

LOK SATTA

People Power

Overview

Meeting with Sri Arun Jaitley
7th August, 2004, Hyderabad

National Campaign for Political Reforms

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

William Gladstone

Mission

To promote peaceful, democratic transformation of Indian Governance process and enable India to achieve full potential through good governance

What is Lok Satta

*A non-partisan people's movement for
political and governance reforms*

Lok Satta's Structure

Primary Units (3714)



Intermediary Units (520)



District Units (23)



Apex Unit

Lok Satta's Structure

- Grassroots people's movement (more than 100,000 members)
- Democratically elected leadership
- Decentralized operation
- Presence in all 23 districts and 70% of mandals
- 35% reach in AP
- Powerful voice on behalf of civil society

Who Support us?

- Contributions from supporters
- Does not accept non-Indian contributions, including any multi-lateral institutional support
- Volunteer driven – thousands of full-time activists
- Does not accept government funding

Key Premises

- Crisis is systemic
- Most players are victims of a vicious cycle
- Change of players not enough
- Change of rules of the game needed
- Values are not the issue
- Institutions are the key
- Resources are not a problem
- The way they are deployed is the key
- Focus on governance process and not on contentious policies

Lok Satta's Approach

- Non-Partisan and Pro-Political
- Advocacy of specific, practical and acceptable reforms
- Stress on Institutional Reform
- Constructive engagement with government and political parties
- Seek change in the rules of the game – not players
- Adopt best practices from across the world
- Optimistic movement
- Democracy is the only ideology

Guiding Principles

- Freedom
- Self-Governance
- Empowerment
- Rule of Law
- Self-Correcting mechanisms

Core Philosophy

- People are true sovereigns
- Public servants should be accountable to people
- Governance should be citizen-centered
- Collective informed assertion of public will

Constituency

- General Public
 - Inclusive
 - Accommodating core concerns
 - Shorn of ideology except democracy
- Opinion makers
- Decision makers

Lok Satta's Goals

- Comprehensive electoral reforms
- Empowerment of local governments
- Instruments of accountability
- Speedy and efficient justice

Electoral Reforms

- Process Improvements
 - Preventing polling irregularities
 - Arresting and reversing criminalization of politics
 - Checking abuse of unaccountable money power in elections
- System Improvements
 - Political party reform
 - Proportional representation
 - Direct election of Chief Executive at the State level with clear separation of powers

Empowerment of Local Governments

- Transfer of funds, functions and functionaries to local governments

- Link between

vote \rightleftharpoons public good

taxes \rightleftharpoons services

authority \rightleftharpoons accountability

Instruments of Accountability

- Right to Information
- Independent crime investigation
- Independent appointment of constitutional functionaries
- Independent and effective anti-corruption agency
- Term limits for public office
- Strict penalties for abuse of office
- Citizen's Charters
- Stakeholder empowerment

Judicial Reforms

- Limit writ jurisdiction
- Increase number of courts
- Local courts in local language (Gram Nyayalaya)
- Time bound justice
- National Judicial Commission
- Independent crime investigation
- All India Judicial Service

Lok Satta's Methods of Intervention

- People's watch
- Election watch
- Swarajya
- People's Ballot / Signature Campaign
- Specific issue advocacy

Approaches to Citizens' Action

- Collective, informed assertion
- Wide dissemination of information
- Effective mass communication
- Strategic intervention

Lok Satta as a Platform

- Citizens encouraged to use Lok Satta as a platform
- Fight corruption
- Demand better delivery of services
- Work for specific reform goals

Keys to Action

- Goals should be of local relevance
- Locally achievable
- No cost / low cost
- Universally acceptable
- Strategic goals opening many doors

Lok Satta's Strength

- Clarity of goals
- Non-partisan and pro-political approach
- Target institutions not individuals
- Strategic interventions
- Full-time professional work
- Committed army of volunteers

Macro Perspective of Indian Polity

- Disaggregate volatility
- Broadly reflective of public opinion
- Ruling parties and powerful candidates do lose
- Rejection / Negative vote pretty common

Micro Perspective of Indian Polity

- Money power dominant
- Criminalization rampant
- Voting irregularities frequent
- People take money to vote
- Caste and divisive impulses are prominent

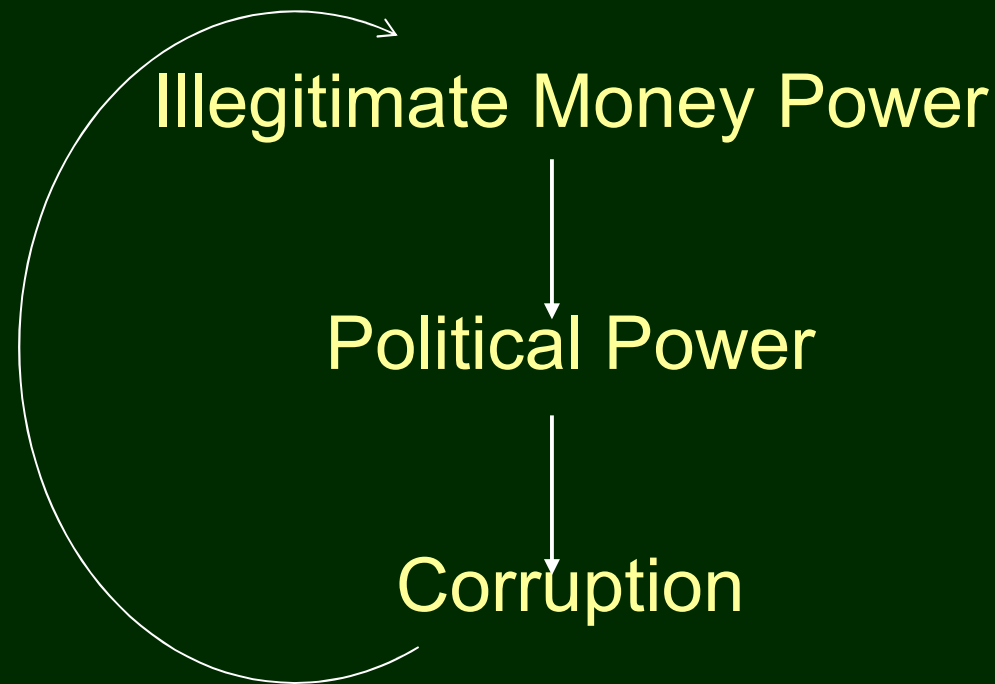
How is Democracy Surviving?

- A system of compensatory errors (competing distortions neutralize each other)
- Strength of Election Commission
- Tradition of neutrality of officials
- Pre-polling process scrupulously fair (nominations, ballot papers, appointment of polling officials etc.)
- Post-polling process - completely non-partisan (transport, storage and counting of ballots and declaration of results)

Failure of Political Process

Interlocking vicious cycles

Inexhaustible demand for illegitimate funds



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- *Margaret Meade*