



LOK SATTA
People Power

**Foundation for
Democratic Reforms**

**Credibility of
Elections and Democracy in India**

Dr. Jayaprakash Narayan

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FDR / LOK SATTA :

Hyderabad, India. Phone: 91 40 2335 0778 / 23350 790; Fax: 91 40 23350783;

loksatta@satyam.net.in

www.loksatta.org

**Myron Weiner's
Four 'Measures'**

**Elections
&
Democracy**

Competitive Elections

**Universal Political
Freedom**

**Peaceful Transfer of
Power**

**Real Power with Elected
Governments**



Democracy and Elections in India

Genuine

- Political power only through elections
- Elections institutionalized
- Voter has choice
- Change of governments
- Political competition

Deep rooted

- 1977 verdict
- Peaceful transfers of power
Eg: 2004 verdict
- Broadened representational base.
Eg: Dalit and OBC empowerment
- Towards balanced federalism

Democracy and Elections in India

Example: Elections led to widening of representational base of Legislatures

Year of election	% of Members from "Forward Castes"	% of "Backward Caste Members"	% of farmers
1952	45.4	10.2	22.5
1962	49.4	12.8	27.4
1971	44.7	13.0	32.2
1984	36.9	9.3	38.3
1996	45.6	23.3	51.8

Source: *India Today*, July 16, 1996.26-30



Why is Indian electoral process credible?

- **Elections broadly reflective of public opinion**
- **Powerful parties and candidates do lose.**
- **Strong Institution of Election Commission**
- **Rejection vote common**
 - **Over 50% of incumbents lost in 2004 Parliament polls.**
- **No state-sponsored interventions in the process**



Why are Indian elections credible? (contd.)

Traditional neutrality of officials/bureaucracy

- ***Pre-Polling process* scrupulously fair and transparent (nominations, ballot papers, appointment of polling officials etc.)**
- ***Post-polling process* is completely non-partisan and transparent (transport, storage and counting of ballots and declaration of results)**
- **A system of compensatory errors - competing distortions neutralize each other !**
- **Independent Judiciary**

Deficiencies in Indian Elections

- **Flawed electoral rolls**
- **Polling irregularities**
- **Unaccounted and illegitimate use of money power**
- **Rampant criminalization**
- **Autocratic political parties**



Process Improvements in Indian Elections

- **Improvements in voter registration, lists and ID**

- Voter ID Cards

- Post Offices as Nodal Agency (2004)

- Nationwide initiative to improve voters lists

Voters' List Irregularities came down from 15% (1999) to 5.1% (2004).

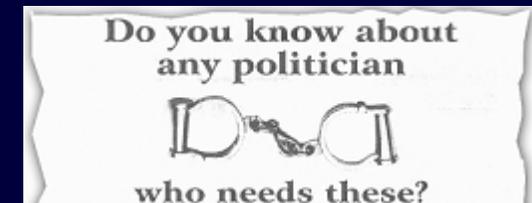
Lok Satta survey

- **Electronic voting machines**

- **Disclosure of candidates' financial, criminal and educational antecedents (Supreme Court Judgments in 2002, 2003)**

Process Improvements in Indian Elections (contd.)

- **Political Funding Reform Law (2003)**
 - 100% tax exemption to donors (both individual and corporate)
 - Mandatory disclosure of donations above Rs. 20,000
 - free air time on public and private electronic media to parties
- **Citizens' efforts to check entry of new criminals into politics**
Election Watch activities in some states



Systemic Improvements yet to be in place

- **Electoral and political *incentives* need to be realigned to**
 - change rules of the game – not mere change in players
 - fully eliminate money power, criminal elements from elections
 - make honest and people-centered politics always winnable
 - make politics a means for nation building

- **Representational distortions need to be eliminated**
 - Elections must capture social/voting diversity
 - Fairer representation to scattered minorities

Systemic Improvements yet to be in place (contd.)

- **Genuinely democratic political parties**
 - to bring truly competent people into politics
 - better choice for voters
 - parties as efficient vehicles for citizens'/supporters' aspirations

- **Improved accountability to check abuse of power**
 - Instruments of Accountability like Right to Information (2005), Citizen's Charters in government offices
 - making elected governments truly accountable to citizens

“At the bottom of all the tributes paid to democracy is the little man, walking into the little booth, with a little pencil, making a little cross on a little bit of paper.....”

- *Winston Churchill*