LOK SATTA

People Power

Deepening Democracy – Agenda for Action

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The purpose of a government is to make it easy for people to do good and difficult to do evil.

William Gladstone
Failure of Political Process

Interlocking vicious cycles

Inexhaustible demand for illegitimate funds

Illegitimate Money Power

Political Power

Corruption
Interlocking Vicious Cycles

Most expenditure is to buy votes

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

Contd..
Interlocking Vicious Cycles

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 delinked 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
Taxes delinked from services

Only 16% of GDP collected as taxes (union & states)

Fiscal deficits and crisis

Higher Taxes
Unacceptable because of corruption and poor services

Desubsidization
The poor do not see alternative benefits for the subsidies given up

Wage Reduction
Centralization and Art 311 preclude it

Deeper fiscal crisis

Poorer services and public goods

Perpetuation of poverty and backwardness

Contd..
Interlocking Vicious Cycles

Political survival and honesty not compatible

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
Interlocking Vicious Cycles

Social Divisions Exacerbated

FPTP

Scattered minorities unrepresented
Marginalization and Ghettoization
Strategic voting and vote bank politics
Obscurantists become interlocutors drowning voices of reason and modernity
Politicians pander fundamentalists
Counter mobilization of other groups based on primordial loyalties
Communal polarization and strife

Contd..
Interlocking Vicious Cycles

Competence and integrity excluded

FPTP

↓

Need for money power and caste clout

↓

Honest and decent elements have little chance

↓

Bad public policy and incompetent governance

↓

Deepening crisis

Contd..
Interlocking Vicious Cycles

Oligopoly of parties

FPTP

Only a high threshold of voting ensures victory

Parties with 35 - 50% vote, or social groups with local dominance get elected

Significant but scattered support pays no electoral dividends

Voters prefer other “winnable” parties

Marginalization of reformers, and national parties

Regionalization of polity & perpetuation of status quo

Contd..
Representational Distortions

FPTP

Women & deprived sections not represented

Reservation with rotation is arbitrary and leads to proxies

Perpetuation of dominance of traditional groups

Representational illegitimacy

Contd..
What Ails Bureaucracy

- Life time security of bureaucracy
- Penchant for centralization and secrecy
- Lack of professionalism and specialized skills
- Absence of incentives for excellence
- No accountability
- Corruption and mal-administration
Distortions of State Power

- Positive Power restricted
  Negative power unchecked
- All organs are dysfunctional
- A system of alibis
  Victims of vicious cycle
- Change of players
  No change in the rules of the game
- Political process ought to be the solution
  But has become the problem itself
Keys to Resolution

- Crisis is systemic
- Most players are victims of a vicious cycle
- Change of players not enough
- Change of rules of the game needed
- Institutions are the key
- Resources are not a problem
- The way they are deployed is the key
## Key Reforms

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The Track Which Impedes

Players (drivers)

Democratic Institutions (Engine)

Railings / Track

(political system)
Recent Political Reform Initiatives

- Disclosure of candidate details
- Political Funding Law
- Changes in Rajya Sabha election
Reforms in the Pipeline / Floundering

- Post office as nodal agency for voter registration
- Anti-defection law changes
- Limiting the size of Council of Ministers
- National Judicial Commission
- Right to Information
- Women’s reservation in Legislatures
Key Systemic Reforms

- Proportional Representation
- Clear separation of powers
- Political party regulation
Proportional Representation

- Gives representation to scattered minorities and reform groups
- A party’s image and platform, not local clout and money power, matter
- Incentive to buy votes in a constituency will disappear
- Genuine competition among political groups and ideas

Contd..
Proportional Representation

- Fair reconciliation of social and political groups
- No ‘wasted’ votes
- Disenfranchised sections will find ‘voice’
- Political fiefdoms will disappear
- Political process will get into a virtuous cycle
Problems of Proportional Representation

Problem

- Political fragmentation in a plural society
- Party bosses will be autocratic
- Link between voters and legislator is snapped

Solution

- Reasonable threshold level
- Democratization of parties and choice of candidates
- Mixed system combining Proportional Representation with FPTP
A Suggested Model for India

- Mixed, compensatory Proportional Representation
- A threshold of, say 10% vote in a major state for Proportional Representation
- State as a unit for representation
Separation of Powers

- Direct election of head of government at State and local levels
  - No one can buy a whole state electorate
  - Image and agenda of leader will be decisive
  - With separation of powers, there will be no incentive to overspend for legislative office
  - At state level, there is no fear of authoritarianism as Union government, Election Commission, Supreme Court etc., will act as checks
  - Honest leaders can survive in public office
  - There will be checks and balances to prevent abuse of office
Political party regulation

Membership
• Free, open and voluntary
• Uniform, objective conditions / no restrictions
• No arbitrary expulsion
• Due process for disciplinary action

Leadership choice
• By regular, periodic, free and secret ballot
• Opportunity to challenge leadership through formal procedures with no risk of being penalised

Choice of candidates
• By members at constituency level through secret ballot
• By elected delegates through secret ballot
• Central leadership cannot nominate candidates
Window of Opportunity

- Deepening fiscal crisis
- Citizen’s disgust and concern
- Unsustainable status quo
- Relatively sound private economy
- Demographic changes and rising expectations
- Communications revolution
“Strategy without tactics is the slowest route to victory. Tactics without strategy is the noise before defeat.”

- Sun Tzu