

LOK SATTA PARTY

New Politics for the New Generation

Agenda for Action

Meeting with Sri Aamir Khan

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“ We desperately need young, dynamic, honest,
intelligent and upright leaders, who actually care for
the country. ”

www.aamirkhan.com/blog

(Nov 27, 2008)

...but, what is holding us back?

What is wrong with today's politics:

- Huge entry barriers - massive money power, political dynasties, modern fiefdoms
- Politics as illegitimate business, parties as private (limited) companies
- Politics deepening divisions in society – increasing tensions of religion, region, caste, gender, etc.
- Gratuitous 'freebies' – free colour TVs, Rs. 2 a kilo wheat/rice, etc. *But, no education, healthcare skills and real opportunities for growth...*

The Indian Middle-Class & politics

Then...

- Educated, middle-class Indians led the Freedom Struggle
- Made politics a noble endeavour
- In most democracies, enlightened middle-class underpinned real transformation

...and Now: why the Middle Class shuns politics today

- 'Politics' has become a pejorative term
- Middle class has deserted politics, since independence
- Shunning voting
- Shunning political participation:
 - Fear of ridicule
 - Fear of failure - huge entry barriers, skewed electoral system & wasted vote
 - Fear of persecution – afraid of challenging the establishment

...status quo perpetuated

What happened so far...

Lok Satta Milestones

- Mandatory disclosure of electoral candidate details
- Political funding law reform (2003) enables transparent and legal contribution to parties
- Size of Council of Ministers limited (91st Constitutional Amendment)
- Tightening of anti-defection provisions in Constitution
- Right to Information Act (2005)

What happened so far...

Lok Satta Milestones (Contd..)

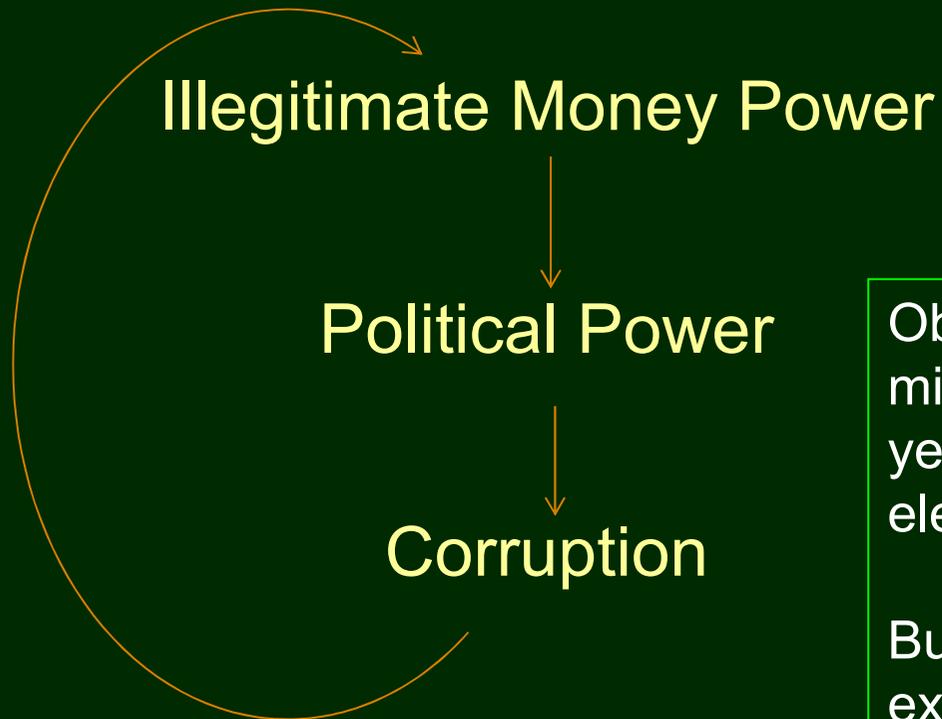
- Citizen's Charters introduced in India
- Gram Nyayalayas law enacted (2008)
- National Rural Health Mission (NRHM)
- Procedural reforms in Indirect Taxation
- Voter roll-improvements reduce errors (from 44% to 12% in urban areas)
- Post Offices nodal centres for easy, permanent and universal voter registration

But, system caught in vicious cycles

- Inexhaustible demand for illegitimate funds
- Most expenditure incurred for vote buying
- Rise of political fiefdoms
- Vote de-linked from public good
- Political survival and honesty becoming incompatible
- Social divisions exacerbated

Contd.. Interlocking vicious cycles

Inexhaustible Demand for Illegitimate Funds



Obama & McCain spent a record \$ 866 million for 2008 US elections – over two years, for all primaries and the national election.

But our traditional parties' election expenditure in AP alone, (in PPP terms), is *more than four times* the total Obama-McCain campaign expenditure.

Who said Indian elections come cheap?

Contd.. Interlocking vicious cycles

Inexhaustible Demand for Illegitimate Funds

Voter seeks money & liquor

More expenditure

Large spending may or may not lead to success, but failure to spend almost certainly leads to defeat

Greater corruption

Greater cynicism

Voter seeks more money

Rise of Political Fiefdoms

Need for money, caste and local clout



Parties are helpless in choice of candidates



Rise of political fiefdoms



Absence of internal party democracy



Competition among a few families in most constituencies



Oligopoly at constituency level

Contd.. Interlocking vicious cycles

Vote De-linked from Public Good

Centralized polity



No matter who wins, people lose



Vote does not promote public good



Voter maximizes short term gain



Money, liquor, caste, emotion and anger become dominant



Vicious cycle is perpetuated

Contd.. Interlocking vicious cycles

Political Survival and Honesty becoming incompatible

Parliamentary executive

Government survival depends on legislative majority

Legislators spend a lot of money to get elected

They need multiple returns to sustain the system

Corruption and misgovernance endemic

Government has to yield to legislators' demands

Corruption is perpetuated even if government has the will

Honesty not compatible with survival

Social Divisions Exacerbated

Scattered minorities unrepresented



Marginalization and ghettoization



Strategic voting and vote bank politics



Obscurantists become interlocutors drowning voices of reason and modernity



Politicians pander to fundamentalists



Counter mobilization of other groups based on primordial loyalties



Communal polarization and strife

Is Change of Players Enough?

- Mere change in players happening with unfailing regularity – incumbents do lose, rejection/negation vote very common
- Indian elections broadly reflect public opinion
- Electoral outcomes governed by compensatory errors. The parties and candidates neutralize each other's malpractices – money, muscle, liquor, caste, etc.
- Players change, but incentives in politics remain the same
- No matter who is in office, outcomes for the people do not vary much
- **Need of the Hour:** Change in the rules of the game, New Political Culture

How do we Change the Rules of the Game

- **Alternative Electoral Systems** to change incentives and outcomes in politics
- **A New Political Culture**, transforming public life and attracting the finest citizens “**who actually care for the country**”

Key Electoral Reforms Needed

Shift from FPTP to Proportional Representation / Preferential Voting

- Every vote counts – seats proportional to votes obtained
- Voting will be based on party image and agenda; incentive to buy votes will disappear
- No wasted votes, disenfranchised sections will find voice, representation to scattered minorities and reform groups
- Political fiefdoms will disappear
- Political process will get into a virtuous cycle - genuine competition among political groups and ideas; space for competent and honest leaders
- Preferential voting rewards the best parties and candidates – no fear of wasted vote

...and a Directly-elected Head of Government in States

Survival of the government for a fixed term is guaranteed, no need to “buy” MLAs

New Political Culture needed

- Politics, once again, as a noble endeavour
- Agenda which focuses on enhancing capacities, promoting self-reliance and human dignity, opportunity and justice
- Parties' organization and functioning should reflect constitutional values – contestation of ideas, peaceful, non-obstructionist methods
- Genuine internal democracy in political parties – choice of leadership and candidates
- Transparency in funding and ethical utilization

Changing the status quo... Where is Lok Satta Party

Unmatched credibility and reach:

- LSP built on India's largest civil society movement since Independence
- Lok Satta is known to 75% of the people of AP and with near-universal acceptance
- 94% of television news viewers supported the formation of LSP and its agenda
- Party Chapters in all districts of the State; grassroots units cover over 90% of Mandals
- Unmatched successes over the past decade

Changing the status quo... Where is Lok Satta Party

Strong Platform:

- LSP contested independently against all established parties in May 2008 bye-elections (AP).
- Massive money-and-muscle power deployed by opposition parties
- Still, LSP got 18% and 14.5% vote share in two critical constituencies

The Time is Ripe:

- People increasingly rejecting established political culture
- Electorate thirsting for meaningful political change
- Ready to vote for good governance
- Urgent need for New Political Culture
- '26/11 crisis' also a historic opportunity

Lok Satta Party's Agenda for Action

Transforming people's lives

- Opportunities for growth instead of gratuitous freebies
- High quality English and Computer education
- Universal and comprehensive public healthcare (no more out-of-pocket burden for hospital costs)
- Skills to guarantee employment to youth; setting up *National Volunteer Corps* for youth to serve the country *and* make a living
- Revitalizing agriculture, enhancing rural incomes
- Social security to the destitute

Entirely achievable with current resources; possible to eradicate poverty within 5 years.

What is needed? Political will and commitment

Lok Satta Party's Agenda for Action

Transforming India's Governance

- Empowered local governments – District Governments & City Governments
- Accountable, transparent and corruption-free local governments; integration of services, people participation
- Police and Judicial reforms, Anti-corruption mechanisms

Agenda and approach of established political parties

- Gratuitous freebies, unviable schemes make citizens utterly dependent on state handouts
- Rapidly deteriorating public finances
- Centralization of power, authority and decision-making
- Tremendous inefficiency and corruption
- Lack of deeper governance framework and political philosophy
- “power, at any cost”

Lok Satta Party

- ✓ Genuine empowerment of citizens & opportunities for growth
- ✓ Agenda based on actual village and ward-level issues
- ✓ Entirely possible within existing budgets
- ✓ Local issues addressed at local level
- ✓ Citizens need not travel beyond their district for quality education, healthcare, urban amenities, employment, justice, etc.
- ✓ Agenda and approach to harmonize Indian politics

What Next?

In Andhra Pradesh:

- Lok Satta Party ready to challenge status quo across entire state (AP as large as Germany!); firm resolve despite massive challenges
- Ethical fight with ethical means and ethical resources
- Middle-class and Youth as the target
- Need to enhance voter enrolment (2.75 lakh new voters enrolled through Post Offices; 2-3 lakh more expected; to be expanded across entire State)
- Aiming to achieve >10% of voteshare in general elections; as many seats as possible
- LSP credibility is very high but conversion to votes a severe challenge
- 'Wasted Vote' challenge; but in a 4-way fight, every vote counts!

What Next ? (contd.)

In Maharashtra:

- Channelize efforts and demand for change – post 26/11
- Mumbai is an ideal platform for launching political reforms – enlightened citizens, liberal media

LSP launched in Karnataka; efforts underway in Tamil Nadu

What Next ? (contd.)

- Credible, visible thought leaders and opinion makers to give confidence for change
- Visibly endorse Lok Satta's New Political Culture, be the Brand Ambassador
- Call to initiate similar efforts in all states
- Call to every young person to
 - become a voter
 - vote for clean politics and honest candidates
 - reject money and muscle power, divisive politics
- Be a part of the leadership team, especially in Mumbai

Change by Default or by Design

- Change is inevitable when status quo is unsustainable
- But we need 'desirable' change – not 'any' change
- If change is by default, it could lead to anarchy, disintegration or authoritarianism by invitation. Eg: 1991 – USSR
- Change by design is necessary and possible

Opportunities for Change

- Growing young population
- Thirst for change
- Economic growth and present crisis
- Communications revolution
- Nation has great leaders, opinion makers and change-makers in several fields
- *Convergence of these forces and trends needed*
- *Change by design is within reach; the window opportunity exists; but we need to act quickly*

“ Thou shalt not be a victim. Thou shalt not be a perpetrator. Above all, thou shalt not be a bystander. ”

- Holocaust Museum, Washington, DC