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## PROJECT

### Democratic Politics in Contemporary India

As "democracy" expands to most parts of the world, there is a tendency to interpret and evaluate democratic politics all over the globe in the light of the narrow historical experience of Western Europe and North America. My project is a part of an ongoing global conversation that seeks to interrogate this established but parochial "commonsense" about democracy.

I wish to contribute to this conversation by writing about India's democratic experience since independence. Initially written off as a country not suited for democracy due to its complex diversities, extreme poverty and high illiteracy, India has now been accommodated as an exception to the dominant understanding of democracy. There is a need to move beyond this culturally essentialist understanding of Indian exceptionalism and reflect upon this experience to rewrite democratic theory itself.

Specifically, I propose to focus on elections in post-independence India. The existing body of knowledge on elections and voting behaviour leads us to view Indian elections as a series of absences, if not maladies. My point of departure is to see the apparently unique features of Indian elections are a product of the encounter between modern structure of formal political choice (instituted through a system of "free and fair" elections through a given set of rules) and the historically constituted public sphere in India. This opens the way to reinterpret what is often seen as electoral "volatility", party "fragmentation", "casteism" in politics or the "absence of ideology" and the widespread "clientalism" in Indian elections. I plan to work on a book manuscript on this subject with Dr. Alistair McMillan of the University of Sheffield. I would also begin working on a book on Democracy in India, besides completing a long essay on Rammanohar Lohia, a twentieth-century Indian socialist thinker who was trained in Germany.

#### Recommended Reading

Yadav, Yogendra et al. *State of Democracy in South Asia*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Yadav, Yogendra, Sandeep Shastri, and K. C. Suri. *Electoral Politics in Indian States: Lok Sabha Elections in 2004 and Beyond*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Yadav, Yogendra. "Politics." In *India Briefing: A Transformative Fifty Years*, edited by Marshall Bouton and Philip Oldenburg, 3-38. New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1999.

Hindi version: *Rajneeti ke Saat Adhyay*, edited by Abhay Dube. New Delhi: Vani Prakashan, 2002.

## Elections and Representation in Contemporary India

What's wrong with the practice of representative democracy in India? And what can be done about it? My research on Indian elections speaks to these political and practical questions.

A fairly common answer holds that representative democracy in India has not yet evolved to the level of 'advanced' democracies. There are too many parties, too much of caste-based identity politics and too little of ideology that allows political entrepreneurs to take advantage of ill-informed citizens. The view invites us to be patient with the maturing of Indian democracy and encourages legal interventions to nudge it in the right direction.

I explore a different response that recognizes the distinctiveness of Indian elections in its own terms. Elections in India have come to be the hinge that connects the 'formal' sector of high politics with its underbelly, the 'informal' sector of politics. That is why elections have acquired an exaggerated visibility in India's political life. Emphasis on the "bridge function" and citizenship affirming role of elections has ensured robust participation, better descriptive representation and summary trial of governments. At the same time it has meant a relative neglect of the representational role of elections as an instrument of responsive and accountable government.

This reading gives us a different perspective on what's wrong with representative democracy in India. The problem is not that the people are uneducated and lack ideological orientation; the problem is that popular preferences do not get translated into politically relevant signals by the media. The problem is not that caste mobilization subdues other cleavages but that multiplicity of cleavages fractures the majority. The problem is not that proliferation of parties leads to fragmentation, but that an increase in parties is compatible with shrinking of political choices and the capture of parties by special interest groups. Finally, the problem is not with the first-past-the-post (FPTP) system but with the massive scale and multiple levels of representation.

This reading recognizes the need for some corrective measures: lowering of the scales, reducing asymmetry of information, monitoring of media and level-playing-field in terms of resources. At the same time it also reminds us that democracy cannot be made responsive and accountable by tinkering with institutional design alone, that the quality of democracy is in the last instance a function of the extent and nature of political participation.

Yadav, Yogendra (2016)

The footsteps of famine : a visit to Bundelkhand reveals a chilling state of affairs - one wrought in equal amount by nature, state negligence and political failure

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=848845005>

Yadav, Yogendra (2013)

The politics of feasible social democracy

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=766374548>

Yadav, Yogendra (Baltimore, Md., 2011)

Crafting state-nations : India and other multinational democracies

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=620806079>

Yadav, Yogendra (Mumbai, 2010)

What is living and what is dead in Rammanohar Lohia?

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1683964888>

Yadav, Yogendra (Mumbai, 2009)

Between fortuna and virtu : explaining the Congress' ambiguous victory in 2009

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1726980944>

Yadav, Yogendra (2009)

The elusive mandate of 2004: an overview

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=670715255>

Yadav, Yogendra (2009)

Yadav, Yogendra (New Delhi, 2007)

Democratic politics ; 2, [Schülerbd.] ; Democratic politics TT : textbook in political science for class X

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=832292206>

Democratic politics ; 2, [Schülerbd.]

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=832292206>

Yadav, Yogendra (New Delhi, 2007)

Politics in India since independence : textbook in political science for class XII

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=669199958>

Yadav, Yogendra (New Delhi, 2006)

Democratic politics : textbook in political science for class IX

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=66919994X>