

New Politics for the New Generation

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To paraphrase Dickens, we seem to be living in the best of times, and in the worst of times! India is rapidly rising in international importance - entirely due to the first world attitudes of our people. Despite mass poverty, limited natural resources, centuries of oppression, a society "fragmented by narrow domestic walls", and historical baggage, Indian people have extremely positive attributes to succeed in modern world. On the political front too, elections, change of governments, vigorous contestation and political freedoms showcase the vibrancy and robustness of our democracy. We only have to look across India's borders to appreciate how privileged we are to be free citizens in a democracy.

And yet, our present political system is trapped in a vicious cycle. Most mainstream parties have become victims of a culture of politics-as-business. Huge investment, largely to distribute money and liquor, bribe officials, and hire criminals has become the dominant feature of our elections. Most elected politicians habitually resort to promotion of personal gain from public office. A vast rent-seeking industry has come into existence, with large sums of money changing hands for transferring public officials, awarding contracts, interfering with crime investigation and due process of law, extending undue patronage to favoured individuals and corporates, distorting tax administration, protecting criminals and corrupt elements, and defrauding public exchequer. In such a culture, public good is an incidental byproduct of politics for private gain, not the primary purpose of political activity.

The first generation leadership after independence gave us stability and laid foundations of a liberal democratic polity. The urge for political alternatives led to emergence of several hundreds of parties all over the country to successfully challenge the monopoly of the Congress. But most parties in the country are steeped in the same political culture. As a result, elections have only effected periodic change of players, without altering the nature of the game.

It is true that mainstream political parties have shown some willingness to address this decay in the public domain. Disclosure of candidate details, political funding reforms, limiting the size of council of ministers, strengthening anti-defection provisions, and right to information law are some of the concrete expressions of the resilience and dynamism of our political system in recent years. The mainstream parties themselves have neither the will nor the energy needed to bring about far-reaching political reforms. Political leaders, cutting across party lines, have often expressed deep concern about this political decline in our country. All parties have outstanding men and women whose integrity, competence and commitment are beyond question. But parties are trapped in a vicious cycle, and such elements are increasingly becoming isolated and helpless in shaping events.

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II. Fostering New Political Culture

The only way out of this crisis is by fostering a new political culture, based on internal democracy of parties, complete transparency in political funding, probity in public life, and robust policy responses to growing challenges. It is time politics became a noble calling, with elected office being recognized only as a means to collective progress and not to further narrow self-interests. This new political culture should conduct electoral politics based on popular will and support – not on illegitimate money and muscle power.

In an electoral democracy, this New Political Culture can be ushered in only by offering a real and meaningful political alternative in the form of a truly new political party. Such a party must be focused on transforming the very landscape of politics towards making citizens the true sovereigns. The ushering in and establishment of such a political culture is the only way to safely lead our nation from the present critical juncture. It is to fulfill this historic necessity that a truly new political party must be formed, with the following features:

1. A member-controlled and citizen-centered political party
2. Democratic choice of party leadership
3. Totally democratic and transparent choice of electoral candidates
4. Completely transparent and legal raising of funds
5. Electoral expenditure for legitimate purposes alone
6. Institutionalized and inclusive policy-making process
7. Robust self-correcting mechanisms

Citizens themselves have to play a key role in ushering in New Political Culture by facilitating political mobilization through reasoned public debate, honest reconciliation of conflicting views and liberal, creative, and humane responses to public policy. Importantly, the educated citizens, middle-class, and youth must realize the stakes involved and should become re-engaged with the political process, including voter enrolment and voting during elections. Only a broad political movement which can galvanize public opinion and prove the electoral support for clean politics will generate forces for the necessary political reforms to transform the nature of our politics.

III. Lok Satta Party

With this intention, throughout 2006, Lok Satta generated wide public debate covering all regions and sections of society (especially in Andhra Pradesh) on the need for a new political culture. The overwhelming view was in favour of a new political party spearheading the movement for political reforms, equitable growth, elimination of discrimination by birth, decentralization and rule of law. Accordingly, a new political formation – *Lok Satta Party*, was formed on October 2, 2006 and is now a political party registered with the Election Commission of India, under Section 29 of The Representation of People Act (1951). The defining features of Lok Satta Party are:

- It is a completely member-controlled and citizen-centered party. Its members are drawn from all sections of the society with a majority of them being youth.
- An autonomous Electoral Authority ensures that the Party's leadership is democratically elected at all levels by secret ballot. All electoral candidates are chosen only through *open* primary elections by secret ballot based on the preferential, Single

Transferable Vote (STV) method. An independent ombudsman's institution comprising of reputed, non-party citizens will monitor the party activities and primary elections.

- All party funds are raised in a completely transparent manner, to be used only for legitimate political and electoral expenditure.
- Institutionalized self-correcting mechanisms, including the provision to recall elected leaders and autonomous Disciplinary Authority.

Lok Satta Party already has extremely wide name recognition all over Andhra Pradesh, and is known to the more enlightened sections across the country. More than 250,000 citizens have become its members over the past six months. It has chapters in every district of Andhra Pradesh, and in over half of the mandals and more than 90% municipal towns. The extensive coverage given to the formation and activities of Lok Satta Party in the print, television and internet-based media, has contributed towards people associating the Party's ideas, agenda, articulation, structure and functioning with their own aspirations.

The Party's goals are national, and unity and integrity of India are of paramount concern to it. Therefore, the new party's concerns will transcend religion, region, caste and language. It will work with like-minded individuals and groups in other regions and states to build a nation-wide movement for a new political culture. Already, Lok Satta's campaign for ushering in a New Political Culture has resulted in stirrings of change across India: (i) In Mumbai, the VOTEJUHU campaign created history when the democratically chosen citizens' candidate for Juhu (Ward-63 of Greater Mumbai Municipal Corporation) won in the face of massive and brazen deployment of money power by the mainstream parties' candidates. (ii) In Ghaziabad (UP), the electoral candidates endorsed collectively by the citizens won nearly half the seats in the Municipal Council and the office of the Mayor.

Lok Satta Party invites all public-spirited and honest citizens with leadership qualities to lead the citizens meet the challenges of our society. We invite such committed citizens to be engaged in true politics, and create the new political culture that India needs. The best and brightest in society need to actively participate and provide leadership in the public sphere. We welcome them to become candidates in the open primary elections. Those who get public support in primary elections will become the candidates of the Lok Satta Party.

IV. Conclusion

Even as the decline in our present culture of politics continues, newer challenges are emerging. The vast majority of Indians is denied the opportunities to participate in wealth creation in a growing economy. Centuries of discrimination by birth is aggravated by the failure of state to create opportunities for vertical mobility through education, healthcare and skill promotion. Economic growth itself is imperiled, thanks to governance and political failure. The danger of rising crime with rapid urbanization is complicated by criminalization of politics and partisan control of police apparatus. All these challenges need robust and mature responses from the political and governance system. But the present polity, steeped in a culture of politics-as-business and power-as-private-property, is incapable of addressing them swiftly or sufficiently.

Consequently, there is a serious mismatch between first world people forging ahead with growing aspirations and third world politics undermining our prosperity and happiness. Such a situation is clearly unsustainable. Either the people will have to force politicians to change and recreate a polity worthy of us and capable of meeting the challenges; or politics will

retard our future and bring India down by several notches. Which will happen first? That is the great question of this decade, and the future of our nation and world will be shaped by the answer we give together.

And the answer clearly lies in building a clean, robust, mature, just and equitable polity. Each one of us has to play a crucial role in rejuvenation of our republic by transforming the very nature of our politics and by ushering in a truly new culture of politics for the new generation. Lok Satta Party is a clear and unambiguous response to this historic challenge to build a democracy we need and deserve.

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Indian citizens residing outside India can contribute to Lok Satta Party in any of the following ways:

Direct & Secure Online Bank Deposit / Wire Transfer / Credit Card Transfer

Account Number : 020205001973 **Account in the name of :** Lok Satta Party

Type of Account : Current Account **Bank :** ICICI Bank **Branch :** Punjagutta, Hyderabad - 500 082
Address : Lok Satta Party, 5-10-180/A & A1, Bandline, Adarsh Nagar, Hyderabad - 500 063. AP, India

Tel : (+91) -040 - 2323 - 2829 / 2711 / 1818 / 3637 2329 9227 **Fax :** (+91) 040 - 2323 - 0111

Email : info@loksattaparty.com **URL:** www.loksattaparty.com or www.loksattaparty.org

Note:

1. *After transferring funds to LSP's Indian bank account, please send/email us your name and complete contact address with transaction code details of your contribution. This will enable us to send you the receipt/acknowledgment.*
2. *Non-resident Indians should declare that their contribution is made from their own resources, and is not raised from foreign sources. Please visit www.loksattaparty.org/contribute for sample declaration form that you can simply fill out and email/post to us.*
3. *Non-resident Indians can claim tax exemption only on their Indian income.*

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