and fairness do not get contained within bounded communities that are the present-day sovereign states. Democratic consciousness is about rights of 'I', 'You'



and 'Us' and a recognition that there is no moral justification behind the selective sympathy only for 'our kind' and its corollary of dehumanisation of 'other kinds'. The exclusive focus on I may lead to anomie, corruption, blindness to daily sufferings brought on the many by economic violence, in short, a lack of care for the not-Is. The privileging of 'Us' may contribute to the promotion of narrow sectional and parochial interests, and to sectarian and confessional violence, and to nationalist xenophobia. While democracy can and should be a mix of local grassroots empowerment and nation-building, it is the means to an end, that of world-building. One can only hope that the ends we are working toward is one of a democratic consciousness, compassion and humanity.

A democratic consciousness is one that accepts and celebrates the categories 'people' as well as the 'political will' as dynamic, always changing and often contested. Difference is not feared nor merely depoliticised and celebrated as a curio, but it is accepted as a fact of life which has to be accommodated into the political system. Dissent and constant questioning are not only tolerated but built into the evolving political culture. The health of a democracy comes from how differences are deal with and not by how sameness is imposed. It is a far more difficult responsibility to be a democrat than an autocrat or a technocrat. The exact mechanisms to incorporate differences and change within the system will depend on the context. Countries may learn about institutions for procedural democracy from each other, but as for the democratic consciousness, there can be no blueprint, only footprints.

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