LOK SATTA

People Power

Good Governance - Role of Civil Society


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“Never doubt that a group of thoughtful, committed individuals can change the world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever did”

Margaret Mead
In a Sane Democracy

- Political process should resolve the crisis
- Parties, elections and public office are the route to reform
- In India a vicious cycle operates
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
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
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..
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
Way out

- Assert people’s sovereignty

- Fundamental democratic transformation

- People centered governance
## Key Reforms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Reforms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Electoral reforms</td>
<td>Funding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Criminalization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electoral system</td>
<td>Proportional Representation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Separation of Powers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decentralization</td>
<td>Local Governments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rule of Law</td>
<td>Judicial reforms</td>
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<tr>
<td>Accountability</td>
<td>Right to information</td>
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<td>Citizens’ charters</td>
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<td>Independent crime investigation</td>
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The Track Which Impedes

Players (drivers)

Democratic Institutions (Engine)

Railings / Track

(political system)
What can Civil Society do?

- When political process fails, the ball is with citizens, the ultimate sovereigns
- Local assertion
- State-level reforms
- National platform for larger reforms
What can Citizens do?

- Resist misgovernance
- Check corruption
- Influence public discourse
- Channel resources better
- Enforce better services
- Bring pressure for reforms
Approaches to Citizens’ Action

- Collective, informed assertion
- Wide dissemination of information
- Effective mass communication
- Strategic intervention
Conditions for State-Wide movement

- A group of credible citizens with excellent track record
- Insights to political and governance process
- A practical agenda which unites all segments
- Professional, full-time, institutional approach
Citizens Initiatives – Lok Satta’s Experience

- People’s watch
- Election watch
- Swarajya
- Specific issue advocacy
Methods of Citizens’ Action – People’s Watch

- Collective informed assertion
- People’s charter
- Lok Satta as platform
- Fight against corruption
- Fight for better delivery of public services
Methods of Citizens’ Action – Swarajya

- Advocacy and campaign for specific reform goals
- Choice of goals
  - Locally achievable
  - No cost / low cost
  - Universally acceptable
  - Strategic goals opening many doors
Swarajya – Reform Goals

- Right to Information
- Citizen’s Charters
- Empowerment of local governments
- Empowerment of stake holders
- Universally accessible school education
- Speedy justice through rural courts
- Toilet for every household
Methods of Citizens’ Action – Election Watch

- Voter verification and registration
- Screening of candidates
- Know your candidates
- Common platforms
- State-level debates
- Training of volunteers
- Monitoring of polling process

contd..
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
- Disenchanted 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Membership</th>
<th>Free, open and voluntary</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Uniform, objective conditions / no restrictions</td>
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<td></td>
<td>No arbitrary expulsion</td>
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<td>Due process for disciplinary action</td>
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| 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
Conditions for State-wide Movement

- A group of credible citizens with excellent track record
- Insights to political and governance process
- A practical agenda which unites all segments
- Professional, full-time, institutional approach
Approaches to National Campaign

- Identify reform groups and support
- Focus on key goals and mobilize public opinion and bring pressure
  
  eg: disclosure; funding; alternative model for women’s representation; Post Office as nodal agency

- National communication campaign
National Communication Campaign

- What are the reforms needed and why
- What is there in it for me as a citizen
- How can I participate
- In all major languages
- Taking advantage of Radio and Cable TV penetration
Two Big Challenges

- How do we get media time (as public broadcasting service)

- What is the response capture mechanism (infrastructure of institutions)
Two Paths - Choice is Ours

German example vs USSR example

- Freedom enhancing
- Democratic
- Orderly
- Integrating
- Growth-oriented

- Tyrannical
- Chaotic
- Disintegrating
- Debilitating
“Strategy without tactics is the slowest route to victory. Tactics without strategy is the noise before defeat”

- Sun Tzu