

An introduction to

The New Democracy

Defining Indian politics for the 21st century

Preface

1. **This book is based on a single premise: Indians no longer accept a status quo.** The average Indian voter is thirsting for change. The outcome of nearly every general and mid-term election since the past two decades reflects this deep-rooted desire. This is precisely why two-thirds of all incumbent legislators lose, after each round of elections. The people across India, irrespective of their age, sex, religion, caste, economic status or even educational background feel exactly the same. They desire fundamental changes in the way politics is carried out in this country. The present political system is no longer acceptable to a vast majority of Indians. This much should be self-evident to the critical, concerned observer.
2. **Indian politics is complicated enough.** It becomes our duty not to make it any more so. That is why we have attempted to write this book in a very simple, direct, conversational and at-times, even in a light-hearted style. However, given the very nature of issues being discussed, this style might occasionally vary from very simple to slightly complex. The casual style of this book is only to contrast the seriousness of the issues being discussed. After all, we are talking about the very future of India. And, India's future is nothing but a capsule of our own collective futures.

This book is a practical guide for anyone who is interested in experiencing a better, brighter and truly democratic Indian politics in the 21st century.

The typical reader is certainly not expected to have a formal or substantial theoretical grounding in political science or constitutional law. In fact, the only 'pre-requisites' are (i) a genuine interest in Indian electoral politics and (ii) willingness to focus on solutions and not just on the problems themselves.

3. **This book is primarily about the umbilical connection between the distortions in elections and the perversion of politics and governance in our country.** Contrary to popular perception, underperformance of our political system has less to do with the perceived 'low quality' of our netas. The malaise affecting our politics, governance and administration goes beyond individual failures. Corrupt, criminal or overly partisan politicians are at best mere symptomatic problems. However, they unquestionably point to a systemic failure of the democratic process itself. It came about almost entirely due to the inappropriate choice and design of Indian electoral system. The following chapters will help you analyze and verify this claim. But we will not stop at that: this book is also about evolving more rational and robust electoral system for our country.

Chapter 1 introduces the concept of a modern, functioning democracy and how India's version of democracy, politics and elections fits into the picture. The performance of India's electoral system, including its shortcomings on multiple fronts, is carefully analyzed in **Chapter 2**. The deep-seated cause-and-effect relationship between the present electoral system and the performance of our political and governance structure is brought out here. Clearly and urgently, we need better alternatives, when it comes to our electoral politics.

Chapter 3 looks at elections from the systemic design (i.e. nuts-and-bolts) perspective and an argument is made for a more rational and representative method of electing our representatives. From the logical flow of this thesis emerges an electoral formula, which is genuinely representative of the people's choices, as the optimal, robust and only feasible solution to the present day's deep-rooted political crisis. In a step-by-step manner, this chapter guides you towards designing a proportional representation system for electing our legislators.

However, a shift to a proportionality-based electoral formula alone would not be enough. It is a necessary-but-not-sufficient reform measure. To be genuinely effective, it has to be accompanied by two supplementary, vital reform measures, which are explained in **Chapter 4**. They deal with making the political parties more democratic and making the executive and legislative arms of the government more effective and accountable to the citizens.

By the end of Chapter 4, the methodical reader would certainly question: 'these political and electoral reform measure sound fine to me, but to actually go about achieving these goals?' **Chapter 5** introduces the strategy "road map" on how Indians of diverse backgrounds can closely collaborate to achieve the above political-electoral reforms and thereby effect fundamental changes in the way politics is being run in this country. This chapter then introduces the *Janadesh* campaign (also, National Campaign for Political Reform or NCPR), India's first and largest citizen-based democratic movement for bringing about fundamental reforms in our electoral and political systems. The good news is that the groundwork has already begun and the ball is ready to roll (at the time of writing of this book).

By the time the interested and motivated reader finishes reading this book, s/he would be able to figure out her/his role in this unique movement for democratic reforms. Such a reader might also realize how to place her/himself into this unique mosaic of collective, concerted and informed citizen action. If not, s/he is always welcome to get in touch with us!

4. 'Special' Features of this book

The observations and arguments presented in the five chapters of this book are supported by numerous anecdotes, examples and illustrations (both verbal and otherwise). In addition, this book also has some features, not-so-commonly found in literature dealing with similarly serious topics: each chapter begins with an '**Opening Puzzler**' which aims to provoke the readers' curiosity about the chapter topic. Answers to these puzzlers are given in the following pages of the chapter. **Information/Fast-fact Capsules** are liberally spread though out this book and give interesting information and/or analysis on situations and developments (e.g.: 'why can't even popular people like Manmohan Singh and Abdul Kalam win elections?'). Each chapter has a '**Review & Summary**' section at the end that gives a handy gist of the chapter contents.

Then, there is also a featured series '**Politics for the Politicians of Tomorrow / *Masterji says...***' Until now, Indian politics gave the impression of lagging behind the aspirations of Indian society. But thanks to concerted and collaborated initiatives from different sections of the Indian society (the politicians included!) Indian politics is undoubtedly on the path towards rapid progress. Politics of the future promises to be very different from politics of today, both in theory and in practice. Under such circumstances, what are some key concepts to be understood by anyone who wishes to follow the political developments? Our resident political guru, *Master ji*, had kindly agreed to provide valuable 'tutorials' on understanding the foundations of tomorrow's politics. These tutorials are presented in this book, in the form of '*Master ji says...*' series of lectures. **Though the tone of presentation might appeal to the young(er) audiences, *Master ji's* lessons could be of interest even to the more critical reader.**

We hope you will enjoy reading this book!

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What *Masterji* Says...

CHAPTER 1

Chapter 1

A Young India, a Democratic India

OPENING PUZZLER

Contrasting photos of Saddam Hussein during his presidency (smart, surrounded by people and courtiers) and after he was captured (alone, bearded and untidy)

OR

May be we could use a cartoon that conveys how we praise powerwala neta too much and then completely forget him/her later on.

Until March 2003, Saddam Hussein was literally living a life fit for ten kings. We used to see him on TV with fawning courtiers or delirious crowds chanting his name and extolling his greatness. What happened, then? In December the same year, he was caught like a “mountain rat” from his spider hole where he was hiding. The ruthless dictator who lived in vulgarly large palaces was caught hiding in a 6-by-8 feet hole in the ground. Almost immediately, every respectable citizen in Iraq queued up to condemn Saddam. Many, including some of his former foreign friends, wanted to see him dead even before his interrogation had begun. Anything and everything wrong in Iraqi society was directly attributed to his 25 years of dictatorship.

India is a democracy, unlike Saddam’s Iraq. But, though to a lesser extent, we too experienced the same phenomenon when past Prime or Chief Ministers came into and went out of power. First lionize; then demonize. First deify; then crucify. It appears as if most Indians still do not realize what ‘power’ really means.

So, what exactly is the nature of ‘power’ in a democracy? What can politically powerful Indians really achieve?

1. Impressive Track Record

India is truly unique.

The end of World War II saw the dawn of liberation across several countries off the world. Along with India, they emerged as nascent democracies with high hopes. Unfortunately, a majority of these countries quickly succumbed to authoritarian impulses and army coups. The experiences of several Asian, African and even European nations bear proof to this fact. Our own neighbours – Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh – illustrate the difficulties in running a democracy. But it is India alone that has a unique record of stable and peaceful democracy complemented by successive and successful elections.

Indian democracy has shown a refreshing capacity to adapt to conditions and uphold democratic institutions and practices. *Desi* democracy has broadened its appeal, though it may not have struck deep enough roots. There is wider representation of various castes and social groups in legislatures. Without any doubt, the bold experiment of universal adult franchise since the inception of our republic has paid off.

However, instead of speaking in terms of broad generalizations, can we actually measure and compare our democratic institutions and practices against those of other countries? Myron Weiner*, a brilliant political scientist who was at the MIT, had done precisely that. He listed four institutions and practices that can be used to ‘measure the worth’ of a country’s democracy:

- i) Government leaders in that country are chosen in truly competitive elections in which there are opposition political parties.
- ii) Political parties – including opponents of government – have the right to openly seek public support. They have access to press, freedom of assembly, freedom of speech and freedom from arbitrary arrest.
- iii) Governments and leaders defeated in elections step down; losers are not punished by winners. Defeated leaders are not punished unless, in the act of governance, they have broken the law. Their punishment is based on *due process*.
- iv) Elected governments are not figureheads; they exercise power and make policies. Elected governments are accountable - only to the electors and not to the military, any monarchy, the bureaucracy, or an oligarchy.⁺

* Dr. Myron Weiner (born 1931) earned a doctorate in political science from the Princeton University and later became the Ford International Professor of Political Science and the director of Center for International Relations at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), USA. He was considered a leading authority on Indian politics and his empirical research provides us with one of the most insightful analysis into the working of Indian politics and democracy. He died of brain tumour in 1999.

⁺ Oligarchy refers to a small group of politically powerful individuals.

By now, you might have recognized that these are yardsticks for measuring an *electoral democracy*. Naturally, these standards are less strict than the ones used for measuring a genuinely liberal democracy (see box). Even then, several countries fail to make the mark. How so? Let us look at some examples.

Frequently under-appreciated is the fact that the early history of Argentina is almost identical to that of the United States. As modern nations, both were entirely built by European settlers facing fierce opposition from both Native Americans and fellow Europeans, between the 16th and 18th centuries. At a time when colonial rule in much of India, Asia and Africa was only becoming stronger, Argentina declared independence from Spain, 188 years ago. By 1853, when Indians were not in a position to even *think* of becoming united, Argentina declared national unity and adopted a constitution. The following decades saw political parties, political opposition and several rounds of competitive elections for public office. Still, its post-independence democratic history (especially in the 20th century) is punctuated with political power exchanges between military and civilian administrations. For some time, there was also limited electoral competition - with major political forces banned. The country saw frequent economic collapses, political chaos, terrorism and armed civil strife. In spite of starting out very early on the democratic path, it is only at the beginning of the 21st century that Argentina is limping back to some kind of stability. Even as recently as in December 2001, they had four presidents in two weeks. How different from the US or for that matter, even India!

In the apartheid-era South Africa and white-dominated Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), while there were regular elections, large sections of people were forcibly prevented from participating in them. In fact, even in the southern states of the United States, the blacks, while legally permitted to vote, were actually denied the franchise until the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. Countries like Mexico, Pakistan and Bangladesh, on several occasions, had electoral competition in theory but practised massive state-sponsored rigging. In Turkey, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Philippines periods of electoral competition were interspersed with dictatorships. In Algeria and Myanmar (Burma) there was electoral competition but the winning parties were prevented from assuming office, and are in fact persecuted. Erstwhile Soviet Union, and most of the Eastern European countries until their adoption of democracy about a decade ago, had authoritarian communist regimes in which only one party could control government. Until 1991, Zambia (open the map of Africa in your atlas and it is situated above Zimbabwe, below the equator) too had been under the harsh rule of one-party politics. Even today, China continues to be under an authoritarian, one-party rule. Several Southeast Asian countries too have witnessed limited electoral competition or outright authoritarianism for decades. Multiple rounds of elections in middle-eastern countries like Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Egypt, Saudi Arabia or Syria have been conducted without universal franchise, genuine political competition or freedom to openly seek public support

A large number of the countries have been one-party states, military bureaucracies and dictatorships, communist dictatorships (now defunct) or personalized autocracies, right upto the 1980 and 90s. They typically restrict opposition parties, limit freedom of assembly and freedom of the press, do not permit competitive elections, restrain the judiciary from performing an independent role, and limit freedoms of their citizens in a variety of ways – to speak out, to travel abroad, to criticize the regime and to change the government peacefully. In most post-colonial

How to identify a political democracy?

Add a collage photo of people rallying, people voting/ballot/elections, parliament.

Add the drawing of the five pillars of democracy

While the record of our electoral democracy has been fair when judged by Myron Weiner's postulates, India emerges poorly when judged by the more accurate and practical standards of a genuine liberal democracy. There are five key measures of a democratic country and let us briefly examine the performance of India according to these standards.

- **Freedom.** In an elementary sense, it is the right of an individual to do as he or she pleases, as long as his actions do not impinge on the freedom of others. It is true that our constitution and law have guaranteed these freedoms in a fair measure to citizens. But in reality, our freedom is undermined by the unchecked power of party and state functionaries to paralyze society at will, to appropriate resources, and to blackmail or bully citizens and groups. Institutional maladies including inaccessible school education and primary health care, delayed justice, unaccountable police, unchecked crime, secrecy in government and inefficient public services have severely eroded our freedoms despite constitutional guarantees.
- **Self-governance.** It is the right of citizens to govern themselves directly or indirectly. Representative democracy means that the elected legislators and governments should be fully accountable to citizens. But autocratic Indian political parties, flawed electoral process, limited and often unhappy choice of candidates, uninformed and distorted public discourse, criminalization of politics, marginalization of citizens and over-centralization have all reduced our self-governance to a mockery.
- **Empowerment** is the ability of citizens to influence the course of events on a sustained basis and to make meaningful decisions on matters of governance having impact on their own lives. In effect, people should always continue to remain sovereigns. In India, however, rampant corruption, hostility to public participation in governance, centralization, secrecy, red tape, and a culture of touts and middlemen with the backing of powerful party organizations have denied people any meaningful degree of empowerment.
- **Rule of law** is the concept of people being governed by law, and all citizens, irrespective of station and rank, being subject to the same laws to the same extent. However, highly secretive functioning, habitual abuse of executive authority, ubiquitous patronage system, VIP culture in every public service, primacy of political agents, political control of crime investigation and the tardy and inefficient justice system all make rule of law virtually non-existent in our society. Rule of law is generally not the same for you and a high-ranking politician's son.
- **Self-correcting mechanisms** give institutions of state and the political structure the capacity to learn from past experience and to constantly improve themselves, in order to serve the people better. Indian democracy has shown a surprisingly high degree of incapacity to design and operate the institutional correctional mechanisms. We have a political and administrative structure incapable of attracting the best elements of society thereby making sure that self-correcting mechanisms are not put in place. Not surprisingly, India has to reinvent the wheel each time, every time.

To sum up, Indians are living in a successful electoral democracy, but they have not yet experienced the fruits of a truly liberal democracy.

regimes, political participation is restricted and leaders are not held accountable; and, in the worst cases, governments are outright tyrannical. Judged by these standards, as Myron Weiner points out, "India is one of a handful of post-colonial countries that could be regarded as having a stable democratic regime. *India, along with a handful of smaller countries, is a notable exception.*" But, by now, you must have recognized by now that this book is not about

comparing ourselves with countries that typically do not even appear on the radar screen of global politics.

2. Distortions distress the democracy

In spite of our country having sound democratic fundamentals, there were several aberrations from time to time in our commitment to democratic institutions and practices.

Any Photo/image/graphic conveying the feature(s) of Emergency

The most notorious example is the period of "internal emergency" between 1975 and 1977. Civil liberties and habeas corpus* were suspended during the period and thousands were incarcerated for no other reason except that they were the opponents of the regime. Elected legislators and leaders of opposition were all detained without charges or trial. Opposition political parties were denied access to media. Freedom of press was suspended and publications were subjected to pre-censorship. The government invoked our Constitution's 42nd Amendment that allows the Parliament to suspend elections and extend its own life indefinitely – one year at a time. That was how the elections that were supposed to be held in 1975 were twice postponed and the life of the 5th Lok Sabha was extended. At this point in our history, India was dangerously perched on the edge of the slippery slope that led countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh, Turkey, Algeria or Egypt down towards dictatorships and authoritarianism.

However, it must be said in favour of Mrs. Indira Gandhi, chief architect of the emergency, that she did voluntarily call for elections, though after the expiry of the natural term of the Lok Sabha, and lifted the curbs on most freedoms. The elections in 1977 were by and large free and fair, resulted in the stunning and what-was-then-unimaginable defeat of the seemingly all-powerful government. The subsequent transfer of power from the defeated Congress Party to the newly elected Janata Party was peaceful and orderly. This internal emergency is an example of how Indian democracy can be distorted on nation-wide scale, based on a single theme.

Any Photo/image/graphic conveying the feature(s) of booth capturing, voter fraud, etc

In contrast, there have been many other smaller-scale aberrations and local-level distortions in our democracy too. In fact, by 2004, some of these local-level distortions, each driven by its own local political considerations, have become so widespread and so common that they begin to appear a part of the rules, not the exceptions. These deviations might be less obvious than the imposition of 'emergency' but are no less dangerous. What are some of these persistent and dangerous, local-level deviations?

* the right of a citizen to make the court protect her/him from illegal imprisonment

Flawed elections have often reduced the legitimacy of our democracy. Severely defective electoral rolls, irregularities in the polling process, vote-buying, unaccountable use of money in elections, criminalization of politics and the curse of defections for personal gain have undermined the sanctity of elections. The autocratic and unaccountable control of few individuals over the entire machinery and working of political parties has reduced them to personal estates and private fiefdoms, undermining the democratic political process. Party-hopping and defections (though now outlawed) had severely eroded the stature of the legislators to that of modern-day serfs. All these undemocratic institutions and practices have severely diminished the legitimacy of governments and legislatures.

Newspaper collage photo – paper headlines talking about criminals in politics

Certain recent trends have been even more disturbing. There is a perceptible and alarming decline in the quality of debate in legislatures. Much of legislative business and reviewing the work of government has become perfunctory. Legislatures have become theatres of the absurd to catch the attention of the media and the public, with little sense of purpose or dignity.

Changes of governments, particularly in our States, have been often divorced from the people's mandates. Chief Ministers and governments are made and brought down in midnight parleys and palace. The ouster of Kalyan Singh's government in UP (1998), the unseating of NTR's government in Andhra Pradesh (1984 and then again in 1995), Farooq Abdullah's government in Kashmir (1984), Keshubhai Patel's sarkar in Gujarat (1995) – they all had nothing to do with people's mandate or policy differences. There were scores of other such changes in governments engineered by palace coups, horse trading of legislative support and politics of defection for personal gain. Equally frequent, were instances when changes in governments were *prevented* by adopting similar methods. The infamous 'JMM bribery case' belongs to this category: In July-August of 1993, the then Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao allegedly ensured the bribing of four MPs belonging to the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) Party to ensure that they would vote for him during an opposition-sponsored no-confidence motion in the Lok Sabha. During the course of investigation, circumstantial evidence – particularly, in the form of deposits in the bank accounts of the four MPs – was found supporting the allegation. But the Delhi High Court later acquitted Rao and his colleagues for apparent lack of convincing evidence.

Here, we must keep in mind that all these downfalls of governments were constitutionally, legally and technically valid (obviously, except those cases involving outright breach of law). But their democratic legitimacy can definitely be questioned. In 2000, the formation of the first governments in the newly-born states of Chattisgarh and Jharkhand were accompanied by tension, drama, and even fisticuffs. Lack of peaceful and dignified transfer of power further eroded the validity of the democratic tradition.

Fortunately in India, losing politicians are not victimized, jailed or beheaded as is the unfortunate practice in many post-colonial nations, including neighboring Pakistan and Bangladesh!

However, elected leaders and public officials are not held accountable either. Our system never allowed a government leader to be punished for misdeeds or corruption while in office. The rare instances of chargesheeting, trial, or conviction have invariably been well after they lost power, and always while their opponents are in power. Launching of prosecution has always been selective, sparing the ruling parties and aimed against a rare opposition politician

But the most important aberration of the elected governments is in the area of governance.

While elected governments in India are not figureheads, their capacity to really make a positive difference in our lives has proved to be marginal at best. The institutional rigidities in our parliamentary democracy have thus ensured that real governance reform, bureaucratic accountability or improvement in their performance is virtually impossible.

Let us perform a ‘thought experiment’: assume that all the legislators who have won a general election have actually lost and instead, their immediate rivals won. What would be the outcome? Would India change completely? The stark reality is that while governments change, governance itself would not. Irrespective of whether one set of candidates won or lost, Indians would be governed in exactly the same manner as before. As far as our lives are concerned, the only visible difference with change of government is that we see new faces in public offices. Of course, the fortunes of select individual players dramatically improve! This rigidity in our governance process ensures that *no matter who wins or loses in the elections, we the people always end up as losers.*

What exactly is the nature of power? What can politically powerful people achieve?

A majority of us citizens generally have an incorrect perception of the meaning of power. The leaders who are raised to the heavens today are simply condemned once they lose their elections and are 'out of power.' Instead, we have to be very clear about our own position vis-à-vis those who are 'in power':

- Political power, in essence, is the capacity to influence change in the society. Nothing more and nothing less.
- In democracies like India, the true political power flows from us, the ordinary people. The leaders are elected only to implement *our* agenda.
- Since we live in a representative democracy, we temporarily entrust our political power to an elected representative. For example, through elections, we entrust legislative power to an MLA or MP for a maximum period of five years. In other words, these leaders are only *temporary* custodians of people's power.

Politically powerful people can exercise their power in two ways — positive and negative.

Positive power can be defined as the power to influence events, resources or human behaviour to promote overall public good. In India, this positive power is severely restricted because of the several flaws in the way we designed our governance structure. Contrary to popular perception, even politically powerful people — be it the prime minister or chief minister or other ministers or high officials — really have very limited positive power.

However, the negative power which is defined as self, privilege, patronage, petty tyranny or plain nuisance value is more or less unfettered and limitless. All elected politicians, appointed public officials and employees of public sector undertakings, enjoy this negative power in abundance. When a politician breaks a traffic rule and gets away with it, think of this negative power. A vast majority of them choose to exercise it.

This is because of the Indian governance climate where good acts are not rewarded and bad performance is not punished. The few who wish to exercise positive power find themselves in shackles and wield limited influence at best. The resultant imbalance has caused incalculable damage to our political landscape and society. As a consequence, the great institutions of the Indian republic have all but collapsed, and the crisis of governability is deepening by the day.

3. No substitute to Politics and Democracy

Given these infirmities and distortions of our political process, it is easy and tempting to deride politics and democracy themselves. In fact it has become fashionable among the some sections of the society to be anti-political, and to wistfully suggest authoritarian solutions. Some well-known personalities have even argued that too much of democracy is hampering the efficient functioning of various institutions that are required for vibrant economy and for protection of individual rights of speech, property, and religion. For these doomsayers of democracy, the remedy for too much of democracy lies in delegation of authority to undemocratic or un-elected bodies. It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that most educated Indians flirt, at least on a one-

time-basis, with the idea of having a dictatorial system that quickly transforms India into a modern, truly-developed global power!

The good news is that we such ideas and discussions reconfirm the fact that we Indians share a certain degree of natural irreverence to power and authority. Such healthy skepticism is a sign of vitality in any democracy. But the bad news is that harsh and sweeping remarks are unwarranted and counterproductive.

Is politics bad?

People love to hate their politicians. Not just in India, but everywhere in the world. The Chaplain of the US Senate was once asked, "Reverend, do you pray for the Senators every morning?" He replied, "No, I look at their faces, and pray for the country". Politicians are often their own worst critics, and they employ invective as an effective weapon to undermine their opponents. This propensity makes them easy targets for public criticism. Disraeli and Gladstone were the great rival statesmen in 19th century Britain. Asked to differentiate between a misfortune and a calamity, Disraeli gleefully remarked, "If Gladstone falls into the Thames and drowns, it would be a misfortune. But if someone saves him, it is a calamity!"

True politics is about the promotion of human happiness. There is no substitute to political process conducted in a democratic manner. Politics is the mechanism through which the gulf between unlimited wants and limited resources is bridged, and governance reconciles the means with ends. Political process mediates conflicts and resolves seemingly irreconcilable differences among various groups in society. It is the only means of peaceful progress in a free society.

Adopting an anti-political approach is counterproductive. Demonizing may help us find scapegoats but will not help in retrieving the situation, unless we identify the root causes and eliminate them.

Is too much democracy hurting India?

Indian democracy seems to return the same set of people back to into power, election after election. The only difference is that at any given instant some are in power and the rest, in opposition. In contrast, the Supreme Court and higher levels of judiciary or bureaucracy appear positively clean and effective. The success of China under single-party rule and the rapid economic progress of South Korea, Singapore or Malaysia under tightly restricted democratic setups are portrayed as evidence of the comparative advantage of authoritarian regimes over struggling democracies like India. Such thought processes generally tend towards questioning the very basis of democracy. This discussion has spread even to the academia and educated class of Indians.

In fact, India's failures had nothing to do with democracy, and everything to do with the perversion of democracy. *Our democracy under-performed because we really never understood and implemented the institutions and practices which constitute a true democracy.*

Instead, for far too long we blamed democracy itself for our follies and failures. Such contempt for democratic institutions is dangerous and short-sighted. *The real solution to the problem of democracy lies in deepening democracy.* In order to preserve and strengthen liberty and democracy, we should constantly seek to improve the democratic institutions and practices based on lessons of past experience. Jawaharlal Nehru did have a point when he said, "Democracy is good. I say this because other systems are worse."

The much-derided Indian politician actually works incredibly hard to reach out to people. The relative lack of ‘sophistication’ of the average grass-roots politician must not blind us to her/his vital contribution to sustain and strengthen liberty. It might come as a surprise to many but, our netas are no more corrupt than the other players entrusted with the task of running the Indian state. It is only that the very nature of democratic politics and shifts in political power make them highly visible. In fact, the constraints and compulsions of survival in a power-centered society actually provide our politicians with a legitimate excuse. Other sections of the governing class do not even have this fig leaf to cover themselves. For example, the civil servants, whose life-long tenure is guaranteed, enjoy safe and secure careers. And yet, their failure is as pronounced as that of politicians. Even the judiciary, despite its independence and impregnable constitutional protection making it invulnerable to political vagaries and public moods, can be fairly criticized for law’s delays and growing propensity to yield to temptations.

In a free society there is no substitute to politics. True politics is a noble endeavour. Politicians perform the two most complex tasks of bridging the gulf between limited resources and unlimited wants, and harmoniously reconciling the conflicting interests of fiercely contending groups in a plural society. The only antidote to bad politics is more and better politics. Improvement is possible only through serious political engagement and constructive dialogue. We are not looking for a bloody revolution or a military dictator as an answer to our problems. Intemperate criticism and treating politicians as cancer are unintended invitations to despotism.

At the same time, it is a self-evident truth that there is a wide-spread and growing frustration about our political process. Many honest and decent Indians led the freedom struggle and made politics their calling. In the early post-independence decades this leadership gave us stability and built democratic institutions. However, early policy failures, and systemic distortions unsuited to our society made politics increasingly hostile to genuinely public-spirited and principled citizens. Illegitimate money power, family connections, criminal links, caste clout and political fiefdoms have become the real controls over power, in most cases.

Given this climate, it is truly a miracle that India still has many gifted politicians who continue to retain their integrity and serve the nation with loyalty, ability and perseverance. The great challenge now is to bring the best elements into politics and restore the legitimacy of representation and ensure competent governance. We need to strengthen the sane elements in politics, not weaken them by painting all politicians with the same brush. It is absurd to believe that all politicians are scheming villains and those outside politics are angels. This ‘them vs. us’ approach will only weaken our politics and undermine democracy.

Here comes the best part yet: our society and polity have the strength and resilience to address this malaise. We, the Indian people are in no way inferior — we are as capable as any other people on this planet. Our governing classes are no worse than those in any other society. Our people are no more capricious than those of different cultures. We have the same sense of values and capabilities that made other nations great.

The real problem, for India, lies elsewhere.

Chapter 1: Review & Summary

- For a young country, India has done remarkably well in establishing and strengthening a democratic political structure. The key successes of Indian democracy are political liberty, individual choice and freedom of expression.
- However, Indian democracy suffers from serious defects. These defects go beyond individual failings and are systemic, structural deficiencies. Consequently, Indian democracy satisfies neither Indians nor democracy (as institutionalized ideals of liberty, rule of law and justice).
- Underperformance of our country, in general, and Indian democracy, in particular, is not due to any “inherent” shortcomings present in Indian society, culture or its people.
- Making politicians, politics and democracy scapegoats for all our problems might be the easiest way out but is also most reliable way to ruin our future. Just look at military dictatorships like Pakistan or Libya.
- The only way to improve democracy and politics is through more and better political democracy.

*Cartoon of a bespectacled
Masterji- with stick in hand*

Politics for the Politicians of Tomorrow

Masterji says ...

"Yaar, most desis are not mature, rational or balanced voters!"

The average Indian regularly worries about her/his own personal good while having genuine concern for societal good. Time and again, our elections and politics have shown that the voters consistently reject ideas and movements based on narrow, sectarian issues. Yes, there have been specific instances where divisive, emotional issues found support. But this support almost always proves to be short-lived. It is as if the pendulum of the voters' mood sometimes swings to extreme amplitudes but these deviations are internally dampened and the equilibrium of their political outlook is gradually restored.

It is easy to blame the large numbers of illiterate or poor for the failings of our democracy, especially for the perceived 'low quality' of our elected representatives or growing corruption and criminalization of politics. It appears that they do not vote 'rationally.'

But let me point out that voting for a politician is somewhat like eating *saag-paneer*. We can choose to eat from any one of those thousands of Punjabi *dhabas* dotting our country's roadsides. But their *saag-paneer* tastes the same everywhere. We may get a lot of choice but we actually get very little variety. Similarly, we can also choose from dozens of political parties, but all politicians seem to have the same flavour. Increasingly, most political parties and candidates appear to think, talk, walk, look and behave alike. Voting in favour of one over the other brings no serious long-term improvement to the lives of a majority of the public. No wonder the poor, uneducated voters ask for money, liquor or favours from the candidates in return for their vote. They are attempting to maximize their short term gain at least. It is a completely rational response to an irrational situation!

CHAPTER 2

Chapter 2

Indian Elections and Decline of Political Democracy

OPENING PUZZLER

*Cartoon of a Gulliver neta being tied down by several Lilliput netas.
Gulliver represents the big, national parties. Lilliputs are the regional, small parties and the chota netas.*

Currently, the BJP and the Congress are India's two main, centrist parties and the only two natural contenders for political power at the union level. In terms of their countrywide scope and presence, resources, membership and mass following in nearly all states in the country, these two parties are India's true national parties. Those dozens of other political parties appear positively tiny in comparison. But this feature hides a rather surprising fact: of the 28 states in India, these two 'national' parties actually face each other directly *in only three big states* – Gujarat, MP and Rajasthan! In every other major state in India (having more than 20 Lok Sabha seats) either of these is forced to play a second fiddle to region and state parties. Furthermore, in large and critical states like UP, Bihar, Maharashtra, West Bengal and Tamil Nadu, both national parties are dominated by regional or local political groupings.

Starting with the ticket distribution during elections right up to the selection of Ministers or even while formulating government policies for the entire nation, *chota netas* from small and regional parties seem to have a disproportionately high say. In coalition governments, even single MP-parties seem to be 'dictating terms' to these national parties.

How are small, even tiny, political formations able to 'control' the big, national parties in India?

1. India imports British elections

Thomas Babington, better known as Lord Macaulay, was a famous British Parliamentarian before becoming a member of the Supreme Council of British India during the reign of Governor-General Bentinck. Though Lord Macaulay was in that post for a mere four years (1833-1837), he is probably one of the most famous occupants of that chair. Because of two principal reasons: he gave us the monumental Indian Penal Code and brought the English language into our classrooms (the drawing rooms followed soon after). He once famously said, “Indians will be the last living Englishmen.”

Along with the Indian Penal Code and the English language, India also imported and adopted something else of far greater significance, from our (ex-) colonial masters. It is called the first-past-the-post or more commonly, the FPTP electoral system. We follow this method, or formula, for electing members of the Lok Sabha, state Assemblies and local governments. Before we proceed any further, it is important to understand how it works. So, get ready for a short tutorial on the nature and functioning of this electoral system.

Under the FPTP scheme, our country (or a state) is divided into several legislative constituencies, each of which is populated by its voting community. These voters decide on who should represent their constituency in the various legislative fora like the Lok Sabha and the state Vidhan Sabhas. But how do the Indian voters actually choose a candidate under this FPTP system? Via a uniquely human achievement called ‘elections.’ Typically, interested and eligible citizens compete against each other as ‘candidates’ in a constituency, during these elections. Most candidates prefer to stand in elections on behalf of groupings of like-minded citizens with specific political agenda; these groupings are called ‘political parties.’ The voters of that constituency then cast their votes in favour of a particular candidate (who could be representing a particular party) and the candidate who wins most number of votes in a constituency is considered ‘elected’. S/he then becomes the legislative representative of all citizens in that constituency – including those who did not vote in her/his favour. By now, you might have already recognized that the votes for all the remaining candidates do not count at all. This is quite unlike the Olympics - there are no prizes for runner-ups. In other words, the winner takes all.

The political manifestations of this characteristic feature of the FPTP system have taken enormously significant dimensions. The single act of deferring to British electoral tradition has shaped India’s democracy in a manner that even our founding fathers might not have anticipated.



The word *candidate* can be traced to its Latin root *candere*, meaning, "glowing, white or pure." In early Roman times, any person who wanted to be elected to a high office would wear a white wrap-around robe called 'toga' and stroll among the public making public appearances. This person was known as a *candidatus*, and the white toga apparently signified the person's integrity and purity. The candidates' toga was not of the ordinary type; they made it glow intensely white by rubbing chalk onto the fabric. Therefore, the candidate implied someone who was pure, above reproach and whose reputation 'glowed.' Interestingly, the wardrobes of modern day Indian politicians also seem to be dominated by dazzling whites!

2. Consequences of India's First-Past-the-Post Electoral System

a. Votes at any price; Victory at any cost

In the FPTP system, a constituency win is the only outcome that finally counts. In turn, the only determining factor in a constituency win is that the winning candidate secures at least one vote more than the nearest rival. (This is termed 'plurality' of votes. That is why textbooks frequently refer to our FPTP as a Plurality-Majority (PM) system or in simpler terms, the 'winner-takes-all' method). So, the candidates are prepared to adopt any means to secure that one additional vote over their nearest contenders. Political parties too, in their quest for "winnable candidates", are generally prepared to nominate anyone who can muster enough resources to win at any cost. This feature has a direct impact on feeding the cycles of political corruption and criminalization in India.

Growing Corruption

Reliable estimates indicate that the visible and largely legitimate expenditure for Lok Sabha election for serious contenders is of the order of Rs.1.5 crore. Most often though, much of the expenditure is 'invisible', incurred in the last three days before polls, and may exceed the visible campaign expenditure. In certain states like Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, the total expenditure incurred by a serious candidate may be of the order of Rs. 4 to 5 crores for Lok Sabha, and Rs 1 crore for State Assembly – most of it spent to buy votes, distribute liquor, hire hoodlums, and sometimes bribe officials to turn a blind eye at poll irregularities. The legal

ceiling of election expenditure which has been raised (substantially) in 2003 now stands at Rs. 10 lakhs for Assembly constituencies and Rs. 25 lakhs for Lok Sabha seats in most major states. In a five year cycle, the total expenditure for State Assemblies and Lok Sabha is estimated to be about Rs 7000-10,000 crores, assuming there are no mid-term polls. Under these circumstances, the elections are literally priced out of the reach of the honest politicians without substantial means, typically hailing from the middle classes, poor and disadvantaged sections. An unpublished empirical study commissioned by the Election Commission in 1999 Lok Sabha polls clearly established that 8 out of 9 candidates elected or runners up belonged to the category of 'super-rich' or 'very rich'.

Contesting elections is not just a costly business but also a very risky one— the winner takes all and the runners up are left with nothing but a laundry list of expenditures. Typically, for a new entrant into politics, there is a long gestation period required before s/he has a realistic chance of attaining legislative office. Also, a candidate must factor-in the higher cost of future elections. Finally, there is also he need to involve the vast bureaucracy in the web of corruption. It might surprise you, but over 90 percent under-the-table money is shared by the large number of employees and less than 10 percent reaches the pockets of the politician! Effectively, for every rupee of expenditure by the candidate, fifty to hundred rupees has to be recovered to keep the 'business' going. An election expenditure of one-rupee normally entails at least a five-fold return to the politician. To share five rupees with the political class, the rent-seeking bureaucracy has to recover about Rs.50. In order to extort Rs.50 from the public, there should be delay, inefficiency, harassment, humiliation and indignity worth Rs.500 heaped on the innocent citizens. For example, in a major State in India, it is estimated that about Rs.1000 crores (10 billion) has been spent by the major political parties in the general elections for Parliament and Legislative Assembly in 2004. This expenditure can be sustained only when the returns are of the order of at least Rs.5000 crores (50 billion), which in turn is translated as extortion of Rs.50, 000 crores (500 billion) from the public by the vast bureaucracy. More than anything else, the inconvenience, humiliation, the lost opportunities and the distortion of market forces are often worth ten times the actual corruption.

During the 2000 elections in the USA, the expenditure incurred by parties, candidates and political action committees for elections to the presidency, both houses of congress and gubernatorial offices was estimated to be of the order of \$ 3 billion. About half of this was allotted for issue advertising and half was the actual campaign expenditure. There was much criticism and debate on this high cost of electioneering in the U.S, later forcing the (rather weak) McCain-Feingold law. In fact, campaign finance reform remains a strong and recurrent theme in American politics even during the run up to the 2004 elections. However, two facts should be remembered while analyzing the U.S elections – all campaign financing is fully accounted for and disclosed; and all expenditure is legitimate and open, with over 80% being spent on television advertising.

In purchasing power terms, the Indian election expenses are probably five times those in the U.S, making our per capita expenditure higher than in the U.S! And more importantly, almost all this campaign finance is undisclosed and illegal, and worse still, most of it is spent illegitimately – for buying votes, hiring hoodlums and bribing election officials. Former Prime Minister Vajpayee had gone on record several times stating that most elected politicians start their careers

with a big lie – by signing an affidavit that their election expenditure has not exceeded the ceiling prescribed by law, while the actual expenditure is often ten to twenty times the ceiling limit. Excessive, illegal and illegitimate expenditure in elections is the root cause of corruption in India, siphoning off money at every level of our administrative setup. In addition, this ubiquitous corruption alters the nature of political and administrative power, and undermines market forces, efficiency and trust on a much larger scale, retarding economic growth and distorting democracy.

Growing Criminalization of Public Life

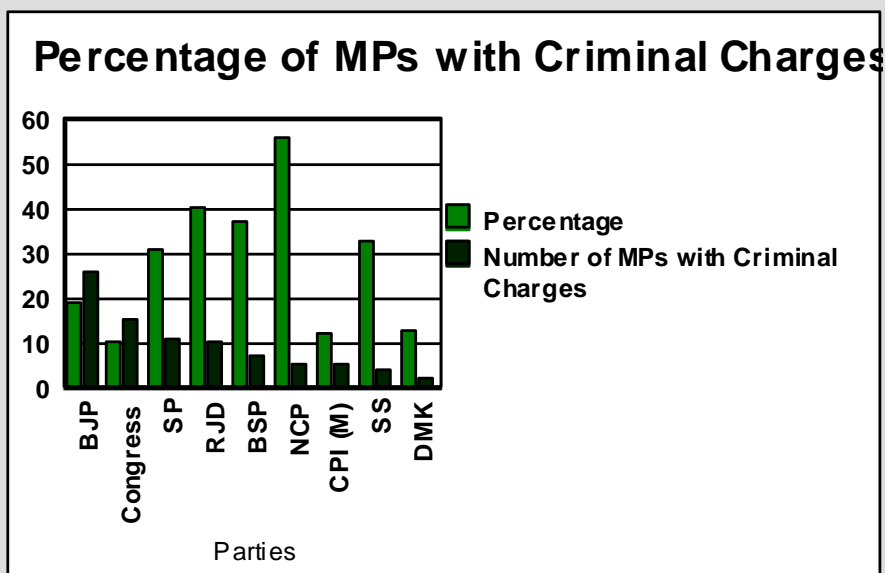
In the recent years, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and the Intelligence Bureau (IB) had officially warned that there has been a rapid spread and growth of criminal gangs, armed senas, drug mafias, smuggling gangs, drug peddlers and economic lobbies in the country which have, over the years, developed an extensive network of contacts with bureaucrats/government functionaries at the local levels, politicians, media persons, and strategically located individuals in the non-State sector. In certain states like Bihar, Haryana and UP, criminal gangs enjoy the patronage of local level politicians, cutting across party lines, and the protection of Government functionaries. Some political leaders become the leaders of these gangs/armed senas and, over the years, get themselves elected to local bodies, State Assemblies and the even national Parliament. Such elements have acquired considerable political clout seriously jeopardizing the smooth functioning of the administration and the safety of life and property of the common man, causing a sense of despair and alienation among the people. The typically high cost of contesting elections has thrown the politician into the lap of these criminal elements.

It is therefore understandable if electoral candidates turn to criminals for help during elections. But why do parties invite these very criminals to directly become their electoral candidates? Here is the reason why: in a constituency-based first-past-the-post (FPTP) system of election, the local caste clout, and ability to bribe or browbeat voters, and resort to polling irregularities like bogus voting improve the chances of a victory. The criminal elements also take advantage of social cleavages and position themselves as protectors of their caste or community, thus provoking primordial loyalties. With such caste clout, musclemen at their disposal and money accumulated through crime, they have natural advantages in a local election. This crime-caste-communal nexus has proved to be one of the most successful combinations for controlling Indian elections and voting behaviour. The Ranga/Nehru clans of Vijayawada and the Chota Shakeel/Chota Rajan gangs of Mumbai are just two examples (*are more details on who Ranga/Nehru necessary?*). That is why sometimes even mafia dons contesting from a prison win elections with ease. No wonder, any party would love to have such ‘winnable’ candidates on their side! Under the present circumstances, broad based public support does not count if a party’s candidate cannot win in a constituency. Since the general public opinion, even across the entire country, does not really matter, the parties are not penalized (electorally speaking) for putting up corrupt or criminal elements as candidates.

Law Breakers as Law Makers

The 'taint' stains all parties

In the 14th Lok Sabha (elected in April-May 2004), 100 of the 542 members face criminal charges. The seriousness of their chargesheets range from minor misdemeanours like "disturbing the peace" to "rioting" to serious offences like murder, rape and dacoity. These 100 MPs belong to all major parties and roughly one-third of them can be described as those involved in atrocious crimes. A dozen have murder charges against them, another 10 have been charged with attempted murder. Around 11 of them in general public perception are even known as "dons". The following table lists the number of MPs in the 14th Lok Sabha who are currently facing criminal charges, based on party and political grouping.



Source: Graphics from *Sunita's 20-pager*

The Election Commission has revealed as early as in 1997 that over 700 of the 4072 legislators in States and more than 40 members of Lok Sabha had criminal records against them.

*Cartoon of a bespectacled
Masterji with stick in hand*

Politics for the Politicians of Tomorrow

Masterji says ...

Psephological Pscripts and Psecrets

Predicting election results has become a fascinatingly hazardous business, even for the experts. The latest round of general elections in April-May 2004 yielded outcomes that none of the opinion polls, exit polls or even the internal party polls had predicted. At the end of all this drama and *hungama*, there is a very interesting and significant lesson that I want you all to keep in mind.

If the elections are held under 'ordinary' circumstances, there is no more a thing called 'national verdict.' What we have is simply a numerical addition of state and regional verdicts. On an India-wide scale, the voters generally do not favour one particular party over the other; their choice differs sharply with the state and the region. However, if there is any one single trend, it is that the voters are routinely disappointed and dissatisfied with their governments. They are thirsting for change. In spite of the claims by the party bosses to the contrary, our voters do not vote *for* political parties but generally vote *against* sitting governments. In the 2004 general elections, three out of every five sitting MPs, or nearly 60% of the incumbent Lok Sabha members, were told to take "time-off" by their constituents. Another 6% did not even get re-nominated by their parties.

So, if you have to bet on Indian elections, the safest one would be that a sitting state government will lose.

Why is it so? Because, Indian elections have simply become a mandate for change. The voters are changing their governments in a desperate search to find one that matches their expectations and brings some improvement to their lives. Almost every electoral verdict in the past 15-20 years, for both the state and the central governments, is a reflection of this singular fact.

b. Old wine in an old bottle: the politics of rigidity

The present electoral system favours entrenched parties and individuals, allowing very little scope for reform. Since the only way of getting legislative presence is to obtain the largest number of votes in the constituencies, the FPTP system favours dominant parties or those with concentrated presence in certain pockets. Entrenched parties and individuals therefore acquire enormous power. While this is not unexpected or uncommon in democracies, the parties in India are largely autocratic in their functioning, which results in the frequent misuse of their dominant position. New political groups and individuals cannot make an impact unless they muster enough money and muscle power.

Political parties have become modern-day fiefdoms; but there is no space outside party politics.

As of 2004, the contenders in nearly half of our parliamentary and assembly constituencies are decided solely on the basis of family connections. Being a relative to powerful political leaders has become a key eligibility criterion during the process of distributing tickets among aspirants. These VIP category leaders themselves show no accountability to their rank-and-file party members and workers. 'Public support' for *bada netas* is largely orchestrated by political mercenaries and is often reduced to a vulgar display of money and mob power. Given that positive personal qualities like competence, commitment and integrity play little role in helping an aspirant obtain party ticket, it is not surprising that the quality of candidates who actually manage to secure the party nominations, is rather poor. The legislators who are elected from this (cess)pool of candidates, consequently, are often much below the public expectations. In this manner, nearly every political party denies truly deserving candidates their legitimate space in electoral politics.

What if these committed, capable and deserving candidates chose to work out side of these feudalistic parties? What if they decide to contest elections as independents of these party politics? Over the past 50 years one key development in our electoral politics is the shrinking space for political participation outside the party structure. Even as parties have become unaccountable oligarchies in their exercise of power, their importance in electoral politics has grown. Individual candidates, however capable they might be, stand very little chance should they decide to take on the might of major parties.

However, this domination of political parties at the expense of individual candidates and groups has been witnessed throughout the democratic world. Since independence, the number of independent, non-party candidates elected has been shrinking. Even more significantly, the percentage of independents who gained a significant proportion of vote has declined dramatically, as seen from the candidates who lost their deposits (Figure-). Independents, reformist groups or new political formations (even those with credibility and broad support across a wide geographic area), cannot pose any effective challenge to the arbitrariness of parties. They thus get marginalized or are forced to join the dominant parties whose functioning leaves much to be desired. This only served to reinforce the primacy of established parties in political action and electoral participation. Though party activity is no longer seen as worthy of

respect and awe as in days of freedom struggle, it is increasingly difficult for individuals to break into the system outside parties. The choice available to voters therefore remains limited and very unsatisfactory.

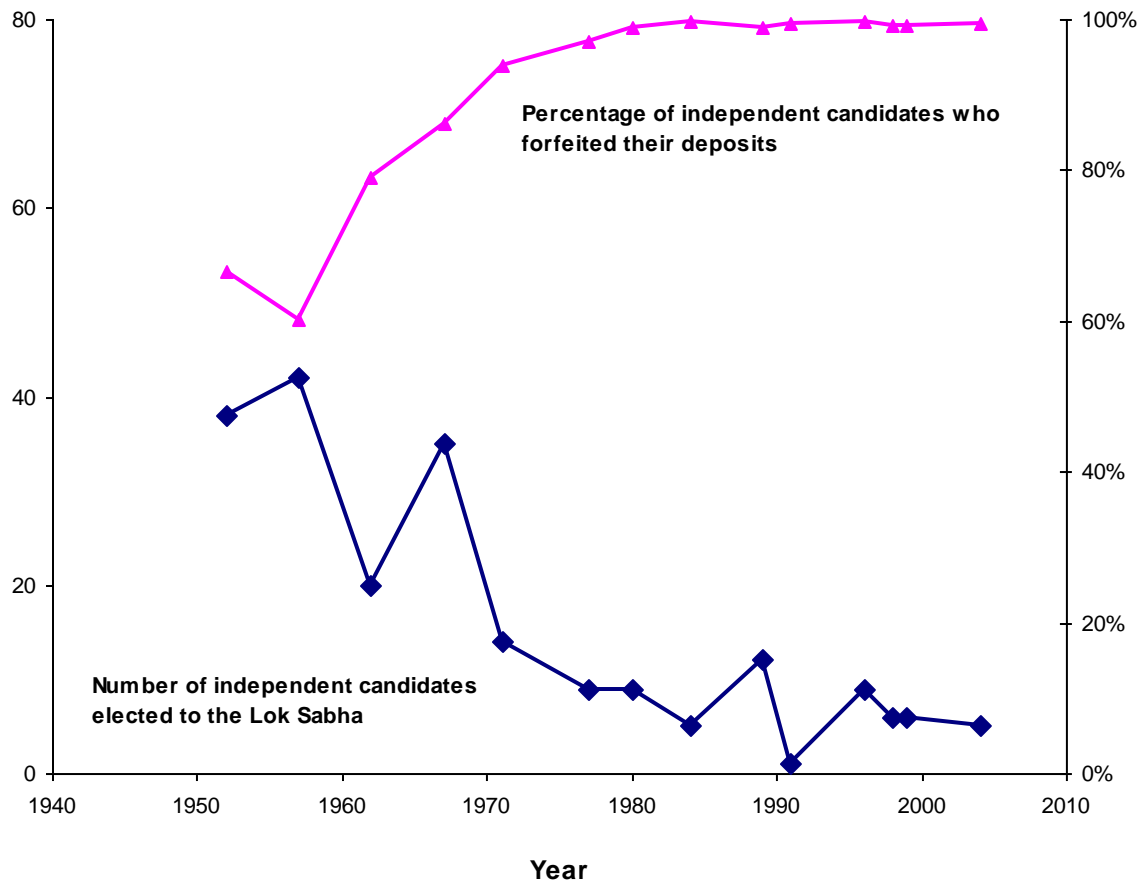


Chart 1: No space for aspirants outside political parties. The number of successful independent candidates has visibly diminished over successive election cycles. Correspondingly, the number of independents who could not even recover their deposits has reached the peak.

Source: *Lok Satta* Data unit

Talented, competent Indians kept out of active politics- Pedigrees count more than degrees!

The flawed electoral process when combined with the ‘close-door’ functioning of political parties ensures that public-spirited citizens find it impossible to get elected or survive politics by adhering to law and propriety. They thus choose to stay away from politics, leaving the field open to those who are already entrenched (heredity and family connections), or have the money and muscle power, personal contacts, high visibility (film stars & sport stars) etc. **In the run-up**

to the 2004 Indian general elections, a leading weekly current affairs magazine *India Today* reported that ‘every sixth candidate in the electoral fray is a product of hereditary politics.’ Aspirants from over 100 families were contesting elections in nearly 250 constituencies. Here, we have to bear in mind that there is nothing inherently wrong in an otherwise talented, capable and competent candidate having familial connections to party leaders. But, in most cases, family and dynastic relationships seem to be the only qualifications for obtaining a party ticket!

If we examine the new entrants into politics over the past three or four decades in the country, very few with intellect, integrity, commitment to public service and passion for improvement of the situation could enter the political arena and survive for long. Almost every new entrant has chosen politics exactly for the wrong reasons. A careful analysis shows that heredity and family connections are the commonest cause for entry into politics. This is closely followed by those who have large inherited or acquired wealth and have decided that investment in politics is good business.

In recent years, many local muscle men, whose services were earlier sought for extortion or vote-gathering, are now directly entering the fray and gaining political legitimacy. A few persons have entered politics out of personal loyalty to, and close contacts with, those in high public office. Film stars, whose faces are widely known and admired, have predictably started converting their popularity and image into elective office. Occasionally, accidents of fate are pitchforking certain individuals into elective public office. If we exclude these methods of heredity, money power, muscle power, personal contacts, stardom, and accidents of fate, there will not be even a handful of persons in this vast country of ours, who have entered politics with passion for public good and survived for any length of time over the past four decades.

Democracy is the only system, which demands constant selection, nurturing and development of capable leadership. If the best men and women society can offer are repelled by the political process and politics acquires a negative connotation, the result is collapse of ethics in public life, and with it public confidence in governance. With the most competent and qualified persons eschewing politics, paralysis of governance is the inevitable consequence.

The Case of the Missing Manmohans

South Delhi Parliamentary Constituency is reputed to have the most educated, informed and reform-minded middle-class voters in the entire country. The 'darling of the middle classes' and the famous finance minister who fathered modern Indian economy, Dr. Manmohan Singh, contested from this constituency in the 1999 Lok Sabha elections. If there was any constituency 'tailor-made' for Dr. Singh, it was South Delhi.

In fact, he lost.

Why do popular and good candidates lose in Indian elections? Since victory means winning most seats in constituencies, micro management of elections becomes critical. And since victory in a constituency is defined as winning the marginal vote which puts the candidate ahead of rivals, those who can get that marginal vote – by any means, become candidates.

If there is a feeling of 'sweep' in favour of a party before the polls, it is mostly the faithful batch of 'loyalists' of the top leader who get the nod. On the other hand, if the election is perceived to be 'tight', along with loyalty, money-power (to buy vote, or at least neutralize the opponent), muscle-power (to browbeat opponents and get false votes cast), caste (depending on local demography) or pedigree become all-important. Once candidates are nominated and elected under this process, the future is sealed. That is why even widely popular and respected individuals like Abdul Kalam and Manmohan Singh are 'unelectable' even if they do manage to secure nominations to the lower houses. Their country-wide popularity really does not count when it comes down to voting at a constituency level.

Even if circumstances provide such decent persons with an opportunity to head the government, her/his room for manoeuvre is very limited. Reforming the ticket-distribution process or selection of her/his cabinet is generally difficult to control. After all, the party legislators have invested a lot in winning from their constituencies and they demand their pound of flesh!

c. Electoral verdicts distort popular choices

Notwithstanding our claims to be a modern democracy, our electoral verdicts routinely violate the basic principle of having elected representatives and governments who carry with them at least an electoral majority. A majority of our legislators are routinely elected without their winning a majority of the votes in their constituency. This is because, to be elected, a candidate simply needs a minimum of one more vote than her/his challenger. Similarly, the governments formed in the states, and even at the union level, do not have the majority support of our voters.

“The first principle of democracy is representation in proportion to numbers.”

John Stuart Mill

Mill (1806-1873) was a world-renowned philosopher, economist, civil servant with East India Company and a Liberal MP in British Parliament.

Wasted Votes and Low Turnouts

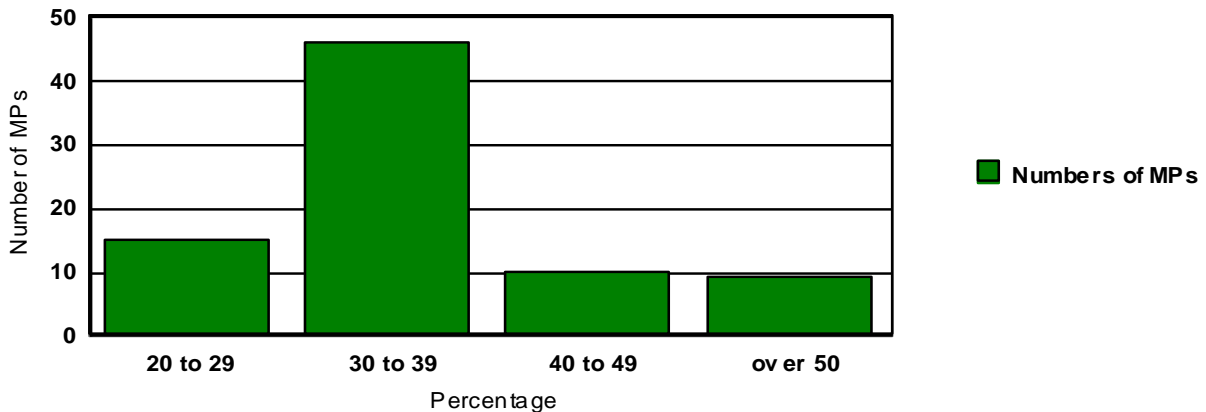
In the FPTP system, the votes secured by the losing candidates are not counted – even if they are only one less than those obtained by the winning candidate! These discarded votes are termed ‘wasted votes’ (different from invalid votes, mind you). Wasted votes are legitimate but still do not get a representation in the legislatures. In other words, the voters who cast for the first, second or third runners-up do not find representation.

This is one of the main reasons for the very low voter turnout during elections under the FPTP rule. Many educated and informed voters feel that even if they vote for decent, honest and capable candidates in the elections, their votes are ‘wasted’ and do not influence the electoral verdicts. Those candidates who manage to make full use of money and muscle power and sectarian cleavages in the society continue to win and represent the entire constituency.

Contrary to what the TV advertisements say right before each round of elections, every vote really does not count.

In Uttar Pradesh (UP), which had the largest number of eligible voters for 2004 Lok Sabha, the winning candidates polled only between 20-39% of the total votes cast for 60 constituencies. The National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution (NCRWC) showed that in the 13th Lok Sabha elections, only 40% of the members were elected with the support of a majority of their voters (i.e. over 50% of the votes polled). In the 12th Lok Sabha, one-third of the members were elected with a majority of votes polled while this number was 27.44% in the 11th Lok Sabha elections. Uttar Pradesh in 1996 had only 11% of the MLAs elected with majority support!

Percentage of Votes Won by Candidates in U.P. LS Elections 2004



The voting patterns across the country in the elections for 2004 indicated that both the Congress-led and National Democratic alliances secured around 35% of the total votes cast across the country. Actually, there seemed to be less than 1% difference in the vote shares of each side. Even though the Congress- and BJP-led alliances have secured nearly equal number of votes across the country, the Congress + Allies ended up with 216 seats (or 40% seat share) while the BJP + Allies managed only 186 (or 34% of the 539 seats announced). The Congress alliance, which claimed the peoples' mandate and formed the next Indian government, had a positive vote swing of only around 0.1%! And this was equally true in 1999, except that NDA was the beneficiary then. The FPTP system under some circumstances could lead to the formation of even more skewed and un-representative legislatures. For example, let us suppose that a party manages to secure 51% of the votes cast, in every parliamentary constituency of the country. In that case, it is guaranteed to end up winning 100% of the seats in the Lok Sabha. The remaining 49% of the votes cast in the country simply end up getting deleted (this is the age of the electronic ballot, mind you).

The Gulliver Syndrome

The notion of nation in politics

Indian politics since 1996 has seen the rise of coalition culture at the union level. This is a welcome development, as only a coalition will reflect India's political diversity. But this need for electoral alliances and coalition governments is making the national parties increasingly vulnerable. In our winner-takes-all FPTP system, only a high threshold of vote share for a party ensures a reasonable chance of victory. Usually this threshold level is 35-40 percent. Significant, but scattered support base over a whole state or region, of say under 25 percent, does not pay electoral dividends. In such a situation even the voters who are otherwise inclined to prefer a party feel that their votes to a losing party are "wasted". They switch loyalties, and vote for a "winnable" party or candidate. (A large chunk of the voters are put-off by this entire process and completely lose interest in voting)

Today, large centrist national parties, like the Congress and BJP may have a sizeable voting share in several states, but that does not get translated into legislative representation. Therefore, they are forced to forge pre-election alliances with regional parties or locally influential political groups/individuals to enhance their prospects of victory. But this has a downside.

Once a national party forms an electoral alliance with a regional party, its growth in that state is stunted. First, its electoral presence is limited to constituencies in which it contests. Second, it cannot compete with its alliance partner. This leads to a decrease in the national party's appeal and its vote share, over time. Our FPTP system accentuates this trend, and encourages growth of regional parties (the political Lilliputians) at the expense of the national parties (the unfortunate Gullivers). Very often, the electoral, political and even the governance agenda at the national level seem to be 'dictated' by these relatively tiny political groups and individuals. At times, even single-member political parties seem to be deciding upon who becomes a cabinet minister for the entire country!

It is true that regional parties have generally acted with restraint and broader national outlook. But inter-state disputes, regional chauvinism, sons-of-the-soil policies and other contentious issues are being aggravated by the present system. The FPTP system is leading to an almost irreversible regionalization of our polity. Already, we see the consequences in the fact that there is no longer a national verdict in India even in Lok Sabha elections. It is often an aggregate of state verdicts, dependent on local factors and the popularity or otherwise of the state governments and regional or local political groupings. Slowly, with such political fragmentation, the idea of a united and peaceful India itself is in danger.

Syed Shahabuddin, a former MP, observed (Table No.1) that on an average the ruling party or combine needs only about 35% of the votes polled. This in itself forms only around 21% of the total electorate because of the low turnouts during elections. **In other words, the winning party takes power on a minority of the votes cast. Our governments do not enjoy popular support and this contradicts the very basis of representational principle democracy.**

As seen from Table 1, every single government since independence has been based on a minority of votes cast. This is true not only of parties that do not have overall majorities in the legislatures but also those governments that had an 'absolute party majority' in parliament. It turns out that absolute majority is only in terms of the number of legislative seats - not public support!

Election Year	% of Votes Polled	Name of the Largest Party	Seats obtained /Total No. of Seats	% Votes obtained by largest Party
1952	61.7	Congress	357/489	45.0
1957	63.7	Congress	359/494	47.8
1962	55.4	Congress	358/494	44.7
1967	61.3	Congress	279/520	40.7
1971	55.3	Congress	352/519	43.7
1977	60.5	Janata Party	295/542	41.4
1980	56.9	Congress	353/527	42.7
1984	64.1	Congress	415/543	48.1
1989	62.2	Congress	197/543	39.5
1991	56.7	Congress	232/543	36.5
1996	57.9	BJP	169/543	20.3
1998	62.0	BJP	182/543	25.6
1999	60.0	BJP	182/543	23.8
2004	58.1	Congress	145/543	26.5

Table 1: Percentage of votes and seats obtained by the largest party in Lok Sabha

Source (except for 2004 data s): Syed Shahabuddin: 'Representational Legitimacy of the Existing System' – paper presented at the National Seminar on Electoral Reforms, Kolkata, 17-18 Nov 2000.

Source for data on 2004 elections:

d. Social diversity goes unrepresented

One of the important achievements of Indian politics is that there has been some widening of representation over the years: in the early years, members from upper castes and landed gentry dominated the legislatures. Many members were educated lawyers and professionals who were involved in the freedom struggle. The scheduled castes (SCs) and scheduled tribes (STs) had fair representation due to reservation of constituencies for them. But the other poorer segments, intermediate castes and other backward castes did not have adequate representation. However, over the years, the representational base of our legislatures has certainly widened. For instance, the percentage of members of Lok Sabha belonging to Backward Classes (BCs) has gone up from 10.2 in 1952 to 23.3 in 1996. Correspondingly, the percentage of farmers in Lok Sabha went up from 22.5 in 1952 to 51.8 in 1996.

But the FPTP often over-represents the (local) majority communities while scattered minorities do not find adequate representation, thus marginalizing them. This is because while their vote may be important in many constituencies, they are not concentrated in large enough numbers to get parties to nominate candidates from their group. As particular sections have perpetuated their hold on political and administrative levers, representation of scattered subgroups became an emotive issue. Not surprisingly, today, every segment of population feels victimized and discriminated against.

One of the most prominent among these groups has been the Indian women. For all the talk about women's empowerment in India, the numbers of women in our legislatures is extremely low. The widening representational base and election of members from the hitherto marginalized sections has not translated into greater women's participation or representation. And they are not even a 'scattered minority'! The representation of women in Lok Sabha has been more or less stagnant over the years (Chart []). This under-representation of women has given rise to the demand in the 90's for enacting laws promoting women's participation and election to legislatures.

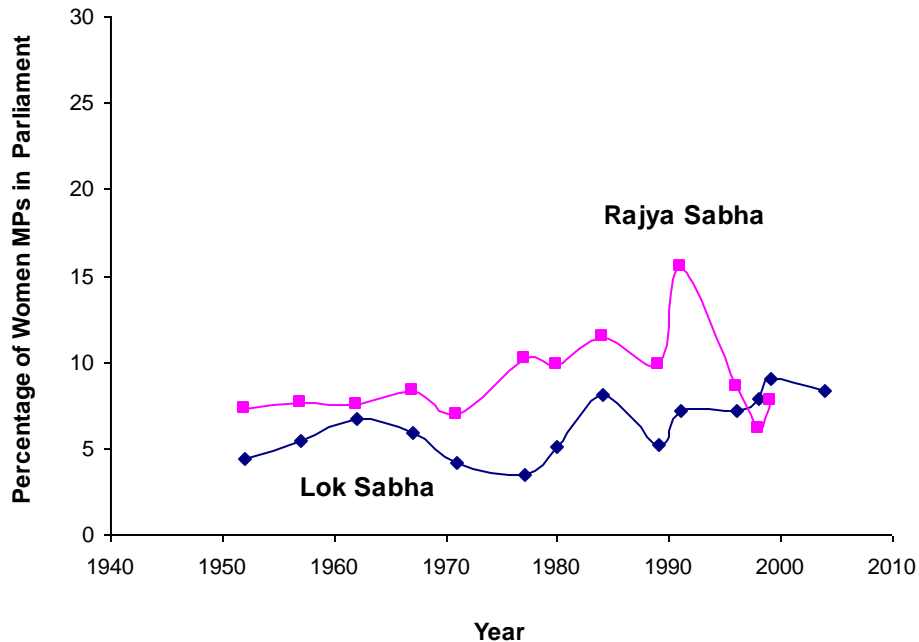


Chart 3: Women's representation in Indian Parliament has remained extremely low over the election cycles between 1952 and 2004. During this time frame, the average number of women in the Lok Sabha has been around 6.3%. In the Rajya Sabha, it is marginally better, at 9%.

Data Source: CSDS Data unit and Election Commission of India

The issue of adequate representation of caste minorities has been a serious issue even before independence. The most famous debate on the issue of caste-minority representation was the one between Gandhi and Ambedkar, preceding the Poona Pact of 1932. By the mid 1930's, both leaders considered the uplift of Dalits (then called Harijans) to be of primary importance. They strongly disagreed, however, in their strategies to accomplish this aim. Ambedkar argued for a separate electorate for Dalit voters and candidates alongside those who were advocating separate electorates for Muslims and Sikhs. Gandhi, on the other hand, felt that separate electorates would create deep divisions the country. Instead, he felt that a regular FPTP with joint electorate system would give dalits political power as orthodox Hindus would have to approach them for votes. As a compromise, both leaders accepted joint electorates and agreed on setting aside a

number of reserved constituencies for depressed classes. Independent India too had adopted the same formula. Both Gandhiji and Ambedkar were attempting to find solutions *within* the FPTP model of elections.

But, a 1996 study⁺ showed that the SC/ST MLAs of various Indian legislatures themselves think of the current situation as inadequate. The MLAs across India when surveyed, gave a clear response that, in their opinion, caste-based constituency reservations did not help the concerned communities to overcome their backwardness or socially disadvantageous position. Surprisingly, this response came not only from the overall sample of MLA's but from a majority of the sub-set of SC/ST MLAs. A study* of scheduled caste winners of non-reserved seats in the 1950's to the 1970's made it clear that dalits hardly ever win a seat without governmental protections. Even today, SC and ST groups stand little chance of winning seats outside of the constituencies reserved for them. In addition, other groups living in SC/ST reserved constituencies are limited to having SC/ST representatives only, so their choices too are compromised. In a number of cases, powerful castes overcome this obstacle through undemocratic means, and still retain power by propping up non-serious SC/ST candidates.

Added to this, we also have the pressing problem of inadequate representation of minority religious communities such as Muslims and Christians.

The failures of the FPTP system in giving due representation to minority and disadvantaged communities has given rise to the demands for extending the reservations all such aggrieved sections of the society.

3. Believe it or not, politicians are victims too!

The nine interlocking vicious cycles

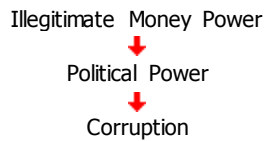
In a well-functioning democracy, the political process ought to find answers to governance problems. But our political process, itself, has become a problem. This is because our current political-electoral process is locked into a vicious cycle, and has become a part of the problem. And the universally-derided politician, who remains trapped at the centre, finds her/himself unable to break free. In that sense, the politicians are victims of the electoral and power process as much as the common citizens themselves! There are nine factors complicating the political process, trapping the politicians in their complex webs and perpetuating status quo:

⁺ Chopra, Vir. *Marginal Players in Marginal Assemblies: The Indian MLA*. Orient Longman Limited, New Delhi. 1996.

* Singh Bains, Ravinder. *Reservations and Anti-Reservations*. BR Publishers, New Delhi. 1994

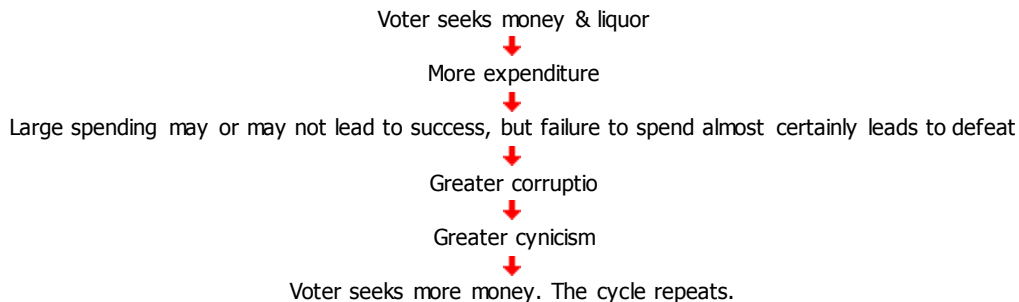
1. Endless Demand for Illegitimate Funds

Election expenditures are largely unaccounted for. Candidates always end up spending more than the permissible limits. For instance, the expenditure limit for assembly elections in most states is Rs. 10, 00, 000. In reality it usually exceeds 10 to 15 times the ceiling prescribed. Most of the expenditure is incurred to buy votes, bribe officials and hire musclemen. To recover this amount, parties resort to large scale corruption once in power. This can be in the form of control of transfers and postings, siphoning of funds meant for public expenditure, bribes for handing out contracts and procurements etc.



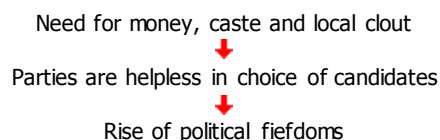
2. Large-scale Vote Buying

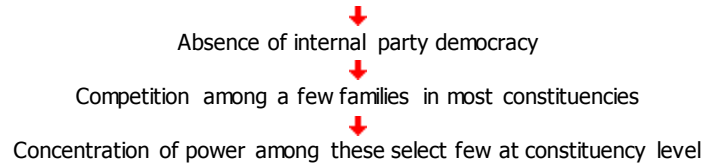
With money power, polling irregularities and corruption taking hold of the system, election results have ceased to make a difference. Repeated disappointments have made people cynical about the system. They have realized that no matter who wins, they don't stand to gain anything. So, they readily accept money, liquor and other types of gifts from parties. This has increased illegitimate expenditure and hence corruption.



3. Rise of Political Fiefdoms

Entry into electoral politics is restricted, as only those who have money power, caste clout, bureaucratic and political contacts at their disposal, can effectively exploit the current electoral system. This has given rise to political fiefdoms. Often, the choice is between two or three "families" who can muster these forces. Parties are compelled to choose one of these individuals or families to enhance their chances of electoral success. With party democracy virtually absent, honest party workers (without any clout) remain sidelined.





4. Vote Delinked from Public Good

In the current system of governance, even if the vote is wisely used by the people, public good cannot be promoted. The citizen has very little say in the decision-making process while the administrative machinery is incapable of delivering public services of high quality or low cost. To make up for it, parties resort to populist politics so that they do not lose out on votes during elections. The voter, already disenchanted with the system, takes whatever comes his way- in the form of money, liquor etc.

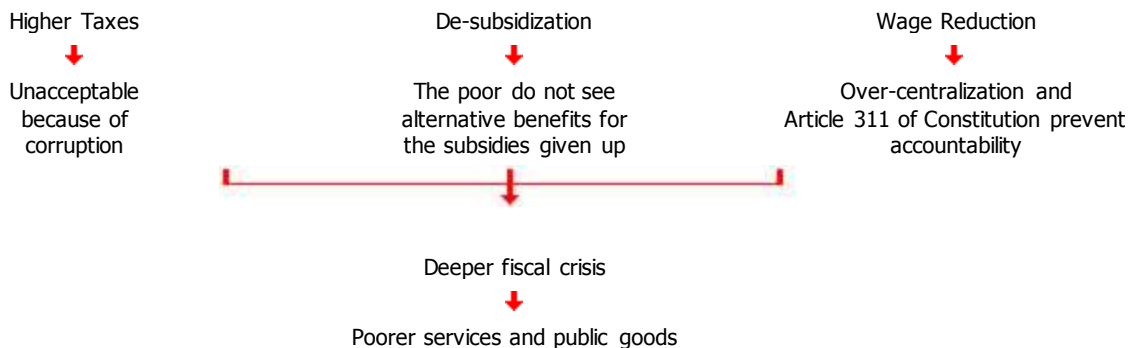


5. Taxes Delinked from Services

The total tax revenues of the union and states are only 15 percent of GDP. The only way to restore this fiscal imbalance is through higher taxes, reduction of subsidies or wage reduction.

1. Higher taxation is resisted given the amount of corruption prevalent in the system and the poor quality of services.
2. De-subsidization has political implications as it alienates the poor, who constitute a major vote-bank for the parties. Even if the subsidies were to be withdrawn, the poor do not benefit from the money saved.
3. A vast over-staffed bureaucracy under centralized control continues to remain unaccountable. And wage reduction is not permissible by a constitutional law!

In face of mounting fiscal deficit, public services take a beating while the poor continue to remain poor and backward.





Poverty and backwardness continues to grow

6. Political Survival & Honesty Incompatible

Legislators spend a lot of money or help from criminal elements to get elected. To cover this expenditure and satisfy the demands of the criminal elements, legislators are forced enter the web of corrupt and improper practices. Honesty takes a backseat.

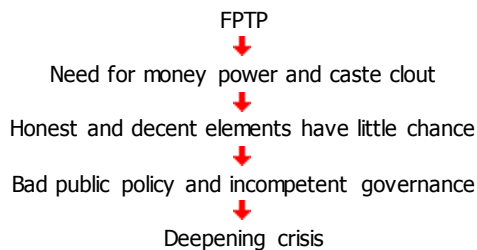
7. Worsening Social Divide

The current FPTP system often over-represents the majority while scattered minorities do not find adequate representation. They thus become marginalized. This encourages strategic voting and vote bank politics as parties try to woo fundamentalists in these excluded groups, drowning voices of reason and modernity. The fundamentalists through their provocative comments and acts incite communal passions to mobilize their community on the basis of caste and religion. This in turn creates polarization and disturbs communal harmony.



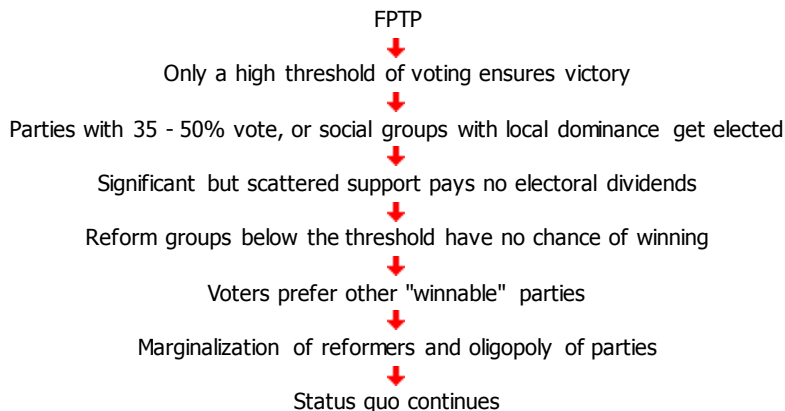
8. Competence and Integrity Excluded from Politics

As money power, caste clout and muscle power have almost become prerequisites for success in constituency elections, honest and decent elements have little chance of getting elected through honorable means. This makes elections a happy hunting ground for candidates who can muster the above. And, when they get elected, it more often than not results in bad public policy and incompetent governance.



9. National Parties Marginalized

In the FPTP system, only a high threshold of votes for a party ensures victory, while scattered support to a party or individuals does not pay electoral dividends (even though it may be a significant percentage). Therefore voters prefer other "winnable" parties and candidates, to try and make their vote count. National parties and reforms are thus getting marginalized increasingly in many parts of India. While the status quo continues to be maintained as the political structure becomes regionalized.



Ideally, our electoral system should have permitted the deepening of our democracy, enabling it to fulfill the political aspirations and administrative requirements of a diverse representative democracy such as India. Instead, the FPTP method of conducting elections has permitted the birth, growth and entrenchment of severe distortions in our electoral process and verdicts.

Unfortunately, our familiarity with British institutions and practices seems to make us accept FPTP as the only 'natural' electoral system. But only ten countries in the entire world – Bangladesh, Canada, India, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, UK, US, Zambia – have been following the FPTP system in single-member constituencies, over a considerable time period. Even Australia and New Zealand, though former British colonies, have different systems. In fact, 43 functioning democracies including countries like Germany and France have systems of election other than FPTP. Even now, India is stuck with FPTP despite the fact that UK itself is gradually shunning it. European Parliament members in UK and regional parliaments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are all chosen through non-FPTP methods. Looks like Lord Macaulay's prophesy that Indians would be the last surviving Englishmen has come true in a strange way!

Chapter 2: Review & Summary

- Indian elections follow the first-past-the-post or FPTP system in single-member constituencies. This is the oldest and simplest form of electing representatives.
- In FPTP, we have people voting for candidates in specified constituencies. A candidate who wins the highest number of votes cast becomes the representative for the entire constituency. All other votes in favour of other candidates are discarded. This is called Plurality-Majority (PM) or in simpler terms, the 'winner-takes-all' method.
- In order to win in a constituency, all that matters to a candidate is securing at least one extra vote than the nearest rival.
- The previous feature of the FPTP has caused severe distortions in Indian democracy: growing corruption and criminalization of politics, undemocratic functioning of political parties, exclusion of women and scattered communities or groups of like-minded people, exclusion of competent and honest people from electoral politics and growing disparity between the people's choices and electoral verdicts.
- FPTP system works reasonably well when there is an effective two party system and parties function democratically. But, given our multi-party system, federal structure and undemocratic functioning of parties, FPTP has only exacerbated many of the problems and divisions in Indian society.
- The politicians too are victims of this system. Even reform-minded and honest politicians are finding it nearly impossible to break the vicious cycles perpetrated by the FPTP system.
- India had adopted the FPTP system from the British, purely for traditional reasons. There is nothing 'sacrosanct' about this method of electing our legislators. In fact, a vast majority of the functioning democracies in the world consider our version of the FPTP to an outdated and unsatisfactory system.

*Cartoon of a bespectacled
Masterji with stick in hand*

Politics for the Politicians of Tomorrow
Masterji says ...

Focus on institutions, not individuals

In politics, individual politicians often seem to dominate the stage. But, individuals and their perceived shortcomings are only the symptoms and focusing too much on them diverts our attention from more substantial issues. Wide spread democratic failings, as they are happening in Indian politics, are pointers to institutional defects. Where the real future of our country is concerned, institutions matter much more than individuals.

The biggest failure of Indian democracy has been in building institutions which can replicate best practices and creating self-regulatory mechanisms that can consistently deliver results. Added to this, improving our politics, until now, has mostly implied altering the individual players within the existing political system. When the system itself is close to collapse, merely changing the players without changing the rules of the game really does not yield the desired results.

That is why any meaningful and well-formulated political reform measure must have institution-building as its heart. The challenge is to create or enhance fair, effective and robust institutions of democracy. Only when this objective is achieved, does it make sense to focus on the behaviour of individuals players of the political game.

So, focus on systemic issues too, not just the symptomatic ones.

CHAPTER 3

Chapter 3

A representative and rational electoral system for India

OPENING PUZZLER

2004 AP state elections as a pie diagram – vote share and seat share for ruling alliance vs. opposing coalition.

Or

A cartoon with two panels: first panel shows two politicians of equal size. Caption reads 'voters support both parties equally'. Second panel shows one politician as a giant and the other, a midget. Caption reads, 'but only one party gets most of the seats'. (This idea needs to be polished).

During the 2004 general elections in Andhra Pradesh, the ruling alliance secured around 40% of the total votes cast while the opposing alliance got around 48%. However, the ruling coalition could manage only 17% of the seats (49 out of 294) in the Legislative Assembly while the opposition ended up winning 77% (226 out of 294)! Even a moderate difference in the vote shares of the two coalitions got translated into a stunningly huge difference in the seat share between the two sides. It was not for the first time that such an event occurred. Indeed, this phenomenon has been observed several times, across many other states in the country and affecting almost every party in its wake.

It is strange that the composition of Indian legislatures need not remain 'faithful' to the actual choice of the voters during elections! Clearly, this arrangement does not look right.

How to correct this distortion of the popular mandate? Is there a way to make the relationship between popular support and legislative strength (i.e. vote share vs. seat share) more rational?

1. Need to have the right electoral system

Essentially, an electoral system is a “recipe” that converts the votes cast in an election into seats won by candidates and parties. The nature of the electoral system effectively determines who is elected and which party or coalition gains power. Even with a fixed voting pattern, two different electoral systems could easily produce two dramatically different electoral verdicts.

But there are other deeper, long term political influences of electoral systems on the future of a country, especially young democracies. The growth of political parties and their numbers or relative sizes in legislatures is directly influenced by the electoral system. Some electoral systems may encourage diverse parties to form inclusive and cooperative alliances while under other systems, parties might stand to gain politically by deepening and exploiting the animosity among disparate social or communal groups within the society. Electoral system also influences the internal structure and functioning of political parties – whether they operate as open and cohesive groups of like-minded citizens or whether they are dominated by power-hungry factions and oligopolies. The broader political culture of a democracy, including the behaviour of voters and their representatives is also influenced by the choice of electoral systems. Electoral systems also influence the degree of ‘faith’ people and parties have in their democratic setup. By repeatedly producing unrepresentative and distorted verdicts, an ill-designed electoral system might serve to discredit the very concept of democracy itself. In other words, electoral systems shape the very ‘rules of the game’ under which democracy functions. Therefore, choosing a particular model or variety of an electoral system is undoubtedly one of the most important institutional decisions made by any democracy.

Nevertheless, a vast majority of both established and emerging democracies did not deliberately choose or carefully design their electoral systems. Generally, they have been chosen solely because of established customs, existing socio-political circumstances, colonial traditions, or in some cases, perceived gain or loss to specific political interests. In particular, nearly all the newly independent democracies have inherited an electoral system from their ex-colonial masters.

After India gained its independence, the Constituent Assembly comprising of eminent jurists, lawyers, constitutional experts and political thinkers had debated for nearly three years, the issue of which electoral system should be adopted. Our founding fathers looked up to the FPTP system as an established (read British) form of democracy. They chose the FPTP in the hope of avoiding fragmented legislatures and to help the formation of stable governments. Less than six decades later, we the citizens of India, have realized that the first-past-the-post (FPTP) electoral system has given birth to unhealthy trends of vote buying, political oligopolies, criminalization, caste domination and distorted representation. Given the diverse nature of our society and the relative poverty and ignorance prevailing, the FPTP system has produced unintended (at least by our founding fathers) verdicts that accentuated our problems and led to an ever deepening political crisis. Chapter 2 of this book addressed these issues in considerable detail.

It is precisely for these reasons that the time has come for India to move away from the FPTP electoral system. We have to adopt more rational and representative mechanism where people's genuine choices are converted into meaningful electoral verdicts. Such an electoral system would differ from the FPTP in two critical ways: (i) it should minimize or even eliminate any distortions that creep into the pre-polling behaviour of the candidates or voting patterns of the citizens and (ii) it must not inject distortions into electoral verdicts, on its own. At present, parties routinely depend upon local fiefdoms, sectarian appeals, cash-for-vote schemes and crime lords for delivering votes. Instead, the new system must allow for a political party's public image and policy platform (i.e. stance on specific public issues) to determine the voting patterns of people. Only then can competent and honest candidates who represent the party become truly electable. To achieve this goal, the new electoral system must ensure that electoral success of candidates and parties does not depend only on the plurality of votes in any particular constituency. Instead, all the votes polled in favour of a party or agenda across the whole region, state or country must count. Only such an electoral system would ensure adequate representation for scattered minorities (ideological, demographic, etc), even though they might be lacking in concentrated pockets of influence. Also this new electoral regime must encourage parties and candidates to adopt a more inclusive and broad-based political agenda.

Adopting such a rational and representative system for Indian elections has the potential to radically improve the nature of politics and remove many distortions plaguing our democracy. But, the real question is: does such a system exist at all?

2. Towards a better electoral system in India

About Proportional Representation (PR)

Unfamiliar to most Indians, but quite well-known across the world, is the proportionality-based system of electing representatives. **The basic principle guiding the Proportional Representation (commonly termed as PR) is that all voters deserve representation and that political parties should find legislative representation in proportion to their strength in the electorate.** This means that if a party receives 35 percent of the popular vote, it will get 35 per cent of the seats in the legislature; neither more nor less. In more real terms, voters in the majority will earn a majority of seats, while voters in the minority also will earn their fair share of representation.

Under the PR system of elections, the entire country or state can be divided into constituencies (this division is flexible, as we will see later) with candidates being elected to represent them in the legislatures. Upto this point, it sounds very much like our own FPTP system. Here comes the key difference: each constituency or district* elects not one but multiple representatives. For example, imagine a medium-sized state in India geographically divided into 25 parliamentary

* Many publications on electoral systems, especially the foreign ones, typically refer to a geographic electoral unit as 'electoral district' or 'district'; not to be confused with our administrative district (*zila*). We Indians are more familiar with the term constituencies.

constituencies. Under the FPTP system, the voters would have to elect one representative from each constituency. In every constituency, the winner needs to get only a plurality of votes (i.e. at least one greater than her/his nearest rival, but not necessarily a majority) and all remaining votes cast for the other candidates are discarded (i.e. 'wasted'). This is how that state would elect its 25 MPs, under the FPTP scheme.

Under the PR system, the entire state could be considered one constituency/ electoral district represented by all 25 Members of Parliament. In other words, there are no more local parliamentary constituencies – the entire state becomes a single electoral district with multiple representatives. How are those 25 representatives to be elected? During elections, votes are cast for parties instead of candidates, and the votes across the entire electoral district (i.e. state) are pooled together. The percentage of votes obtained by each party or political alliance/group/coalition is calculated and the 25 seats are distributed proportionately. Supposing Parties A, B and C get 40, 40 and 20 percent of the popular vote in our hypothetical state, they win 10, 10 and 5 seats respectively. The overall aim is to proportionally reflect the vote shares in the electoral verdict. This, in essence, is how the PR electoral system works.

Someone well-versed in the vagaries of love reportedly remarked “love is not a single emotion.” In the same manner, PR is not a single system. Even PR-based electoral systems can have varying degrees of proportionality built into them. On one hand, they can be truly representational (i.e. pure PR systems) i.e. the vote shares of parties get exactly reflected in their seat shares. On the other hand, PR systems in some countries (modified PR or mixed PR systems) have features that tend to decrease the proportionality between the vote share and the seat share. Mind you, this is done intentionally. Let us now look at two key features of any PR-based electoral system that determine its degree of proportionality.

The impact of District Magnitude

In the preceding example, the size of an electoral district can be made as large or small as required. Under the PR schemes, the geographical size of an electoral district really does not matter much. More significant is the number of representatives being elected from it. This number is commonly termed the **district magnitude**. Higher this number, greater is the proportionality in the verdict as even smaller parties start gaining seats. Conversely, lower the number of elected representatives from an electoral district, the greater the *disproportionality* (think why).

What if our electoral district is drawn so small that it has only one seat? Then, it is quite obvious that the party getting the highest share of the votes would capture the one and only seat from this district/constituency and all other votes for other parties would not get any representation. Now, you might say, that sounds familiar. Yes, of course! It is nothing but an FPTP result. In other words, the PR system reduces to a single member FPTP system, when the district magnitude equals one. To conclude this line of thinking: single-member FPTP system could be viewed simply as a model of PR that permits an extreme degree of disproportionality.

The impact of Vote Threshold

In actual practice, PR systems in many countries routinely mandate that a party needs a minimum level of voter support before gaining eligibility representation in the legislature. Parties that get fewer votes than this minimum threshold are excluded from the count. This level is called ‘**vote threshold**’ and is designed to limit the election of small, sectarian or even extremist groups from gaining representation. In some countries, this threshold is expressed as some percentage of votes; for example, in New Zealand, Germany and Russia, a party needs to get at least 5% of the polled votes in order to be eligible for seats. All votes cast for parties that fail to cross this threshold are discarded. In some cases, if such small parties win at least a minimum number of single member constituency seats (it is one seat in New Zealand and three seats in Germany) via the FPTP route, they are permitted to by-pass the vote threshold requirements.

The vote threshold has to be carefully chosen while designing a PR system of elections. A very high threshold eliminates several smaller parties. In that case, scattered minorities and political groups would not be represented adequately and the proportionality of the PR method is reduced. On the other hand, having too low a threshold permits the entry of very small, marginal or even extremist groups into the legislature. In other words, the higher the threshold, the greater the disproportionality in the PR. The converse also holds true.

Various Models of Proportional Representation

There are several ‘flavours’ of proportionality-based electoral systems being practised across the world. Without going into the minutiae of each system, we can cast a glance at their broad characteristics:

1. Semi-Proportional Systems

They translate votes cast into seats won by candidates and parties, in such a way that captures the majoritarianism of Plurality-Majority systems as well as the proportionality characteristics of the PR systems.

- **Single Non transferable Vote (SNTV) method:** In this method, each elector has one vote but there are multiple seats in the electoral district to be filled and the candidates with the highest number of votes fill these positions. For instance, consider a three-member electoral district i.e. several candidates compete against each other to be among these the top three. Any candidate needs just over 25% of the vote to be certain of getting elected (can you think why?). SNTV is used for parliamentary elections in Jordan and Taiwan. Japan had adopted this method for its lower-house elections upto 1993.
- **Parallel System:** Under this formula, some seats are filled up by proportionality method and the rest by the FPTP method. The overall composition of the legislature need not remain proportional to the vote share of each party, however. This method is widely used in the countries of Africa and the ex-Soviet Union. Japan currently elects 60% of its MPs through the FPTP method and the rest by the pure proportionality method.

2. Proportional Systems

- **List Proportional Representation (List PR):** This scheme determines number of seats won by the parties, in proportion to the votes obtained in favour of each party. Each party then selects representatives to fill its share of seats, following a specified order of candidate preference called Party List. These lists are determined by the party members and delegates. In some cases, the order of preference or even selection of party candidates' names on these lists might be determined by the voters themselves or party members or delegates.
- **Mixed Member Proportional Representation (MMPR) or Mixed Member Compensatory Representation (MMCR) or simply, Mixed Member Representation (MMR):** Under this scheme, some (typically half) of the legislative seats are filled up by FPTP voting in single member districts while the rest (called compensatory seats) are drawn from the party lists. It is different from the Parallel PR system in that in mixed-member system, the overall composition of the legislature proportionally reflects the vote share obtained by each party. This method effectively combines the advantages of both the FPTP and PR systems. Germany is considered a classic example of a successful MMPR democracy, while New Zealand one of a relatively recent high-profile entrant into the club of MMPR nations.
- **Single Transferable Vote (STV) Method:** In this scheme, voters rank the candidates in an order of preference (ranging from 'most favoured' to 'least favoured') in multi-member electoral districts. This set up is supposed to be the most sophisticated of all electoral systems, allowing for choice between parties and even between candidates within parties. It is used in Ireland, Malta and also for the Australian federal Senate. *More interestingly, in India, we use this method for electing members to the Rajya Sabha.*

3. A Mixed Member Proportional Representation (MMPR) system for India

Just as the purely Plurality-Majority (PM) based FPTP system did not satisfy India's unique electoral, social and political requirements, it is equally clear that a pure Proportional Representation based electoral system also would not work. Why? Because, in a pure-PR system, there would be multiple elected representatives responsible for an entire state or region. This arrangement, unlike the FPTP system, breaks the valuable link between a geographic constituency and the elected representative. Additionally, political independents would find it very difficult to contest elections and gain representation, in a pure-PR setup. An out-and-out PR-based electoral system without any vote thresholds also permits the very minor or even extremist political parties or groupings to find legislative representation and thereby, political legitimacy.

Instead, we have to adopt an electoral system that can also include the valuable features of FPTP, even while retaining the PR scheme on an overall basis. In other words, we are looking at the

Mixed Member Proportional System (MMPR). Under this system, a voter has two votes: one to elect a candidate (belonging to any party) for representing her/his constituency called 'Candidate Vote' and the other vote for a party to represent his/her entire electoral district (i.e. state) called 'Party Vote'. It is called Mixed Member type PR because part of the legislature is filled by candidates elected from single member constituencies, just as in the FPTP system. Their election is based on the Candidate Vote on the ballot. The remaining half of the legislature is filled up by representatives so that the overall composition of the legislature is kept proportional to the total Party Vote of each party.

No, it is not as complicated as it might look the first time. Anyway, to make it clearer, let us consider a rather simple illustration.

A 'tutorial' on how the Mixed Member PR works in India

Let us suppose that Indian Parliament has 100 MPs and representatives are elected from 100 constituencies across the country to fill those seats. Currently, India follows the FPTP system of electing a representative from a constituency. It means that a typical electoral ballot in a constituency looks somewhat like the one shown in Figure 1. You, the voter have to press the button (India has electronic ballots, remember) next to the name of your preferred candidate/party from the list of candidates, belonging to various parties. Let us suppose you and your friends all voted for the Oppositionwale candidate, but somehow (by buying off some voters, scaring away some of your friends, etc), the Mis-ruling party candidate managed to secure a few additional votes in your constituency. That Mis-ruling candidate becomes your MP for five years.

What about the country? Have a look at Figure 2. It appears as if the Oppositionwale candidates have obtained a large proportion (46%) of the popular vote, but because of the FPTP system, won relatively few seats (only 31%). [**Food for thought:** *Can you think of real world situations where such results might be possible?*] Comparatively, the Mis-ruling party has been very lucky to get only 32% of the vote share and still managing to hold on to 48% of the seats.

Even then, our Mis-ruling party did not cross the 50-seat mark so it cannot form the government on its own. Maybe, it will knit a coalition with the Bhagwaan-ke-naam Party (which got 8% vote share but 12% in seats) and together they will have comfortably managed to form the next government by cobbling together a legislative majority of 60 out of 100 seats in the Parliament. It is important that we realize the point that a majority of the electorate did not vote for this Mis-ruling + Bhagwaan-ke-naam alliance. This, in essence is the problem of 'minority governments' and is one of the key problems of our FPTP system (see chapter 2 for a more detailed analysis)

Look the remaining two parties, Oppositionwale and Anti-scam. Even if the come together to form an alliance, they have no chance of forming a government. In spite of them winning the popular verdict (together secured 60% of the popular vote), they have only 40% of the seats in the Parliament. It is as if the final verdict has nothing to do with the people's electoral choices! Of course, we are discussing an entirely fictitious example but, these kinds of results have become all too common in our country.

	Mis-Ruling party Profile Manifesto Strategy	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Oppositionwale Profile Manifesto Strategy	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Bhagwan-ke-naam party Profile Manifesto Strategy	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Anti-scam party Profile Manifesto Strategy	<input type="checkbox"/>

Figure 1

How a ballot paper looks, under our traditional, single-member FPTP electoral system. You have one vote for electing a representative for your constituency. Very often, this means compromising between your preferred party and your preferred candidate.

(Graphics from Janadesh website's draft versions; picture needs to be modified for this booklet)

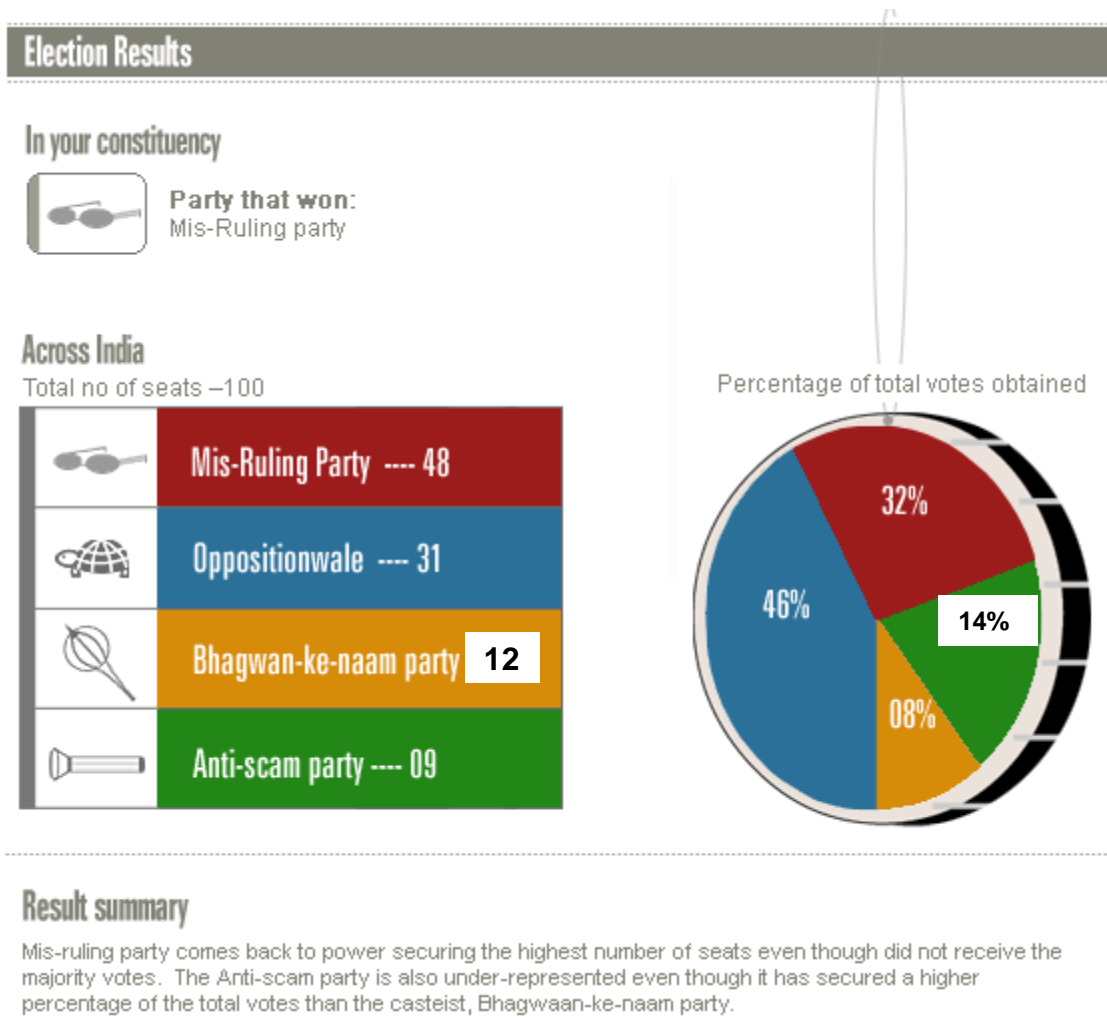


Figure 2

Typical results from an FPTP election – there is a serious mismatch between the vote share and seat share of parties

(Graphics from Janadesh website’s draft versions; picture needs to be modified for this booklet)

Now, what will happen if India adopts the Mixed Member Proportional Representation (MMPR) system? Have a look at Figure 3. First of all, you will get two votes instead of one. One vote is for the party you support (termed Party Vote) and the other is for the candidate who you want to represent your constituency (the Candidate Vote). This candidate vote works just like the single-member FPTP vote and determines the direct winner in your constituency. But, the overall number of MPs a party ‘deserves’ is proportional to the Party Vote it obtains across India.

See Table 4 on page. Across India, the Mis-ruling Party obtained a vote share of 30%, so it ‘deserves’ to have around 30 MPs in the 100-strong Parliament. But 23 candidates of this Mis-ruling Party have already managed to win their FPTP elections in various constituencies. So, the Mis-ruling Party can send seven additional members (drawn from the Party’s prioritized list of

candidates) so that its total seat share comes to 30. Now, let us take up the case of the Oppositionwale. Based on their Party Vote, they deserve to have 44 MPs, but only 19 of the party's candidates could win in the constituency-wise FPTP elections (it could be that it has more broad-based popularity among voters instead of having locally entrenched support). So, the party is allowed to send 25 additional members from its priority list of candidates (called Party List). Now, the total number of Oppositionwale MPs comes to 44.

Then comes the strange case of the Bhagwaan-ke-naam Party. Based on its vote share, it deserves to have only 7 MPs, but in fact, 10 of its candidates managed to win in the direct elections held in the constituencies. Would they be penalized for winning more seats than what their vote share suggests? Not really. A candidate elected remains an elected candidate. The Bhagwaan-ke-naam Party is permitted to retain all the 10 MPs who have been elected by the people. Finally, we have the Anti-Scam Party that got 19% of the popular vote but could win in only one of the FPTP-based constituency elections (looks like its support is truly broad-based!). So, it is permitted to send 18 of its top members to become MPs.

Under normal circumstances, the total number of seats won by all the parties in the constituencies would be half of the total strength of the Parliament (i.e. 50%). And this number would equal the total number of members nominated from the Party Lists of all the parties combined (the other 50%). In this way, the parity between the FPTP winners and the Party List members is maintained and overall proportionality in legislative composition is maintained. But, in our hypothetical example, the Bhagwaan-ke-naam party managed to win three more seats than it 'deserved' (as dictated by its vote share) so the strength of the Parliament temporarily increases by three. But this does not seriously affect the proportional nature of the Parliament by to a serious degree.

Here is an interesting point: in the Table 4, note that no party has obtained a legislative majority on its own. Looks like coalitions and alliances are the only way out. But, unlike the FPTP alliances, any alliance/coalition in the MMPR that has a majority of MPs will also necessarily have a majority of the popular vote supporting it. In other words, minority governments – those that can manufacture legislative majorities even without popular mandate (like the Mis-ruling + Bhagwaan-ke-naam group of the FPTP we had seen before) – are not possible anymore. In PR any government must and will have the public mandate, otherwise, they wouldn't be able to form the government in the first place! This is one crucial difference between the FPTP and the MMPR-derived legislatures.

Finally, one last note before we move on: real world cases would most likely be a little more complicated than our example of four fictitious parties and a 100 member Indian Parliament. But the underlying principle of the Mixed Member Proportional Representation would undoubtedly remain the same. Only the mathematical calculations would get a little detailed and your calculators would be taxed greater!

Voting through Proportional Representation

Here you get two votes to cast- one for a candidate in your constituency; one for the party of your choice.

Please note: The candidate you choose may or may not belong to your favourite party.

Select your party >>

	Mis-Ruling party Profile Manifesto Strategy	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Oppositionwale Profile Manifesto Strategy	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Bhagwan-ke-naam party Profile Manifesto Strategy	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Anti-scam party Profile Manifesto Strategy	<input type="checkbox"/>

Select your candidate >>

	Mis-Ruling party candidate Profile Manifesto Strategy	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Opposition ka candidate Profile Manifesto Strategy	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Bhagwan-ke-naam candidate Profile Manifesto Strategy	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Anti-scam party candidate Profile Manifesto Strategy	<input type="checkbox"/>

Figure 3

How a ballot paper would look under the MMPR electoral system. The voter has to cast two votes – one for the party and other for the candidate to represent the constituency.

(Graphics from Janadesh website's draft versions; picture needs to be modified for this booklet)

	1	2	3	4	5
	Overall vote share of the party (i.e. Party Vote)	Total seats 'deserved' by the party	Constituency seats directly won by the party	Compensatory seats awarded to be party, (from Party Lists)	Total seats for the party in the Parliament
Mis-ruling Party	30%	30	23	7	30
Oppositionwale	44%	44	19	25	44
Bhagwaan-ke-naam Party	7%	7	10	0	10
Anti-Scam Party	19%	19	1	18	19
Total	100%	100	53	50	103

Table 4: The final tally list of parties, vote shares and candidates for the example discussed in the 'Tutorial on MMPR' in the text.

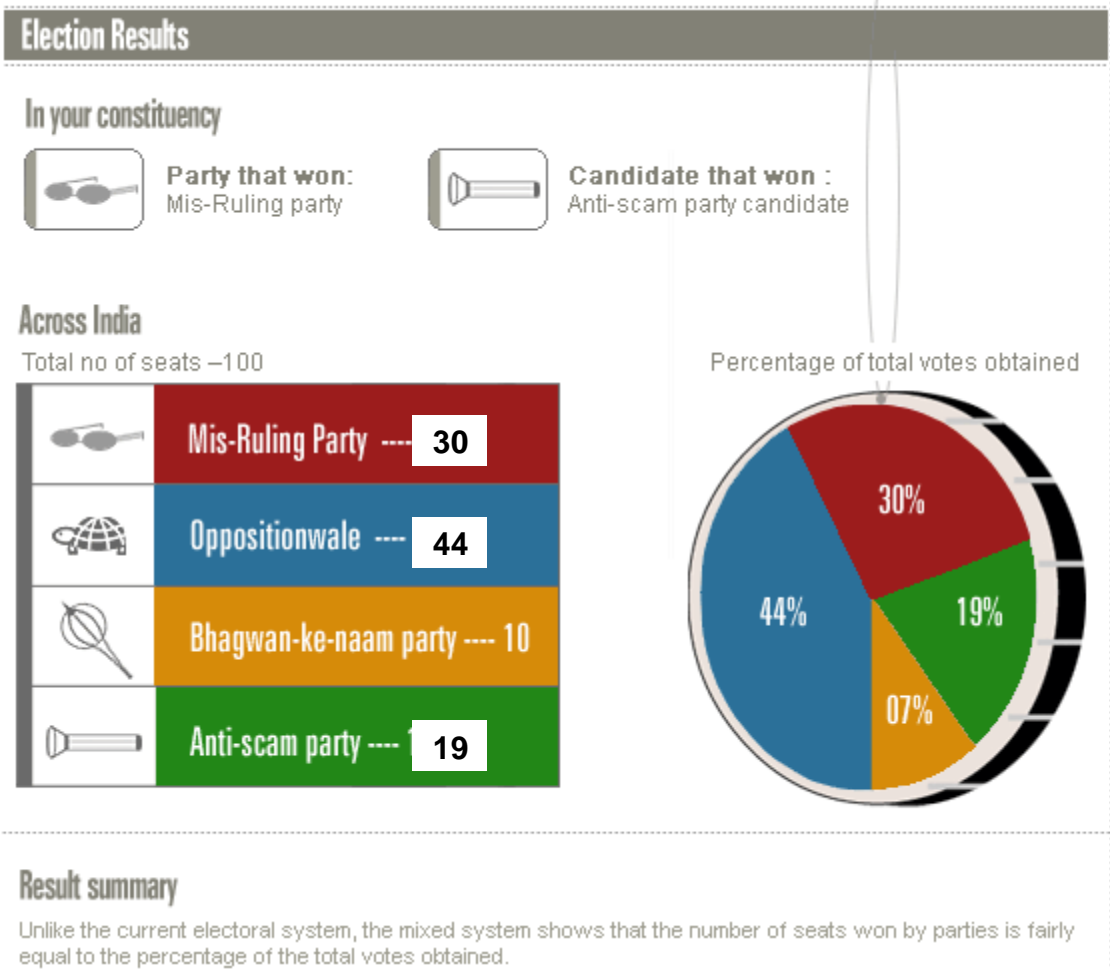


Figure 4

How results from an MMPR election would look like– the seat share of parties is in proportion to the votes they obtain across India

(Graphics from Janadesh website’s draft versions; they need to be modified for this booklet)

A 'Beginner's Guide' to

How the Mixed-Member Proportional Representation (MMPR) system would work in India

1. 50% of the legislative seats will be filled up by FPTP method, in single member constituencies. The other 50% will be elected based on Party Lists (see text for why).
2. You get two votes to cast: the Party vote for the party of your choice and the Constituency Vote for your candidate of your choice. The candidate you vote for need not belong to the party you select. See Figure 2 for how a sample ballot would look like.
3. Party vote determines the total number of seats a party gets. After excluding the constituency (FPTP) seats won by the party, the remaining seats will be filled from the Party Lists. A Party List carries the names of the party's candidates in the order of preference. Each party decides the order of the candidates on its list. While it may be impractical to open this list for public scrutiny, a party's candidates should be chosen by the same party's members, ideally through secret ballot. It is possible that a candidate for the constituency election is also nominated in the party list. In such a scenario, if the candidate wins the election, her/his name gets deleted from the party list, while the following candidates on the list move up one place.
4. A State shall be the unit (electoral district) for proportional representation or lists. All union territories together will constitute one unit.
5. A party shall be eligible for allotment of seats on PR basis only if it obtains at least 10 % of the valid votes in States with 10 or more seats. If the number of seats in the State is less, a party shall have to cross a threshold limit as per the formula:
$$\text{Threshold limit} = [\text{No. of Valid Votes} / \text{No. of Seats to be filled}]$$
6. All a parties that obtain votes below the threshold are eliminated. The seats shall be divided among the remaining eligible parties as per the following formula:
$$[\text{No. of Valid Votes obtained by the party} / \text{Total No. of Valid Votes obtained by all eligible parties}] * (\text{No. of Seats})$$
7. Each party receives one seat for each whole number resulting from this calculation. The remaining seats are allocated in the descending sequence of decimal fractions.
8. Any seats, which a party has won directly in the constituencies, are deducted from this number, so that the balance number to be drawn from the lists is decided.
9. If a party wins more constituency seats than it is entitled to get by proportional representation, it will retain all constituency seats. The additional number will be added to the strength of the legislature on a temporary basis.
10. The existing reservation provisions will continue for the constituencies as well as party lists.

4. MMPR can drastically improve Indian electoral politics

1. More inclusive parties, broad-based political agendas and positive electoral campaigns

In PR, broad-based support really matters. Parties with an ‘inclusive’ political agenda – one that appeals to the broader interests of diverse groups of audience - can actually convert their support into votes and thereby, into substantial legislative presence. Also, the tone and tenor of the election campaigns would be forced into becoming more positive, from the currently divisive and negative approach, in order to appeal to as many potential voters as possible. Parties and candidates with overtly sectarian or divisive agenda and having a narrow support base will find it very difficult to gain legislative representation.

2. Distortion of verdicts is eliminated

PR ensures that the people’s choices in the elections are faithfully reflected in the composition of the legislatures. If a party receives 35 percent of the vote, it will get 35 percent of the seats, not 70 or 80 percent as is normally the case with FPTP. Even if a second party scores a few percentage points lower on the vote share, it will not be irrationally penalized when it comes to the seats.

This setup also ensures that a government cannot be formed if it is opposed by majority of the voters. In other words, every government formed will have a clear mandate in the form of over 50 percent of the vote share. Compare that to the FPTP set-up, where minority governments can be cobbled with the (almost always) transient support of the legislators – even if such a government clearly does not have the popular mandate.

3. MMPR enables voters to exercise their choice, without any prejudice.

The FPTP, often forces the voter to compromise between a candidate and that candidate’s party. Typically, under this system, many voters are forced to vote for an unworthy candidate in their constituency simply because that candidate represents a party they prefer.

But, in the MMPR system, the voter would no longer have to vote for a party or a candidate s/he does not like, just for the sake of exercising their vote. This is because, in the MMPR, the voters get two votes to cast instead of one vote - the Party vote for the party of her/his choice and the Constituency Vote for her/his constituency candidate. The constituency candidate *need not* belong to the preferred party. So the voter gets to exercise choice in the best way possible, without compromising on her/his interests.

4. Criminalization of politics will be curbed. Money power will be controlled.

In the purely FPTP system, locally-powerful mafia dons, gang leaders and rowdy-sheets manage to transform into winnable candidates by controlling the voting patters in their constituencies. Illegal money is routinely employed for illegitimate purposes such as localized vote-buying. Muscle-men are commonly employed to scare away voters of

opposing parties. Political parties, across the political spectrum, are forced to give tickets to such winnable, criminal elements. Voters had no way to penalize these parties for encouraging such criminal and corrupt elements.

But, in a PR-based electoral system, money power will be curbed because it is simply not possible to buy off the voters of an entire state. Even if a locally powerful candidate manages to secure some votes by inappropriate means, the overall loss in public image (and consequent loss in popular votes) for the party and its nominated candidates would offset any such minor gains. In the PR-based system, the opinion of the entire electorate matters, not some localized voting patterns and preferences.

5. PR encourages honest and spirited citizens to contest. Parties can now nominate better candidates.

In PR, it always benefits the parties to have as large a political base as possible. In order to enlarge their political base, parties will be compelled to enlist persons with talent, credibility and merit and project them as candidates to get more votes and broad-based public support. The parties can nominate such capable and public-spirited candidates in their party lists. As the distribution of PR seats depends on the share of party vote across a whole state, desirable candidates will be elected without having to resort to electoral malpractices and high election expenditure as in the FPTP-based elections.

This is unlike FPTP, where "winnable candidates" who can muster money and muscle power usually get the party tickets.

6. PR allows for free and fair competition between all political parties - big or small.

It ensures that scattered minorities (ideological, demographic or otherwise) and their parties get fairer representation unlike FPTP, which puts disproportionately large amount of power and seats in the hands of the winning party.

7. PR increases the representation of scattered, traditionally under-represented and minority communities. PR offers an alternative to the "quota" system.

Under representation of caste- and religious-minorities has been one of the most serious drawbacks of the FPTP system. An attempt to rectify this situation with respect to dalits and scheduled tribes has been made by reserving legislative constituencies for SC (numbering 79 out of a total of 543 Lok Sabha seats) and ST (41 seats) populations.

But this has led to other communities and groups that have been traditionally under represented into demanding their share of quotas in the legislatures. Creating quotas to each and every other aggrieved community would promote tokenism of the worst kind, limiting representation and political participation to artificially imposed numbers.

Minorities and PR

How to bridge the growing communal divide in Indian politics?

Muslims make 12.5 percent of the overall Indian population but have only 5.5 of seats in all legislatures (state and union) combined. Muslims hold a majority in only one state (Jammu and Kashmir) and in only three constituencies each in Kerala and West Bengal, and one in the Lakshadweep islands. Over ninety percent of Indian Muslims live in places where they are minorities. Similarly, Christians too constitute a majority only in Meghalaya, Nagaland, and Mizoram and a couple of constituencies in Kerala. Most of the Indian Christians live outside this limited number of states and constituencies. Similarly, India has mind-boggling numbers of other castes, sub-castes, classes and religions that form a majority, if at all, only in tiny pockets of our country.

In FPTP, the number of seats secured by one community is not based on their absolute numbers across the state, but on their geographic concentration. Generally, the most concentrated and organized groups in a given area completely monopolize the party configurations, electoral candidate lists and legislative representations. Those groups that are geographically scattered are of no political consequence. Under these circumstances, clearly, the FPTP is an exclusionary system for Muslims, Christians and similar such groups that are distributed so as to be in a minority almost everywhere. Once these minorities are denied their due representation, political ghettoization is inevitable.

Whenever a community feels isolated, it is the obscurantist elements and religious bigots who define its identity. Inadequate political representation thus acquires a communal colour and the extremists become the interlocutors for the whole community, with 'my community in danger' as the rallying slogan. Parties, whose objective is to maximize their electoral gains, use this insecurity to their advantage. Politics of tokenism and vote-bank mobilization on sectarian grounds become the norm. The real issues of development and economic opportunities take a back seat. The resultant strategic voting and hate politics lead to communal polarization. Mobilization of one religious group inevitably invites counter mobilization. In short, given our social conditions and political realities, FPTP has accentuated communal divisions. Every incident is blown out of proportion, and the 'eye for an eye' approach leads to blind rage and manufactured hatred. This is what Delhi in 1984 and Gujarat in 2002 witnessed. We should understand that FPTP in itself is not the cause of communal violence and terrorism. But FPTP has accentuated our worst communal divisions instead of bringing out the best in people and countering prejudice and bigotry.

In an attempt to solve this problem, there have been periodic demands for extending legislative reservations to more number of minority communities. But, India's collective political experience has shown such a reservation system would only bring symbolic justice, breed resentment among non-reserved groups and limit the democratic choices even for the reserved groups.

We need to break out of this vicious cycle. FPTP system must give way to a proportional representation-based electoral system, enhancing legitimacy of our political process. Once the scattered minorities feel secure thanks to fairer representation, ghetto politics will be replaced by enlightened self interest. The progressive elements will find voice. Liberty and opportunity, not insecurity and siege mentality, will be the dominant features. True, proportional representation can lead to apparent political fragmentation. In order to offset such tendencies, a reasonable threshold of the vote (around 10%) in a major state for representation, and mixing with half the seats elected through FPTP system can be incorporated. These are pointers to practical solutions to bridge the communal divide and promote sane politics.

But, we have a fair, acceptable and consistent solution to this pressing problem in the form of PR-based electoral system. It ensures appropriate levels of political representation to the dalit, muslim and christian (in fact, any other minority or disadvantaged) communities – across India – and not just in a few delineated territorial (i.e. reserved) constituencies. Even scattered populations of such disadvantaged communities would gain political empowerment and in self-confidence.

Minorities and PR

The case of the New Zealand Maori population

Until 1993, New Zealand had a FPTP system. To accommodate the indigenous Maori people (who were roughly comparable to our own SC/ST populations) in the legislature, the constitution reserved 15 MP seats exclusively for the Maoris, and Maori voters could chose to vote in either the general election or in separate electorates. In 1996, however, the country changed their electoral system to a Mixed-Member PR system for reasons that were completely unrelated to ethnic minority issues. But, in the same elections, thanks to the naturally diverse party lists common to Proportional Representation, twice as many Maori MPs were elected from the general election rolls than from the Maori-specific rolls! *The minority ethnic group benefited more from the natural process in PR than from the quotas specifically set aside from them.* Besides short term benefits for this group, this process “will certainly foster a more unified society in general”. Thanks to PR, the country might soon not need the help of separate electorates.

Proportional representation has existed across Western Europe for almost a century, and in many other parts of the world as well, particularly in places where deep social divisions are present and must be accounted for in legislatures. Some of these countries have historic divisions based on religion or ethnicity that rival India’s in terms of bloodshed and bitterness. Today, even in countries with deep ethnic divisions such as Israel, South Africa, and Northern Ireland PR has become essential for national unity and fair representation.

8. PR can ensure better women’s representation in the legislatures

In traditional politics, women are rarely classified among the ‘minority’ groups. But they are probably the most visible minority, when measured in against political representation and power. Even in industrialized countries where women have advanced greatly in terms of social status, women are still underrepresented in governments. The situation is much worse in FPTP systems, where around women made up only around 12% of the parliamentarians, in even in established democracies (see Table 5).

Women and PR

A win-win solution for increasing women's representation

India is the first country in the world to consider the possibility of a 33% reservation for women in its Parliament. Every major party of our country publicly supported this idea because of the obvious and disconcerting shortage of women in the legislature. However, privately, these same political interests continually scuttle this initiative, and keep it from being brought to vote.

The proposed reservation system for women requires a rotational system of constituency reservation, which is bad for both India's level of democracy in general and women's role in politics.

First, if every third district knows that it may be randomly selected as a reservation district, all representatives will have less incentive to build a strong base of constituency support. Voters will be subject to vast shifts in the legislature every term regardless of the previous legislature's performance. This kind of instability will undercut political accountability by reducing the incentive for legislators to respond to the demands of voters. Second, women themselves will suffer in terms of legislative position. While more women will be in the legislature, they will constantly have to change or run from new districts, preventing their own chances of creating a strong following based on their political record. They will owe their position then, not to a loyal electorate, but to party bosses. In addition, women will only have chances to contest against other women. Though they will not be legally barred from contesting in non-reserved seats, they are unlikely to be given the party ticket to do so in these areas. This will ghettoize women's politics and only a tokenism exists rather than legitimate representation of women's concerns. Women will become a burden on democracy rather than a means to increase competitiveness and standards of representation. Such effects bode very badly for the place of women in Indian civic society in general.

But Mixed Member Proportional Representation (MMPR) offers a more natural and intelligent way of increasing women's representation. Because in MMPR, many more women tend to be nominated either through the party list or as constituency candidates. The reason is simple: since parties can come to power only if they enjoy a majority vote, they might lose out on the significant percentage of the female vote by not nominating women. And the more women get nominated, the more likely are they to win elections!

Equity is just a part of the reason why it is a good idea for democracies to aim to be as representative as possible. **There are multiple benefits to having women and minorities in government in the proportion in which they exist in society.** Firstly, this will automatically give them a greater voice and allow voices of moderation and cooperation to be heard. When women or minorities are denied their just representation, we only hear of them when they take to arms, break the law or make statements that go against valued notions of human rights and

freedom. Having more women and minorities in parliament, the best suited place for them to put forward their concerns, would mean that the extremists and the disillusioned will no longer be their mouthpieces. Protest outside the walls of parliament would easily shift to constructive policy decisions within them – and parliament will be less inclined to senselessly fan the flames of conflict by authorizing brutal, dehumanising containment measures.

Table 5: Women’s Representation in some established democracies

COUNTRY	TYPE OF ELECTORAL SYSTEM	PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN IN NATIONAL PARLIAMENT
Sweden	List-PR	41
Norway	List-PR	39
Finland	List-PR	39
Denmark	List-PR	33
The Netherlands	List-PR	31
Austria	List-PR	27
Germany	Mixed Member PR	26
Great Britain	Plurality-Majority/FPTP	17
Spain	List-PR	16
United States	Plurality-Majority/FPTP	11
France	Plurality-Majority / Single-member districts	10
India	Plurality-Majority/FPTP	9
New Zealand	Mixed Member PR	30

Based on: Amy, Douglas J. *Proportional Representation. The Case for a Better Election System.* Crescent Street Press, Massachusetts. 1997

(Bar Graph will replace the table as illustration)

The experience of several countries with higher percentages of women in parliament shows that there are distinct changes in public policy that have been affected by women. Countries like Sweden, Norway, Finland and Denmark, all of whom have between 33 and 41 percent women in parliament, have internationally commended levels of education, public health networks and support for humanitarian issues worldwide. **The opportunity for women to be involved in decision-making processes has also led to greater empowerment among the women of these countries. In Sweden, for example, women politicians in 1994**

threatened to form their own party if leading parties did not increase the number of deserving women in their party lists. As a result, the political parties were forced to take note of their protest and 41% of the members of the next parliament were women. Even in India, it is a known fact that women have far greater rates of success in elections when they are allowed to contest. Despite this, political parties do little to woo women both as candidates and as supporters. They are secure in the knowledge that, not given a choice, women will be forced to vote for whoever is least objectionable on the ballot.

9. PR enables formation of new political groups, which are public-spirited.

Once PR is practised in India, if existing parties do not nominate candidates on merit, people with credibility and practical ideas can get together and challenge the domination of entrenched parties. Thanks to their broad-based support, under the PR regime, these really competent, talented and credible people have a very realistic chance of getting elected.

In other words, the PR forces the parties to reform their candidate/nominee selection procedure. Those parties that do not choose to reform can be quickly sidelined by the voters themselves!

10. PR encourages more citizens to cast their votes.

Under the PR-based system, nearly every additional vote counts in helping a party win more seats. Parties in turn will have strong incentives to keep their supporters informed, and informed citizens are more likely to vote. This is unlike the FPTP where most citizens know their vote doesn't really count for much. In fact, voter turnout in countries with PR is typically at 70-80 per cent, compared to only around 40-50% in India.

Resolving the twin paradoxes in Indian Elections

When it comes to elections, India faces two paradoxes. First, every election is a promise for change, and yet the very process of election in our system ensures that no real change can come about. Only the beneficiaries of plunder and power games change. Second, real change of governance is necessary at the state level, but the states are not in control of levers of change. This is because the electoral system can only be changed by Parliament.

The latest Union government came to office on a platform of change. That change must include urgently bringing an improved electoral system which makes the likes of APJ Abdul Kalam and Dr. Manmohan electable. Fortunately, the Left parties are committed to proportional representation which gives space for decent and honest elements to be elected without deploying abnormal money-power and muscle.

Did you know? The Indian Constitution already allows for multi-number constituencies and elections based on proportional system. All it needs is a change of law by a simple majority in Parliament. At the same time, selection of party nominees for legislative office must be carried out by party members or their elected delegates through a democratic process. These two reform measures will help us break the twin paradoxes, overcome the inertia and actually usher in real changes in our political process.

5. Potential issues of concern about Mixed Member Proportional Representation (MMPR)

1. Proportional Representation and Mixed Member Proportional Representation sound a bit strange and ‘un-Indian.’ Will they work for India?

Our familiarity with British institutions and practices made us accept FPTP as the only natural electoral system. But only 10 countries – Bangladesh, Canada, India, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, UK, US, Zambia – follow FPTP system in single-member constituencies. Even Australia (alternative vote system, a form of Plurality-Majority system) and New Zealand (mixed member proportional representation), though former British colonies, have different systems. In fact, 43 functioning democracies have other systems of elections out of which, 36 countries follow proportional representation (PR).

The principles behind PR and MMPR are highly intuitive and very rational. Their applicability is universal and not limited to any particular types of societies, cultures or democracies. Once

the specific variant of PR is tailored to suit Indian conditions, there is no reason why MMPR would not work in India.

In fact, we already practice one of the most sophisticated forms of PR in India: it is called the Single Transferable Vote (STV) system that we use for electing members of Rajya Sabha from each state. The STV version of the PR allows the voter to choose between parties as well as between candidates within parties.

2. Isn't it too complex for us Indians? Most *desi* voters are not even properly literate...

A conceivable argument against changing the FPTP system in India is that of voter illiteracy. With a huge number of voters unable to even read the names of parties and candidates, increased complications in the electoral system could indeed confuse voters and compromise the democratic process. However, an MMPR system can adopt a 'Closed Party List' for the additional PR ballot, as in the example of Germany or New Zealand to minimize confusion. In such a system, the FPTP part of the ballot will remain much like the current ballots in India, while the PR part of the ballot will merely have a list of parties with corresponding party symbols to choose from (see Figure 3 earlier). Each party will separately publish a "closed list" of candidates in preferential order, so that seats will be correspondingly filled in order of this pre-determined preference.

More importantly, the average Indian voter might be able to perceive her/his role better under the MMPR electoral regime, because MMPR clearly showcases the proportional relationship between her/his vote and the number of seats obtained by her/his party of choice.

Beyond these administrative provisions to simplify the electoral system, reformers and governments must simply have faith in the political wisdom of the electorate. There is a marked difference between 'political literacy' and educational literacy. In fact, even uneducated voters in India have often expressed sophisticated political preferences and choices. Empirical studies do not support the argument that illiteracy hinders the reform process in our elections. More importantly, our voters themselves have repeatedly expressed their strong desire, through their voting patterns, to see positive change in our political and electoral processes.

3. Won't MMPR bring more fragmentation in our politics? Won't there be even more small and tiny parties, groups or coalitions?

Given our diversity and primordial caste loyalties, a purely PR system might encourage every caste forming a party and fragmenting our polity. In the post-mandal India, this is highly probable. Some political scientists have additional concerns that PR would actually help extremist parties that focused on fascism, racism or radicalism to gain political legitimacy.

But, these repulsive/divisive tendencies can be prevented by having a reasonable threshold, of say 10 percent of the popular vote in a major state, as the minimum requirement for a party to get its members elected. Such a threshold generally favours the mainstream, broad-based political

parties and the extremist parties that might appeal to only 1 or 2% of the population can be denied legislative representation.

At the same time, even if there were more parties and political groupings, they would have to work with each other on a much more positive and cooperative note. The experiences of democracies such as West Germany tell us that after a threshold has been put in place, MMPR generally serves to depolarize and reduce combative political systems. In addition, PR encourages parties to have organization, discipline and structure in order to win, and it therefore opposes the individualistic anarchical tendencies which sometimes develop under the FPTP system. In fact, after a shift to PR in Italy, the number of parties actually decreased as political forces became more cohesive.

“Mathematical” reasoning why number of parties cannot be very large: EC data will be confirmed and plotted.

4. What about political instability due to fluid coalitions and shifting alliances?

A vast majority of the PR countries have witnessed stable and efficient governments. But one of the biggest concerns attributed to PR is that coalition governments will become more common under this system than in the FPTP model of elections. In India, even with an FPTP system, coalitional governments have already become an unavoidable reality at the national level - due to lack of any national verdict (which has become only a summation of regional verdicts). It appears that the MMPR system would bring this coalition culture to the state level also.

The real trouble with a legislature made up of multi-party coalitions is that of constantly shifting leadership. In our states, minor shifts of alliances could bring about completely new governments, because no party would be able to command enough seats to control the position of Chief Minister comfortably. Such constant and dramatic changes could undermine efforts at coherent policy.

This is precisely why ***MMPR should go hand-in-hand with the direct election of a chief executive at the state level.*** In this way, leadership would not be diluted and held hostage by internal political forces, but will remain directly accountable to voters, and remain stable for the election term. Separation of legislature from the executive at the state level is a vital step. [*Refer to Chapter 4 for more details on this topic*]. This step must also be accompanied by outlining the responsibilities and domain of local governments and the power devolved to them must be entrenched and institutionalized.

5. A party candidate’s electoral fortunes seem to be heavily dependent on the Party List? Won’t the party general secretaries or top leaders, who prepare these lists, become too powerful?

In the MMPR, a party candidate can enter the legislature either by standing in the direct FPTP elections in any constituency or by getting nominated from the rank-ordered Party List (or both), depending on the popular vote share obtained by the party.

So, a party candidate's chance of becoming a legislator is partially dependent on her/his ranked position in the Party List. Therefore, *it is most important that the choice of the candidates and their order of appearance in the Party List are based on the democratic choice of the party's rank-and-file members or their delegates, for each region or district.* Ideally, these Party List decisions must be made through a secret party ballot. In other words, genuine internal democracy in parties is very essential to ensure that only the most acceptable, capable and eligible members get to represent them in the legislatures (Refer to Chapter 4 for more discussion on this topic). The preparation of the Party Lists is too important to be left to a few influential party leaders.

6. What about the fate of politically independent candidates? Will they be forced to associate with one party or the other?

MMPR retains the feature of directly contested electoral districts, of the FPTP system. So, political independents can contest from any of these constituencies (which make up 50% of the total seats in the legislatures), just like they do so under the present electoral system in India.

7. Starting with Chapter 2, this book has blamed FPTP for encouraging corruption and criminalization of politics in India. Then why not change entirely to a pure-PR model of elections?

It is true that the Indian version of the FPTP has given rise to several distortions in our political process with criminalization and corruption being some of them. However the FPTP system has two valuable features that promote the deepening of democracy: (i) it creates a vital link of accountability between an elected representative and her/his electors in a constituency and (ii) it enables eligible individuals to contest elections without forcing them to forgo their independent political identity, by making them join a party.

Unlike the purely PR electoral systems, the proposed Mixed Member PR system retains these positive aspects of the FPTP method. It has to be kept in mind, that the *overall* legislative composition by the parties, even in an MMPR, is based on the proportionality principle. It is only that a portion of the legislators are elected through the FPTP route.

For a moment, let us look at electoral design in terms of strategy and planning: the proposed MMPR is a good system that efficiently captures the best features of both the FPTP and PR electoral formulae. But its significance also goes beyond that. The proposed MMPR is also a robust mechanism - one that yields satisfactory electoral verdicts even when surrounding political and social conditions deviate from the 'normal.' In contrast, both pure-FPTP and pure-PR models are susceptible to external deviations and in such cases, they could yield distorted results.

9. Okay, I am convinced about the need for PR. But how can we actually bring about PR in India? Won't that involve amending the constitution and all that tedious process?

The laws and policies, the system and practices that govern Indian elections are not static. India is a young democracy and they have steadily evolved and indeed, are constantly evolving. In all likelihood, the present system of political parties, candidate nominations and elections will also prove to be only a temporary version. For example, three to six decades ago, we used to have separate electorates and multi-member parliamentary constituencies. We have witnessed tremendous changes/improvements in our electoral process, since then. So there is every reason to believe that it can be changed this time too. On top of that, the people of India, these days, are collectively desperate for deep-rooted and systemic change in our electoral process. So, change is possible and reform is inevitable. This is the philosophy part.

Let us come to the more practical aspects: how can our election system be actually changed? In fact, we do not need a constitutional amendment in order to move away from the present FPTP system to a Mixed Member PR system. What we need is only a simple act of the Parliament. Effectively, the only major challenge is to convince three groups: the Indian citizens, the opinion makers of our society our law-makers i.e. the elected politicians. In that sense, achieving an MMPR is not an impossible task, after all! We will examine the actual strategy behind how to approach this challenge, in Chapter 5, in greater detail.

(Picture of world map of democracies and their electoral systems – from the IDEA hand book on electoral systems)

Figure 5

Chapter 3: Review & Summary

- Proportionality-based electoral system offers us a way out of the present mess in politics and elections (for which the FPTP shoulders a large part of the blame)
- Proportional Representation (PR) is essentially about accurately relating people's choices to the electoral verdicts. There are several models of PR-based electoral systems being practiced throughout the democratic world.
- For India, the best, most suited and most effective electoral system would combine the positive features of both FPTP and PR. This is called the Mixed Member Proportional Representation (MMPR)
- The proposed MMPR model for India is largely based on the successful German Model. It requires that the overall composition of the legislature should reflect the proportional vote share of each constituent political party/group/alliance/coalition.
- It allows for filling up half of the legislature with members who are directly elected from constituencies, based on the FPTP model. The remaining half will be drawn from individual parties, based on their rank-ordered Party List of names.
- MMPR has the potential to help the politicians (and Indians, in general) to break out of the vicious cycles of corruption, criminalization and non-performance and enter into the virtuous cycles.

*Cartoon of a bespectacled
Masterji with stick in hand*

Politics for the Politicians of Tomorrow
Masterji says ...

In Politics, Pragmatism and Idealism are not opposites

Or

Good politics is Practical Politics

For many Indians, especially those who are educated and well-informed, politics has become a byword for double talk, deception or people-manipulation. Indeed, the very word politics seems to indicate something antagonistic to ideals, principles and convictions. 'Common sense' seems to dictate that if you are a pragmatic politician, then you must be skilled at these negative tactics. They seem to offer the shortest, and at times, the only route to political power.

Most often, the 'short cut' to power proves to be the longest route leading to nowhere. Believe it or not, at the very heart of pragmatic and practical politics lie the universal ideals. It certainly helps to be truthful to your people, sincere to your convictions and goals, open-minded and respectful to critical external opinions. It pays to put long-term common good over short-term partisan gain.

In the coming years, our citizens and voters across all sections will become increasingly and genuinely well informed and discerning. Never underestimate even the village-type, *pucca desi!* Quite contrary to popular perception, it appears that the voters are already better informed than even their electoral candidates, especially when it comes to addressing local problems. Years of experiencing electoral democracy have made our citizens a very astute judge of the political players. In the future, they would certainly think a lot more before temporarily ceding their constitution-given power to electoral candidates. They will increasingly look to leaders for practical and feasible ideas for solving their problems, without the clutter of ideological debates.

So, here is a working premise for future politicians: what is good, clean politics will also be practical politics. And a note for political reformers and civil society too: what appears to be the long and difficult route to political reform, in the long run, will actually turn out to be the shortest route to success!

CHAPTER 4

Chapter 4

Strengthening our Executive; Reforming our Parties

OPENING PUZZLER

Illustration conveying a Trojan horse image

The Trojan War reportedly took place between the more than 3000 years ago, probably near the western tip of modern day Turkey. One could argue that the entire Trojan War is essentially about two characters: Helen of Troy (the 'face that launched a thousand ships') and of course, the infamous Trojan Horse. Of

Why have our legislatures become the modern political equivalents of Trojan Horses?

1. Indian Legislature and Executive – Dysfunctional Twins

The events of October 2004 in Maharashtra hold a mirror to the crisis in our democratic polity. Elections to the state assembly were conducted on the Tuesday, the 13th and the results were out by the Saturday, the 16th. The incumbent coalition government won comfortably. Still, the Chief Minister resigned but the next government could not be formed even after XX days. The electors fulfilled their responsibilities by voting during elections. But the politicians apparently took too much time bargaining about who will become the CM, which coalition partner gets which portfolio, etc. There was plenty of back room dealing, political instability and the usual scramble for loaves of office in the impending cabinet expansion. The only positive aspect of this sad, sordid saga is that at least, this time, the nation did not witness outright buying and selling of legislators, party hopping and holding MLAs captive in tourist resorts in other states prior to a vote of confidence. This culture has been the norm in several states all over the country over the past few decades.

From time to time we are rudely awakened to face the ugly realities of our politics of pelf and self-aggrandizement devoid of all principles and public good. We all suitably express our distaste for the low standards of public life, and get on with our lives once the visible crisis passes. What we fail to understand is the deep and continuing crisis in our political process, reducing our democracy to shambles.

A legislator is elected in our country not as a law maker and custodian of public interest. A legislator is essentially a disguised executive, and his primary objective is to exercise unaccountable power. He is often the uncrowned king of the constituency. Politics has become big business. A lot of money, often a crore of rupees, is spent by a leading candidate for election as MLA. Once elected, the MLA decides everything that matters – transfers, postings, promotions, contracts, tenders, licenses, public projects and police cases. Robert Wade graphically documented this intricate web of corruption and abuse of office mediated largely through transfers and placements in states. While influence and power flow in one direction, money flows in the opposite direction. All functionaries in the state machinery are willing or passive players in this vicious cycle of dangerously stable equilibrium.

The administration has to do the MLA's bidding, or else there will be dissidence, rebellion and defection leading to the fall of government. Candidates spend exorbitant sums because they get multiple returns. Such returns are possible as they are the de facto and unaccountable executives. The government has to satisfy legislators because its survival depends on their good will. Given the conditions of our society, there is always this unspoken compact between the government and the legislators in a system in which the executive is drawn from the legislature, and survives only as long as it enjoys legislative majority. Honesty and political survival are thus no longer compatible under these circumstances. Our politicians are not crooked by nature. They are compelled to venality and corruption in order to acquire power and survive in office. The price paid by society to sustain governments is horrendous. Rule of law, justice, competent governance, integrity, fairness, economic growth – all are casualties. What we have in the process is change of players, but the rules of the game remain unchanged. No matter which party is elected to office, the people end up being losers. Therefore voters look for the short-term gains and either sell their vote or are swayed by emotion and divisive impulses.

When the parliamentary executive model breaks down



MLAs physically attack each other inside the Uttar Pradesh assembly hall on October 21, 1997

Act 1, Scene 1

Date: October 21, 1997

Stage: Uttar Pradesh Legislative Assembly, the highest law-making body for India's most populous state.

The Scene: Just two days earlier, ex-Chief Minister Mayawati suddenly withdrew her support to the now-CM Kalyan Singh. Still, Singh manages to win a vote of confidence in an assembly session where the opposition alleges that he employed money and muscle power to 'persuade' MLAs into voting for him. That session witnesses extraordinary scenes. Not content with hurling verbal invectives against each other, the honourable MLAs resort to pure physical violence. Chairs and microphones in the majestic circular assembly hall become cruise missiles. Mobile phones, pagers, briefcases, and even file covers become handy 'smart' weapons to precision bomb fellow MLAs. TV news channels enable millions of viewers across India to see this (per)version of legislative democracy, in full colour.

Act 1, Scene 2

Dates: February 21-26, 1998

Stage: UP Secretariat, Assembly, Governor's Residence and High Court.

The Scene: On the 21st, Kalyan Singh is dismissed by the Governor Romesh Bhandari even though he seemingly enjoys a majority in the assembly. MLA Jagadambika Pal is sworn in as the CM the same night. But the UP High Court, on February 23, stays Pal's installation. UP now seems to have two CMs – one recognized by the Governor and the other by the judiciary. Kalyan Singh and Jagadambika Pal enact an unparalleled scene, with Pal sitting in the Chief Minister's office claiming to be the man in charge, and Singh presiding over a Cabinet meeting in the adjoining Cabinet room.

On Feb 26th, a one-of-a-kind vote of confidence takes place in the UP Assembly House where Pal and Singh *both* sat as CM contenders on either side of the Speaker's Chair. The MLAs have to vote for one and the majority chooses Singh. However, in less than two years from this day, he would be ousted from the CM's position - by his own party.

Act 2, Scene 1

Date: Present day

Stage: Uttar Pradesh

The Scene: Both Singh and Pal still remain 'key players' in UP's electoral politics.

In this system, the state government, legislators and senior officials - all want centralization, discretion and patronage. That is the reason why the corrupt, centralized, automatic system of governance is very resilient.

We need to take a hard look at our system of drawing executive from legislature. A clear separation of powers between legislature and executive with sufficient checks and balances to prevent abuse of office alone will break this vicious cycle of money power, corruption and survival of governments. We need to elect the head of the government directly, and he should be free to choose his cabinet from outside legislature. Such a government will have fixed term of office, and will have to carry the legislature with it in order to get laws passed. Its powers are actually more limited as the legislature will zealously guard its independence. Now the legislature is least interested in making laws, and whatever the government wants is enacted, as long as it enjoys majority support in legislature.

Yet, many people harbour legitimate fears of authoritarianism at the national level if a single individual is seen as the fountain of all executive power. In reality, a directly elected president is much less powerful than a prime minister enjoying a comfortable majority. However, these fears of bonapartism cannot be dismissed lightly. Therefore it would be best if we continued with the parliamentary executive as the national level. But there cannot be any fear of authoritarianism of the directly elected executive at the state level. The Union government, Supreme Court, Election Commission and other constitutional authorities are more than adequate to check executive tyranny in states.

For too long we persisted with the disguised executive model in states based on the Westminster system. Governance has been a causality, and the nation paid a heavy price as a result. It is time we woke up from our deep slumber and redesigned our democracy to ensure integrity, stability, competence and good governance through separation of powers.

The Trojan Horse Model: Legislator as disguised executive

One of the main causes of this decline in politics and political discourse is the fact that the legislative office is not perceived by the candidates as well as the general public as one of law making and keeping the executive under check. Legislators are seen by the people, and themselves, as the disguised executive. The Indian Union and even States are too large for any social group to gain complete dominance or decisive influence. The sheer diversity of our society ensures that no group can really exercise control over a whole State or nation. When we come to the constituency level, it is an altogether different proposition. The local dominant castes or groups can, and do, exercise near-total control. When these groups elect the disguised executive in the form of a legislator, what they are looking for is control of the executive branch of government through that legislator. There is little concern for law making. Those few people's representatives who discharge their legitimate public duties fairly and diligently are likely to either lose support of dominant groups, or fall prey to the rejection vote in the election. What the dominant groups want is a legislator who can get a local police or revenue official transferred, who can intervene on behalf of the accused in a criminal case, or at best one who can be a dispenser of patronage in the form of many government welfare schemes. In our constitutional scheme of things, these legislators' support is critical for the survival of the

government. Rarely is this support given on the basis of principles or ideology or public opinion. Invariably, there is a price extracted for such support, which can be in many forms. The executive is then at the mercy of the legislators, on whose continued good will and support its survival depends. As a consequence, integrity and survival in power are not compatible any longer.

In addition, as the local legislator is elected more as a representative of the dominant castes or groups, he doesn't stand for an ideology or a mandate or poll platform. His main purpose is to further the interests of the dominant groups or castes as a legislator, or as a minister, if he can muster enough support to become one. As the people have to choose between two or three contenders of similar unsavory background, the choice is often between Tweedledom and Tweedledee. As the political executive is drawn from those elected in this process, it is almost always certain that we have ministers, who have neither common purpose, nor larger vision, nor deep understanding of public affairs. The council of ministers is very often a loose collection of warring tribes, perpetually feuding for crumbs of office or to further their own group or caste interests. This situation, coupled with the public anger and frustration in the political process as evidenced by the rejection vote, makes it impossible to have any honest or far-sighted governance.

All governance is then reduced to patronage, and transfers and postings of bureaucrats. As Robert Wade pointed out, there is a well-developed market for public office in India. Money habitually changes hands for placement and continuity of public servants at various levels. These public servants in turn have to collect 'rent' from the public. The hafta paid to a policeman, the mamool charged by the excise official, the bribe collected by the revenue functionary or the corruption of a transport officer are all part of a well-integrated, well-organised structure. This vicious cycle of money power, bureaucratic placements, political power, muscle power and election battles based on dominance of local factions is extremely well-entrenched and resilient and cannot be dismantled by a few good deeds of a few good people or by incremental reform or tinkering with the system. It is this vicious cycle that leads to the pervasive corruption that large sections of citizenry in all walks of life are disenchanting with, and which is enfeebling ordinary citizens. With the exclusion of the people from the political process or governance, except for voting once in a while in favour of a candidate who is imposed on them, most people are sullen, resentful, angry and frustrated. No matter how many times they reject a government or party, no matter how often they give vent to their anger and frustration through public protests, demonstrations, and at times violence, the real character of governance does not seem to change; the local public servant behaves in the same manner as always — corrupt, greedy, arrogant and arbitrary.

Often the fear of rejection compels governments to adopt highly short-sighted and populist measures. However, as a general rule they do not help, as the exchequer is soon depleted, and the people have no respect for a government that is venal irrespective of the direct subsidies. In any case, they realise that even when a government makes earnest attempts to improve their lot, its power to do good is extremely limited, while its capacity for harming public interest is enormous. A large and important part of people's lives is neither touched by the government, nor are the people given control over it to guide their own destinies. Many perceptive observers noted this extra-ordinary crisis of the Indian polity over the years and commented on the

ungovernability of India. Galbraith, for instance characterised India as a "functioning anarchy" decades ago. Increasingly today, it has become a dysfunctional anarchy.

Who's In Charge?

Nobody! With this confusion of roles, blame-throwing and finding alibis for non-performance has become commonplace. No one takes responsibility for the functions of government, so when things go wrong, we have nobody to turn to.

A Chief Minister's Loss is a Governor's Gain

While elected heads of the states have little room to manoeuvre, the polity is further distorted by the roles of Governors, who as unaccountable Constitutional functionaries, have vast powers of selecting a chief minister, dismissing a government, dissolving the legislature, recommending President's Rule under Article 356 and reserving a bill passed by the legislature for the President's assent under Article 200. While the elected governments are caught in a deadlock, governors can use and have used their powers in a highly discretionary and partisan manner, especially when the government in the State does not enjoy political support from the Centre.

Keeping the Localities Weak

Due to the power without accountability in the hands of state legislators, local governments are deliberately kept weak and ineffectual. A state legislator, whose primary concern is political patronage, sees the elected local representatives as rivals encroaching on his or her territory. States rarely show any commitment to transferring resources, functions and control to local governments. As the state's political executive owes its survival entirely to legislators' goodwill and support, it is but natural that local governments would not be allowed to take root against the will of legislators. Even the constitutional obligations of constituting local governments and holding regular and periodic elections are violated with impunity.

Captive parliamentary executive in States

There is ample evidence to show that the parliamentary executive model that served to unite India has actually proved to be counterproductive in States.

Given the dominance of local entrenched groups and the culture of disguised executive, two consequences follow. Firstly elections at the local level are often a test of supremacy of the local oligarchies, and public opinion and popular sovereignty are a far cry given the dominance of the local elites. As the legislative office is key to executive power at the State level, getting elected as a MLA is of crucial importance for political survival. Therefore all means – money, muscle power, other inducements, threats, brute force – are liberally employed to get elected locally. Party affiliation and ideologies have no real meaning to these local oligarchies, and what matters is supremacy in faction struggle. Thus the parliamentary executive system has exacerbated electoral irregularities, voting fraud and vote buying at the assembly constituency level.

Secondly, the legislator is elected not to legislate and monitor the government's functioning, but to exercise executive authority in legislator's garb. As a result, the legislator's role in routine executive sphere is awesome.

Reversal of Roles

In fact in States, parliamentary executive system has led to a curious reversal of roles. The legislator's real concern is to function as the disguised and unaccounted executive. Therefore he has little concern for legislation. Laws are often enacted perfunctorily, without the serious attention they deserve. Budgets are approved with utmost casualness, all the legislative bluff and bluster ultimately signifying nothing. A strong chief minister with comfortable majority in the legislature, particularly with a commanding role in his party, can ride roughshod over both his cabinet colleagues and the legislature. With complete control of the legislature and executive, the chief minister can be a highly authoritarian figure. The executive thus completely controls the legislative agenda, and the legislators in turn control the local executive decisions in an unaccountable manner. This development has led to another reversal of roles in day-to-day administration. The elected political executive is busy with day-to-day management of politics of survival. Therefore much of the executive's time and energy are spent in retaining the legislators' support, leaving little attention to governance and policy making. Therefore much of the policy making, except in respect of short-term populist policies, is left to the bureaucracy. Thus, the politician is content to pay attention to day-to-day policy implementation, patronage and transfers and postings, and the bureaucracy is fulfilling the task of policy formulation. This unhealthy tendency has severely undermined our democracy and made our political process increasingly self-serving and unaccountable.

With this confusion of roles, blame-throwing and finding alibis for non-performance have become endemic. As authority is often divorced from accountability, and de facto power is delinked from *de jure* authority, accountability suffered. While things deteriorate, there is no one to assume responsibility. This again resulted in short-term populism and high centralization of power through patronage-distribution. In view of the systemic nature of the problem, electoral verdicts and change of governments do not necessarily improve the situation. As high and illegitimate expenditure is the necessary accompaniment of the constituency-based election of the legislator as disguised political executive, power is bound to be abused for private gain. Corruption is thus ubiquitous as most public services are controlled by rent-seekers in this vicious cycle of 'dangerously stable equilibrium', as described by Robert Wade. Elections often change the players, but the rules of the game are unchanged.

As explained earlier, given the compulsions of the patronage-based political culture dominated by local oligarchies, the talent available in State legislatures for executive office is extremely inadequate. As the parliamentary executive can be drawn only from the legislature, the quality of the cabinet suffered grievously over a period of time. This led to significant decline in the quality of governance and decision-making. Even when a party has a clear mandate and there is clarity in goals, and even if legislators' interference in day-to-day executive decisions is kept under check, the quality of ministers is often less than adequate to meet the complex requirements of modern democratic governance. As a result, even sound policies have failed to yield dividends for want of the ability to translate ideas into effective action. School education, health care, police reform, population control, employment generation, investment promotion, sustainable

natural resource development, anti-poverty measures, policies for promotion of equity and social justice have all suffered even when the governments have recognised the need to pursue sound policies for their own political gains. For a complex country with myriad problems of great magnitude, the political talent available in State legislatures is woefully inadequate.

In conclusion, our parliamentary democratic institutions have served reasonably well, at least to the extent of preserving freedoms, sustaining a competitive, open electoral process and facilitating frequent change of governments. But the severe distortions on account of our failure to evolve a democratic political culture has made our political and state institutions captives in the hands of unaccountable oligarchies. The flaws in electoral process have severely distorted our democracy, undermined our institutions and increasingly alienated the best citizens from politics and elections. The FPTP electoral system we have chosen, coupled with territorial representation has tended to consolidate local oligarchies and promote modern zamindaris. This coupled with administrative centralization has made our citizens subjects, and our representatives and bureaucrats their masters. The Westminster model at state level encouraged the unaccountable, disguised executive, institutionalized corruption, undermined accountability and made honesty and political survival increasingly incompatible.

2. Reforms for an Effective Executive

Just as the political system of the country needs to be ideally suited to the conditions within the country, the various states too have requirements from the political system, which are not being met. There is a strong and compelling case for a directly elected executive in states and the separation of powers in states. Although there can be an argument that this is a national problem as well as a problem of states, it is in the states that we can most effectively implement reform without fears of the concentration of powers in the hands of the executive.

Will the Direct Election of State Executives change the system?

Before outlining how the direct election of the Chief Minister will help mitigate the present problems, it is essential to allay fears that arise every time there is talk of increasing executive powers. Many Indians remember the Emergency and the associated breakdown of democracy in that period. But the same arguments against direct election of the executive at the national level don't hold true at the state level. There cannot be any serious fear of authoritarianism in states as the Union government, Supreme Court and Election Commission are constitutionally mandated with the powers to intervene against abuses of power.

Separation of Power Leads to a Reduction in its Misuse

Fears aside, direct election of the executive and separation of powers have several clear and decisive advantages in the states. The legislator can no longer be a disguised and unaccountable member of the executive. This would immediately cut him or her off from the patronage based politics and local domination. Furthermore, this would lead to a reduction in vote-buying and local electoral irregularities as the constituency legislative election would not determine

executive office. This could lead to serious minded and public-spirited citizens aspiring for legislative office and even for the top job.

We'll Know Who's Responsible

As the executive will be unaffected by day-to-day interference of legislators in local executive decisions, there can be focussed governance. The alibis for non-performance will no longer be available, and authority and accountability will be vested in the same body. But the legislature will not be without powers either. It will finally have real control over law-making and budget approval. The executive will always have to carry the legislature along on its path to achieving the legislative agenda and policies.

Importantly, this measure would go a long way in creating a closer compatibility between honesty and political survival. As the executive's survival is independent of legislators' support, honest and unbiased action will be possible in matters of governance. Moreover, the executive will be able to recruit the finest expertise outside the legislature, thereby dramatically improving the discharge of government functions.

Eliminating the Middle-Man

The need for nominated governors will also cease to exist, thereby leading to direct and constructive federal relations between the Centre and the States. The elimination of a nominated intermediary would immediately build more trustful federal relations, while strengthening state autonomy at the same time. Also, since both the executive and the legislature will be elected separately, there is no threat of constantly changing governments and frequent elections. The dismissal of a state government would only be necessary in grave situations like secession and civil war.

What guarantees do we have to ensure that a directly elected Head of State and the legislature in the states will be able to work together?

When the Legislature is separated from the Executive, an element of healthy competition too is a consequence. For the sake of smoother, more efficient functioning of the state machinery both the Head of State and the Legislature will have to be lawful and transparent in the conduct of governance. After all both are now directly answerable to the people. Moreover the only tool in the hands of the legislature to directly oppose the Head of State is impeachment for a limited number of offences. Conversely, the Head of State can't override the wishes of the legislature, regardless of which party (or block of parties) is in the majority, because every change in the law has to be passed through the legislative assembly.

*Cartoon of a bespectacled
Masterji with stick in hand*

Politics for the Politicians of Tomorrow
Masterji says ...

Positive Approach or Negative Tactics?
Should you be accommodating or strongly aggressive?

Mention the words 'political discussion' and most Indians conjure up images of throwing mud and hurling allegations against fellow politicians, in their mind. To the ordinary Indian, present day's hi-decibel, accusatory and aggressive politics seems to be completely dominated by negative attitudes and 'scorch-earth tactics' of the politicians. This is precisely why a majority of voters are immediately put off by the mere mention of the P word.

How to make politics more appealing and

Instead of falling into the rut of negative tactics, try to identify the positive aspects of political issues and work towards communicating win-win solutions. It helps greatly to think in terms of long term strategic good and not just short term tactical victories. Being overly aggressive might yield you temporary results (usually in terms of public or media attention for a short while) but it reduces your options in the long term. Don't forget: getting noticed is not the same thing as getting accepted. In fact, it eventually pays to be accommodating even with people who disagree with your views.

But, here is a caution: do not compromise on your core values and principles. When it comes to the crunch situation, go ahead and strongly defend what is correct and good for the country. But aggressiveness should be limited to the 'substance'; it should not spill over into the 'style.' In politics of modern India, style can only give you a little help; it is the substance that finally counts. As my mother used to say, the *masala* should not dominate the *sabji*! This holds true for politics at national, state, local and for that matter, at your office, university or even the school level.

It might surprise many but, in politics, nice guys do finish first.

3. Political parties, Indian democracy, but no democratic politics

Role of political parties

In India, traditionally parties have been seen as pocket boroughs of those at the helm. Often there are entry barriers to members. Communist parties have always had a somewhat strict membership admission procedure, which is generally uniform in its application. The mainstream parties which are mass-based and have no rigid membership norms, however, have been erecting barriers of entry to all persons who are potential threats to the current leadership. While ordinary, faceless members are admitted as cannon-fodder with ease, the potentially influential members are not always welcomed with open arms. Similarly, even the faintest criticism of party bosses on any issue is taken as an act of indiscipline, often leading to suspension or expulsion. Again, when leadership changes in the party, the same member who was earlier punished for rebellion is welcomed back with alacrity. There are countless instances of such disgraceful autocracy in all major political parties in India.

The political parties, which exhibit such authoritarian tendencies in protecting the privileges of those in power and nipping in the bud any potential threat to individual dominance have not shown the slightest sense of shame or remorse in assiduously cultivating and recruiting known criminals, corrupt persons and charlatans and rogues. Such shady elements are courted and welcomed, while decent and dignified citizens are shunned and often rejected. No major mainstream party has any published membership rolls. Spurious membership and disputes arising out of it are only too well known to all of us in respect of major political parties. As a net result, parties have often become a collection of greedy, corrupt and unscrupulous persons, who are willing to use any method, however ugly, immoral, violent or brutal, to perpetuate their hold on state power. By virtue of entry barriers and expulsion powers in the hands of party bosses, no real rejuvenation of parties with injection of fresh blood is possible. All idealistic, talented youngsters are often repelled by the parties, and undesirable elements find a haven in them.

As a perceptive political observer commented some years ago, in Indian political parties, 'the man who wears the crown is the king'. Leadership is often acquired through undemocratic means and retained by the power of patronage, nomination and expulsion, rather than the support of members. This paved way for oligarchies and unaccountable and un-elected coteries dominating and manipulating the political process. Party leadership, however illegitimate the ascent to it may be, gives total control of the party apparatus and resources. Through total monopoly over candidates' choice, the leadership's access to, and control over, levers of state power is complete and unchallenged. Given the fact that most parties are dominated by only one leader, and not even a small group, 'monarchy' is the correct description of party leadership. Once in office, the power of leadership is absolute, and control of resources is awesome. Any potential dissidence or principled opposition is instantly snuffed out. Suspension, expulsion,

instant removal from office, denial of party tickets, all these and more weapons are fully available to leadership if there is any whiff of opposition. If the party is in power, state machinery is used for party ends, and more often to perpetuate absolute control over the party and state, with cynical disregard to propriety and public good. All positions in the regional and local units are nominated by the party leader. Every party functionary owes his or her position to the grace and good will of the 'High Command'. Myths and images are assiduously propagated to perpetuate personal power. No other party functionary or leader is allowed to share the limelight. The moment a local or rival national leader is gaining in popularity, he is immediately cut to size, removed from office, and if necessary expelled from the party to deny him a political base, and force him into political wilderness.

Membership rolls are not available, and when prepared are often spurious. Elections are not held, and if held are rigged. Musclemen often take over party meetings and conferences at various levels, and fisticuffs and violence are quite common. All parties, without exception, nominate candidates for public office through the dictates of the leadership or high command. All funds are collected clandestinely and spent at will to further augment personal power. State level 'leaders' are nominated by the 'high command'. When a party is elected to office in any State, the legislature party leader, who will be Chief Minister, is nominated by the central leadership, and formally anointed in a farcical 'election'. Often sealed covers are sent indicating the name of the person chosen as Chief Minister by the party leadership. There are instances in which persons who did not command the support of even a handful of legislators became Chief Ministers. Even candidates for public office in local government elections and cooperatives are decided by the party's central leadership. When the party obtains a majority in a local election, again the zilla parishad chairman or other functionaries are decided by the party bosses far removed from the scene. In short, political party functioning has become totally autocratic, oligarchic, unaccountable and undemocratic. The whole political process and all democratic institutions are systematically subverted. Party leaders have become medieval potentates, with the sole intent of survival in power, and bequeathing their office to their family members or chosen successors.

We as a people have an abiding and legitimate interest in the affairs of parties. As we have seen, parties are by no means private clubs looking after their personal interest. They are the engines of democracy and instruments of governance in society. They seek and acquire power over us, and in reality have effective, and unbreakable monopoly over power. The power of the party cartels cannot be checked by forming new parties. Experience everywhere shows that the hope of new parties emerging and spawning a new culture rejuvenating the political process is a pipe dream. The emergence of a successful new political party itself is a rare phenomenon in modern world. The emergence Telugu Desam Party in Andhra Pradesh was one such rare example. A combination of unusual circumstances – a strong-willed, extremely popular leader who became an idol to millions as a successful film star, absence of a viable political alternative to the dominant ruling party, people's disgust with misgovernance and corruption, and a strong anti-establishment sentiment have brought about a major political change in 1983 in Andhra Pradesh. However, as events have shown, the same new party has become a replica of Congress, and has conformed to the iron law of Indian politics – 'all mainstream, centrist parties imitate Congress and become its clones'. This fate is seen in varying degrees in many parties. The Janata of 1977, which took birth from the anger of people, and its various progeny; BJP, which

claimed indigenous cultural roots and promised a brave new world, and yet lost its sheen in office within a few months; the regional parties like the two Dravidian parties, whose origin was based on cultural regionalism; the Shiv Sena, which rose out of urban middle class frustration; the many other religious, tribal, caste, and regional ethnic parties with bases all over India – all these have proved to be no different from Congress in organizational ethos and internal functioning. Of the three truly ideology-driven parties, Swatantra party and Socialists disappeared, and Communists continue their policy of splendid isolation and democratic centralism, unmindful of the tectonic shifts in global and Indian politics.

From this bird's eye view of Indian political parties, it is clear that we, as a people, have stakes in their functioning and future. The moment they seek power over us, and control over state apparatus, they forfeit their claim to immunity from public scrutiny and state regulation based on reasonable restraints. This is particularly true in a climate in which they have proved to be utterly irresponsible, unaccountable and autocratic, perpetuating individual control over levers of power and political organization, entirely for personal aggrandizement, self and privilege. Therefore, in a deep sense, the crisis in political parties is a national crisis, and has to be resolved by a national effort. This leads us to the inescapable conclusion that there should be internal democracy in parties, regulated by law, and monitored and supervised by statutory authorities. Every party, by law, should be obligated to practice internal democracy in all respects. The details of functioning can be left to the party's own constitution, but it should conform to the broad principles of democracy stated clearly in law. The actual practice of internal democracy should be verifiable by an external agency, say the Election Commission. Mandatory publication of membership rolls of political parties at local level, election of leadership at every level by secret ballot supervised by the Election Commission, a comprehensive prohibition on nominations of office bearers or expulsion of rivals, a well-established system to challenge the leadership of incumbents at every level, and justiciability of these internal democratic processes through special tribunals – all these measures could form the basis of any meaningful reform and regulation of political parties. Extreme care and caution should, however, be exercised to ensure that a party's democratic choices of leadership or its espousal of policies are not in any way directly or indirectly influenced by law or external monitoring agencies. The party leaders and its policies should be judged only by the public, in the market place of ideas and in elections.

And yet we are a truly functioning democracy. This paradox of serious distortions in electoral process on the one hand, and reasonably fair verdicts at macro level on the other hand baffles us. This is possible largely because ours is a system of compensatory errors. Most of the leading parties and candidates are good at this game of manipulation, and each neutralises the other! Mercifully the state is genuinely neutral in our elections, and strong institutions like the Election Commission ensure a fair degree of impartiality and efficiency.

But a democracy which neither facilitates rapid economic growth nor creates conditions for peace, harmony and rule of law in many parts of the country does not satisfy us. While democracy seems to be doing better, we feel worse! Even the communal disturbances deliberately provoked by the political class expose its bankruptcy. The only way parties feel assured of vote mobilization is through crude appeal to primordial loyalties. Politics of individuation are anathema to our parties, and vote bank politics through caste and communal polarization are a sure recipe for political relevance.

Worst of all, we have created political fiefdoms resembling ancient monarchies or medieval Zamindaris. Little dynasties have spawned all over the country and these oligarchies have a vice-like grip over our legislatures. A careful analysis of the nearly 5000 legislative offices in States and Lok Sabha will reveal that probably two-thirds of them are controlled by about 10,000 well-connected political families. No matter which party wins, power alternates between members of these families. Politics has become big business. Big investments are made in elections, and much bigger profits are reaped once elected to office. A legislator is more a disguised and unaccountable executive than a public representative.

For too long we trotted out democracy as an excuse for our failures. In reality, democracy is our strength, and all these and other ills could be corrected genuinely democratic instruments, backed by the consensus which only democracy fosters. And yet, we deliberately distorted our democratic institutions and practices, and blame everything on the failure of democracy. The real problem is not a surfeit of liberty, but a deficit of democracy. The ills of a democracy can be overcome only by more and better democracy. Decentralization of power, restoration of rule of law and speedy justice, comprehensive electoral reforms to attract the best talent and reject the professional parasites, and instruments of accountability – these are needed to invigorate our democracy and promote economic growth. There is much that we can be proud of in our record of 50 years of parliament. There is also much that has gone wrong. The political class owes it to the nation to give up shibboleths for once, and provide clear, honest direction. We need simple, uncomplicated national goals, and specific, practical, effective institutional reforms to achieve them. We have it in us to make lot of difference in a short-while. The millions of jobless youngsters are getting impatient. We need to act quickly.

4. Political Party Transparency: the foundation for effective governance

Political parties are the engines of any democracy and the instruments of governance in all mature democracies. All power derived from the people is channelised through elected representatives who are given the popular mandate in a variety of elections across the country. Political parties are instrumental in this process as they seek power over us by fielding candidates for elections, who upon winning have an effective and unbreakable monopoly over legislating on the future of the entire polity. But unfortunately, while being the bodies that benefit most directly from democratic processes, political parties tend to be deeply undemocratic in their internal functioning, leading to severely limited options being presented time and again to the electorate. *It is our power that they exercise, so we have a right to know how they conduct their affairs.*

Behind Closed Doors: What's Happening in the Party Headquarters?

While political scandals hit the front pages of our newspapers everyday, most of us are completely unaware of what goes on behind closed doors in party headquarters across the country. The party is the foundation upon which all people with political ambitions build their

careers, but the only time party affairs make the news is when there is a split or defection. Many of us lament the end of issue and ideology based politics, but none of us make the connection to political parties, which are supposed to be the font of policies and ideology.

This situation is the direct result of the autocratic and unaccountable functioning of political parties. While people who don't adhere to the party's stated aims and ideology are often invited to join when it suits the party leadership, many others are often barred from entry or are expelled merely because they oppose the leadership. The coteries, individuals and families controlling parties are so firmly entrenched that there is no realistic hope of members being allowed to organise themselves and challenge the leadership and evolve democratic procedures. The fact that political parties are recipients of funds, which are largely unaccounted for, makes the lack of transparency even more problematic as the same leaders and influential people who control the membership also control the flow of party funding.

Knowledge is Power

Given these facts, it is obvious that there is a need for proper regulation and accountability of political parties in any mature and well-functioning democracy. It is clear from the Indian experience that centralised and autocratic party control is inimical to democracy. In Britain, Germany, Norway, Sweden, Belgium, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and several other countries, there are formal, inviolable democratic procedures by which party members at the constituency level, or their elected delegates at the local or regional level select candidates after an interview and by secret ballot. *The central party's role is limited to endorsing those candidates selected democratically at the local level.*

There is therefore a need for legislation in India on the same lines as the Political Parties Act in Germany. This law should govern, among other things:

- matters related to membership;
- register of members and disciplinary procedures;
- regular election of office bearers by secret ballot;
- right of dissent;
- democratic decision making and full and open debate on policy options;
- regular filing of accurate receipts and disbursements;
- severe penalties for non-disclosure and other violations;
- public auditing of accounts;
- right to information for the public;
- and fair and democratic choice of candidates by members or their elected delegates through formal procedures and secret ballot.

The Election Commission of India or any other independent body specially created for this purpose should be entrusted with the responsibility of enforcing the law, penalizing defaulters

and adjudicating on disputes. It is only when political parties themselves are democratic that they can uphold the democratic spirit of the country and empower its citizens.

PR and Party Transparency

The most important issue to be determined in a PR system is the method of selection of party candidates. In India, the central leadership of political parties has absolute control over the choice of candidates, and the fear is that this would extend to the manipulation of party lists by a chosen few. Bringing political parties in compliance with the internationally accepted rules of party organisation is therefore a must. There should be a party conference of elected delegates in every electoral district, and the conference should select the candidates on the party list and their rank by secret ballot. There should be other strict internal democratic norms like open membership, democratic choice of leadership, transparent funding and accountability – all monitored by the Election Commission.

Measures for enforcing party transparency can be passed, but how can we ensure that they are carried out?

It is only with stringent laws governing party functioning that stringent enforcement can be carried out. At present, the Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) order of 1968, the Representation of the People Act, 1951, the Anti-Defection Act 2003 and the Registration of Parties Act 1951 do not directly deal with internal party functioning to any useful extent. Through legislation directly dealing with membership, register of members, disciplinary action, regular election of office bearers by secret ballot and regular maintenance of accounts, parties will find it harder to default on their obligations. Public awareness which in turn strengthens the hands of the Election Commission and the Comptroller and Auditor General would make marked changes in party functioning. In the areas that the Election Commission regulates at present like election advertising and re-polling in constituencies where unfair means are used, it has had a steadily improving track record. Similarly if public demand strengthens the hands of the Election Commission

Chapter 4: Review & Summary

*Cartoon of a bespectacled
Masterji with stick in hand*

Politics for the Politicians of Tomorrow
Masterji says ...

Don't marry Problems; Strive for Solutions

The public has several concerns and problems. Effective articulation of people's concerns is the first lesson in political communication. But don't fall into the trap of problem description. While it might help you get initial 'face recognition' in room crowded with politicians of all colours, it does not take you far. Start focusing on the solutions, not just the problems themselves.

There are several issues where we desperately need our leaders to think creatively and act decisively. Our country is facing ever-worsening problems of enormous magnitude: unemployment of millions, government officials and authorities who do not seem to care about our welfare, lack of even basic water security for nearly two-thirds of Indian population, bankrupt state treasuries, increasing environmental pollution and lack of effective public transport - these are just a few. Speaking politically, these problems are far more difficult than the issues of imperial rule and foreign aggression addressed some decades ago (*can you figure out why?*).

These are not problems that can be solved by the run-of-the-mill *netas*. Such serious problems can be addressed only by the collective and informed assertion of the citizens. We also need genuine public leaders. These 100% *shuddh* leaders of tomorrow are those who:

1. Have the vision to identify the right kind of public issues (i.e. the 'problems')
2. Have the creative ability to evolve the right kind of solutions
3. Publicly articulate these solutions in an effective manner and finally,
4. Have the conviction and character to ensure the delivery (even in the face of persistent opposition) of these solutions to the target groups of citizens.

So, befriend the problems but stick to solutions!

CHAPTER 5

Chapter 5

The Roadmap to Reforms

OPENING PUZZLER

*Image/Illustration of woman or man standing in front of a road that divides into several paths.
The person is apparently not sure of which path to choose.*

1. What is Janadesh/ National Campaign for Political Reforms?

Why NCPR?

At the heart of any healthy democracy are its citizens. Yet in our country all too often the ordinary citizen seems disempowered and marginal, with little recourse to rights and institutional support. The legal channels are long and cumbersome with little hope of justice unless one has both money and influence. The ordinary citizen is therefore left feeling cynical and at a loss as to where he/she stands in this democratic monolith. Ironically, even politicians supposedly the drivers of the democratic engine are all too often lost on the road, taking to corruption and power rather than the good of the people. In fact it would seem as if the entire system has become a kind of spiders-web in which those on the inside don't know how to get out and those on the outside neither want to nor can get inside. Each group watches the other with undisguised suspicion and even contempt.

And yet we have much to be proud of. Despite all the ills of democracy, the spirit of freedom is strong and robust in our country. More than half of our population is young, energetic and looking for opportunities to improve themselves and the lot of their people. Ordinary citizens across the length and breadth of the country are unsung heroes doing whatever little they can to better the lives of those around them. Millions living abroad, moved perhaps by nostalgia or the spirit of service wish to give back a little to the country they call their own. Can we not all come together to become one strong, forceful voice of change rather than being disparate, often conflicting whistles in the dark? The idea behind the National Campaign for political reforms is just that.

NCPR objectives

The aim of the National campaign For Electoral Reforms is two-fold: to change the present first-past-the-post-system (FPTP) to a mixed Proportional Representation (PR) system, with elements of the former and to bring in direct elections for the chief Minister or Governor at the State Level. At a glance, both of these objectives are achievable by persuading political opinion rather than taxing ordinary citizens who may or may not have much knowledge or know-how on these issues. But our reasons for wanting these two key changes to the political system are both numerous and intrinsically linked to the ordinary citizen.

The process of power is central to the way a democracy runs. FPTP made money power, criminal contacts, and local caste clout the dominant factors in elections, leading to a vicious cycle of corruption, perpetuation of political fiefdoms, denial of entry to honest and competent persons, vote bank politics and communal polarization. Parliamentary executive made honesty and survival in states incompatible, with legislators seeking transfers, postings and a say in contracts, tenders, and crime investigation in return for their continued support to government.

Accountability, transparency, the right to information are all about putting the individual at the heart of power. Ridding the system of money and muscle-power, insisting on internal party democracy so that the link between the ordinary citizen's vote and the 'merit' of the individual

party candidate is evident are again ways of reinforcing the centrality of the individual. Cleaner water, quality education or better health-care are the rights of every citizen and should be demanded through due democratic processes, the pinnacle of which is the vote cast by citizens every five years. For these votes to count in any meaningful sense, to be heard as the demands of ordinary people over the next five years, alternative systems of PR and direct elections have to become the bedrock of change.

So how do we achieve our goals? Strategically while several within the political elite are enlightened enough to see the value of change, for many swimming out of the present murky waters onto cleaner shores may cause much heartburn and resistance. If ordinary people can be humoured and persuaded to hang up their coat of cynicism in favour of a new way of being, namely in action, a new kind of politics will have been born — a politics of the people which has the potential to be the forceful lever of change sweeping away any resistance even amongst the political elite. And it's here that the media can play a key role; through one or a series of television spots which can make people see that there is indeed a relationship between their life and the wider society, that a cleaner politics, a better quality of life begins with the everyday demands of ordinary citizens. **Our target groups are youth, the apolitical, disenchanting middle class, opinion makers, ordinary citizens and politicians.** A website will also be launched (www.janadesh...) and a logo identity created to act as the invisible thread of a common link between people who may speak in different languages but ask for the same thing.

Janadesh Logo

(a little bit on the logo of Janadesh)

The campaign will be centred round 8 major cities and states – Delhi, Mumbai, Calcutta, Chennai, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Pune and Ahmedabad. It will be in Hindi, English and regional languages, and spread over television and print media. Nodal groups will be identified in each of these major cities to guide the campaign and evolve and implement response-capture mechanisms

Over the course of the next few months we will be having a series of meetings in different major cities to persuade through presentation and discussion 'opinion-makers' and NGOs to join our campaign. Those enthusiastic and with potential will be trained to take up the task of organization and co-ordination at the State level so that when the communication campaign is finally launched there is a 'response capturing mechanism' in place. Alongside we will in the next few months need to identify one or two key activities in which all concerned citizens can participate. Through these simple activities people will gain the confidence to both ask for more of what is their right and create a movement for systemic changes to Indian polity.

In short, the Campaign will aim to make people aware of the solutions to our political and governance crisis; give a clear rationale as to why we, the people, should care to change things ('what is there in it for me'); and mobilize public opinion through simple and tangible activities within easy reach of citizens.

2. Strategy for achieving Political Reforms: Drivers of Change Catalysts

Media

Despite low levels of literacy, India has very vibrant and independent media. There has been breath-taking proliferation of mass media in recent years. There are over 49000 registered newspapers of all kinds, of which 20000 are in Hindi. The combined circulation of all newspapers is over 130 million. Over 800 films are produced annually, and exhibited in about 10,000 theaters all over India. There are 120 million radio sets, with an estimated 20% of population regularly listening. There are 65 million television sets, with half the population of India regularly watching. 35 million households have Cable TV connections and 21% of the population is covered by FM radio. 35 million telephones over 10 million mobile phones, and over 5 million PCs with internet subscribers complete the list of communication channels. The last decade has seen a remarkable expansion of media and communications network. Feature films for long have been regarded as powerful medium affecting lives and influencing minds. People in all sections, particularly the poor and middle-income groups, are influenced by films. In some ways it can be said that films and cricket have been two of the unifying features of Indian social life. But in general the films have not helped generate deep understanding of, or vigorous debate about, poverty, equity issues, access to education and health, and opportunities for vertical mobility. Films are generally based on song and dance and romance, or great exploits of the all-conquering hero. Occasionally they have tended to question caste divisions and ugly practices like dowry. But the focus has largely been on pure entertainment by transporting the viewer to a dream world.

The rapid proliferation and expanding reach of television over the last decade makes television a powerful medium. Television certainly led to rising expectations, and to some extent changing attitudes on matters like sex. But much of popular television is based on films and largely unsophisticated soap operas. While technical quality of television is improving, the content is disappointing. However, television has become increasingly popular among middle classes and urban poor. Its reach is expanding to even sections of rural poor. The viewers are getting tired of films and mindless emotional dramas. With the involvement of highly creative writers and artistes, television entertainment can be combined with subliminal messages of great power, and helping change attitudes and break social barriers.

In general Indian media have not focused attention on issues of empowerment, education and health care. The press is free and fiercely independent. But neither media debates nor political disclosure focus on real issues of people and poverty. Day to day political maneuvers and power games tend to dominate media space. No serious debate is generated on critical public services affecting the poor. There is plenty of sensationalism and criticism of government and political parties in general. Corruption is unearthed and discussed frequently. The press is sharply critical of the establishment, and creates a demand for change of governments. But there is no serious debate on genuine institutional reform, sustainable improvement of public services, and quality of governance.

But there is no doubt that media can play a powerful role in creating a climate conducive to poverty reduction and empowerment of the poor. In many ways, media reflect the prevailing

political culture and social values. But they can also help shape the political process and attitudes. Serious research of high quality and sensible analysis can be effective tools to influence media and generate strong debate and promote awareness.

Reform-minded elites: Bureaucracy

India has over 350 million workers, of whom only 28 million, constituting 8 percent, are in the organized sector earning secure monthly wages. Of these 28 million, about 20 million, or over 70% are employed by the union and state governments or public sector enterprises.

Indian bureaucracy is large and powerful. In particular, the two all-India services, IAS and IPS, wield considerable influence. But the bureaucracy as a class has not shown any serious inclination to reform the system or improve governance. A sense of common purpose, and enlightened nation-building efforts are missing. In general, bureaucracy has been content to protect its power and privilege, and preserve status quo. But there are reform-minded elements whose influence has been profound and lasting.

In the early months of independence, civil servants like VP Menon played an extraordinary role in nation-building. They worked in tandem with political leadership and laboured with great sense of purpose. During the hey day of state-centered economic activity, several civil servants played a larger than life role. They acted with genuine commitment to public good. In recent years, at the union level a group of competent, committed civil servants have been pursuing reforms in many economic ministries. Finance, commerce, telecommunications, power, disinvestment, and electronics are some of the sectors in which the bureaucracy played a proactive and effective role in shaping policies and bringing about change. The results are not uniform in all these sectors. In complex sectors like power, vested interests and difficult political choices stalled reform.

Similarly in states too there are elements in bureaucracy which furthered the cause of reform. Such elements are very effective when the elected government has clear vision and political will. Otherwise, bureaucracy's efforts will only lead to isolated successes, and cannot produce lasting or massive changes. A few significant initiatives combining political will with bureaucratic skill illustrate the point. The Madhya Pradesh government is making valiant efforts to expand the reach of primary education, and empower local governments. The political vision is matched by the commitment and dynamism of key civil servants, notably Gopalakrishnan in chief minister's office. Similarly, in Kerala there is a broad political consensus in favour of empowerment of local governments and effective devolution. These policies were implemented with bipartisan support while the Left Front government was in power, and are continued under the current United Front government. As a result panchayats in Kerala have seen far reaching changes in recent years. The firm political resolve was effectively translated into reality by a series of concrete steps initiated by key civil servants. The secretary of panchayat raj, Vijayanand, played a vital role in getting several new enactments, rules and procedures in place to institutionalize local government empowerment. The enactment of an enabling cooperative legislation in AP in 1995 is another illustration of bureaucratic initiative backed by political will and civil society pressure. The recent efforts of Shailaja Chandra, Delhi chief secretary, to

empower citizens and make administration transparent and accountable are another illustration of bureaucratic commitment backed by political will.

Apart from political will, there are other constraints to bureaucratic innovation. First the collective vision, esprit de corps and a sense of national mission which were prevalent in the early years of nation building have largely disappeared. Careerism and political patronage have become common. Second, individual innovations are often not sustained, or replicated. Many outstanding improvements introduced by public-spirited civil servants could not endure. Third, the tenures of most civil servants in states are very short. The average tenure in key offices in most states is around one year. In government of India, there is assured tenure of 4 to 5 years at most levels, and there is greater opportunity to make lasting contribution to sound public policy. But even in the union, at the secretary's level, tenures are often short, thanks to largely seniority-based promotion policy giving little time before retirement and frequent transfers between departments at the level of secretaries.

Fourth, while most civil servants show great promise at the time of recruitment, the culture of government and public institutions takes its toll in a short time. Most civil servants cease to be innovators and reformers. Also the knowledge base, skill level and policy insights are not commensurate with the requirements in a vast and complex society. Therefore introduction of highly competent policy experts into government at key levels is necessary to give a sense of purpose and direction. Rigid personnel policies, resistance from civil services, and poor quality academic work in universities limit such opportunities of inducting professional talent into government at higher levels.

Reform Elements – Political Actors

Most true reform is initiated by politicians. Such innovation is generally a result of two factors. First, compulsions generated by a crisis lead to reform. When people see that status quo is not sustainable, they can be persuaded easily to welcome change. Much of the economic reform in India has come about due to crisis situation. There is evidence to suggest that once the immediate crisis passes, the painful steps needed for long-term improvements are usually postponed. However, the contribution of reform-minded, innovative politicians cannot be ignored. Dr Manmohan Singh's far reaching work as finance minister is one such outstanding example. Similarly Suresh Prabhu as environment minister and power minister attempted to expand the reform process, and make governance transparent and accountable. Arun Shourie's work as minister in charge of disinvestment is a good illustration of a competent, honest and reformist minister making a difference. In several states, a crop of reformist chief ministers has arisen. As the states directly deal with people and governance at the grassroots level, often real innovations and reform efforts are initiated at state level. Also political verdicts are generally state-specific, and the national verdict is usually the aggregate of state electoral outcomes. Therefore state chief ministers are compelled to embrace reform in the face of resistance from vested interests. This pursuit of reform, focus on governance, and a healthy competition among states are the distinguishing features of many states in recent years.

Two specific reforms initiated by reform-minded politicians in states are noteworthy. Nazeer Sab, as panchayati raj minister in Karnataka in 1983 attempted the most far-reaching reform in

local government in India. Genuine efforts were made to empower local governments and transfer power to marginalized sections and women. Though the reform could not endure political changes, it had vital consequences. The enactment of 73rd and 74th Amendments to Constitution was largely inspired by Karnataka model. Through these amendments, local governments could be institutionalized in all states. Similarly, enactment of a sound right to information law in Karnataka was the result of the commitment and skill exhibited by the information minister Chandrasekharamurthy. But this step did not yield the desired results as the minister left his portfolio soon after, and there was no follow up action for want of real collective political will of the government.

Social Movements and Civil Society

India has several vibrant social movements and many voluntary organizations. The dalit, women's and environmental movements are the most prominent among social movements. Indian political system has always been sensitive to the need to integrate dalits into society and polity fully, and to ensure their economic upliftment and social equality. Strong affirmative action policies in favour of dalits have broad political support. Dalit movements have reinforced this political will, and welded the depressed classes into a powerful voting block in many states. Also they forced the society's attention on the continuance of heinous practices of untouchability and caste oppression in many pockets of India. Lately, dalit groups have also been arguing in favour of affirmative action policies in favour of dalits in private sector employment. In general, these dalit movements have tended to fight for elimination of caste oppression and enforcement of reservation policies. There is no strong evidence of sustained advocacy by vocal dalit groups for access to school education, health care and speedy justice for the majority of poor dalits. In other words, the notion of formal equality and state patronage have been the dominant features, and not opportunities for vertical mobility through fulfillment of human potential.

Women's movements have had a direct impact on legislation. India has among the most progressive laws favouring women's liberation and freedom of choice. There was little resistance to such legislation from politicians or society at large; nor are many such laws taken seriously by the bulk of the people. Except for thrift and self-help groups, which are making their presence felt in parts of India, the impact of women's movement has not been pronounced. However, attitudes towards women and girl children are improving on the whole. There has never been discrimination against women's employment. Many women are in professions. Poverty, illiteracy, lack of access to health care, indebtedness, and high liquor consumption in poor households are imposing enormous burdens on women. The impact of women's movements on these issues has been marginal. One significant exception was the widespread movement for prohibition of alcoholic consumption by law in AP in 1994 and in Haryana later. In both cases, women power ensured massive political mandate for the then opposition parties and prohibition was imposed. Very soon, prohibition was regarded as a failure in practice, and both governments reversed those policies.

There is growing awareness of need for environmental protection and conservation policies and practices. A variety of groups – the tribals in Himalayas whose harmonious life is affected by felling and quarrying, the displaced persons in large irrigation project areas, educated and committed citizens concerned about pollution and global warming, civil society groups seeking sustainable livelihoods, urban dwellers complaining against air pollution, poor households

fearful of toxicity in ground water, urban groups committed to animal protection - have brought environmental issues to the forefront.

Several tough environmental laws have been enacted, and judicial interventions made on matters ranging from protection of coastal lands and closure of polluting industries to ordering change of fuel used by automobiles. In urban India there is increasing impact of environmental groups on public policies and land use. However, the impact on the lives of the poor, particularly in rural areas, has not been significant.

There are a large number of voluntary organizations operating in a variety of fields. Most, however are development-oriented, and receive and utilize grants from government or foreign funding agencies for small, local projects. In general they have small local impact, some times even lasting impact. But the civil society organizations which have long term and large scale implications are of three kinds. First, there are innovators like CRHP in Jamkhed, SEWA in Ahmedabad, or CDF in Andhra Pradesh. These are serious, highly competent, committed organizations whose innovations have large scale and long term implications for the future of India and the condition of the poor. While inspirational leadership has sustained these organizations, these models can be institutionalized. Two large scale innovations with massive replication illustrate this point. First, the dairy movement which started at Anand in Kaira district of Gujarat spread to much of India and altered the lives of millions. Its is largely sustainable because of the economic incentive to the farmer, and the efficacy of the business model. Second, the Swadhyaya movement started by Panduranaga Sastri Athavale touched the lives of millions of families in the coastal belt of Maharashtra and Gujarat. Social oppression, caste divisions, abject poverty, insecurity – all were effectively addressed by this simple but amazing movement based on spirituality and redefinition of religion. But the sustainability and growth of the movement are in question as the founder did not have the vision or capacity to build an effective and credible leadership to succeed him and carry out the mission. Nevertheless, these two examples are worth studying in detail to understand the dynamics of change in Indian society.

The second category of CSOs are service providers. As government's resources and capacity to manage education, health care and other basic services and development projects are limited, CSOs have a crucial role to play at micro level in specific sectors. They may receive government funds and merely provide services, or raise resources from donors. Occasionally, they may build sustainable models based on user fees. Also government is encouraging CSOs to take over rural development projects like watershed schemes. Such CSOs can be effective agencies for development and poverty reduction at relatively low cost and high efficiency, provided they are made accountable to the community.

The third type of CSOs which are making an impact on Indian society are the organizations and movements focused on governance reforms. These movements, based on liberal democratic ideals, accountable democracy and popular sovereignty are mobilizing people in several pockets and are forcing the pace of change. The work of MKSS in Ajmer district of Rajasthan on right to information, and the rapid spread and impact of Lok Satta movement in Andhra Pradesh and its influence on electoral reform debate in India are two striking examples of such advocacy groups. There is inchoate discontent among most citizens about corruption and mal-administration, and the resultant unfulfilled potential and avoidable suffering. These governance reform groups and

movements are preparing citizens for concerted, informed action, and are increasingly influencing public discourse and political decision making.

The Private Sector

Private sector has been playing three crucial roles as driver of change in India. First, the spectacular success in a few sectors has energized the country and enthused the people. For instance, the success of IT sector in recent years restored the nation's self-esteem and gave confidence to many youngsters. Second, by rapid spread of technology at low cost, and making it accessible to an ever increasing number of people, private sector has actually been helping transform society. The expansion of telecommunication network in recent years, coupled with low cost and high quality, has the potential to change our society and economy dramatically. Considering that even a few years ago people had to pay large sums, bribe officials and wait endlessly for a telephone connection, these changes are far-reaching and will have snow-balling effects. Third, the industry organizations articulate and lobby for change. Some times this pressure for better infrastructure and fairer competition can work as an engine of change. On other occasions, such pressure can favour status quo. For instance, the traders lobby successfully stalled introduction of VAT recently.

Research Community

India has a small proportion of highly competent, well-regarded professionals. But the lure of professions and management is so great that academic community is generally depleted. University teaching is well-paid, but does not necessarily attract the best brains. And for reasons discussed under education, higher education is declining in quality. The emphasis is more on cramming for examinations or sheer knowledge, but not on creativity. Much academic research is of poor quality and is unrelated to problems facing the country. The little research, which goes on, is limited to data gathering. Neither incisive analysis, nor search for solutions figure in research prominently. Only in the field of economics is there serious academic work, and standards of economic education are reasonably high in at least a few major universities. But even there, there is no emphasis on inter-disciplinary research, or search for viable models of public accountability, efficient expenditure, and effective resource mobilization. This paucity of research in social sector has been one of the great failures of Indian academia. As a result, policy makers are not challenged by the academic community based on factual accuracy, logical analysis and rigorous scrutiny. Impressions and ideological predilections tend to dominate instead of academic rigour and intellectual integrity. There is hardly any policy initiatives or reforms or pro-poor changes of long term effectiveness which can be attributed to academic institutions.

This problem is compounded by long decades of dominance of leftist paradigm in public and academic discourse. All public policy and facts are analysed through a predetermined prism, and filtered through a preexisting sieve. Therefore facts and evidence do not seem to have a bearing on the conclusions. For instance, academics are prone to drawing two radically different conclusions in two identical situations, depending on whom they favour. The debates about whether or not the largest party should be invited, or whether or not Article 356 should be invoked in Uttar Pradesh or Bihar illustrated this weakness. Irrespective of facts and circumstances, the views of an academic can be predicted with fair degree of certainty, based on

his or her political proclivities. Even today, the academic and public discourse is dominated by such ideological approach. A liberal democratic paradigm has not developed based on facts and rigorous analysis. A large body of research is needed to change the nature of public discourse based on facts and observed outputs and outcomes of policies, state actions and institutions.

The Professions and Professionals

Indian middle classes are very fond of professional education. Most students dream of professional education as a goal. Competition for entry into most professions (with the exception of law until recently) is very intense. The theoretical content also is usually voluminous. But usually in professional education there is no practical training or exposure to professional practice. As a result, the most successful graduates tend to migrate to the west, and many others take long time to acquire real professional skills. Because of poor quality training, and inadequate demand for excellence from society, professional standards on the whole are less than adequate.

This problem is complicated by lack of adequate internal regulatory mechanisms. Most professions do have statutory elected bodies entrusted with regulation of the conduct of qualified and licensed professionals. For instance, doctors have medical council, lawyers have bar council etc. Indian society has great cohesion within social groups. Within a caste, or clan, or tribe, throughout centuries there has been effective regulation of individual behaviour for the collective good of the group. This has extended to trade unions, professional groups and others with common collective interest vis-à-vis the rest of society. In such situations individuals and group live in harmony. But when it comes to transactions between two different groups, we have no tradition of fair and harmonious reconciliation of varied interests. Either one group oppressed another and enforced submission and peace, or there is internecine conflict and violence. The strife between castes is an example. A similar pattern of behaviour is seen in professional groups. When it comes to the collective gain of a profession or union, all members work together, and individual interests are even subordinated to group goals. But these groups are reluctant to discipline or regulate the conduct of a member in relation to the rest of society. Clearly, credibility of the profession as well as public good demand punishment of an erring member, and enforcement of a viable code of conduct. But professional bodies have not exhibited such long-term interest in protecting the image and professional integrity, and have often succumbed to member-pressures. As a result, two consequences are evident. First, interactions between a profession and general public are increasingly acrimonious. There is a sense of rivalry with larger society, rather than recognition of the fact that the profession exists to meet the felt need of society. Most professions nurse a grievance against society. Second, professional groups in general have been less than enthusiastic about reform efforts. Physicians feel threatened by local accountability or primary health care through community volunteers; mal practices are common, and largely unchecked. Lawyers are perceived to be opposed to any serious legal reforms to simplify procedures or ensure speedy justice.

The middle class must take to politics

Many voters are repelled by the political process and inadequate choice of candidates. Parties have become private fiefdoms, and decent people increasingly shun politics. Muscle power, distribution of money and liquor, lack-luster and irrelevant campaigns put off many people. We should make political process more attractive, honest and people-friendly. Internal democracy in parties, choice of candidates through some form of primary elections, and interactive and civilized methods of campaigning like TV debates are needed to enthuse voters.

Third, many among the middle and upper classes have not internalized the notion of democracy – equality of human dignity and principle of one-person, one-vote. There are many who stay away from the polls for fear of having to rub shoulders with their domestic servants! Unless we all recognize the dignity of labour, and respect each individual regardless of birth and occupation, we cannot build a democratic or peaceful society. We should realize that our security and well being lie in the prosperity and dignity of all. As Lincoln put it succinctly, a nation divided against itself will fall.

Fourth, there is growing cynicism about the outcome of elections. Many people feel that no matter who wins the election, we, the people, end up losing! While the poor still vote to express their anger, or show their relevance at least for one day, or because they get paid for the votes, the middle and upper classes shun polls. But it is dangerous to ignore politics and elections. As Plato said, "the punishment suffered by the wise who refuse to take part in the government, is to live under the government of bad men." The only antidote to the ills of a democracy is more and better democracy. By staying away, we are only ensuring the victory of crooks and fools and perpetuating a vicious cycle.

Finally urban people fail to recognize the importance of local governments. The businessman, the bureaucrat and the academic feel comfortable dealing with a centralized government extending patronage to cities. There is aversion to local politics. We fail to realize that all governance is about people, and all politics is local. In villages, people understand the value of local governments, and take greater interest. We need to recognize that the city government matters. Rudolph Giuliani made a spectacular difference to New York city as a Mayor. His leadership, skill and commitment revived a city on the brink of collapse. The key to success is that he had the power to make a difference. With local governments emasculated, we fail to give them importance. We need to genuinely empower the city government and establish the links between our vote and public good; our taxes and public services; and authority and accountability. Only then will people be enthused.

We need to take city governance seriously. Ward committees in each locality with share of taxes and control over staff will make all the difference between decay and rejuvenation. Citizen's Charters compelling timely response and compensation for delay will work miracles in delivery of services. Local justice through speedy procedures, right to information, and a strong and independent ombudsman are ways to bring life back to the city and make citizen the centre of our political process. We need to stand up and fight for these. If we don't care, no body will. Certainly the rapacious politician and corrupt bureaucrat will not care to improve things. Let us begin with our locality and city, and the country will take care of itself.

No Time to Waste

If we shed nostalgia and examine dispassionately, these past few decades represent a wasted opportunity. They were a glorious opportunity to shake ourselves out of the Russian orbit and pursue a new, more balanced and forward-looking foreign policy. And yet, ostrich-like, we continued merrily with our old ways even as the world around us was changing with breath-taking rapidity. Only liberation of Eastern Europe and the collapse of the Soviet Union forced us out of our hibernation. Even now we do not seem to have found a national vision and will. Most often there is bluff and bluster in place of clarity and sense of purpose, and status quoism in place of vigorous change for the better. We muddle along and drift, and do not set the course or change pace.

A quarter of a century is a long time in modern era. The dramatic transformation of China began in 1978 during JP's lifetime, and when Janata was in power in India. After the demise of Mao Zedong and the fall of the Gang of Four, Deng Xiao Ping articulated the vision of the Four Great Modernizations, which changed his nation's course and transformed China into a giant in the 21st century. Thanks to the last 23 years of successful modernization, China is the next super power, with the capacity to rival the US economically and militarily. What almost appeared as bureaucratism in 1978 has in retrospect become the most successful restructuring of the economy and society in the world's largest nation.

In stark contrast, India clearly wasted the last quarter century. Far too often the apologists for status quo argue that democracy has its price. The truth is democracy is not an impediment but is an engine of growth, for only democracy can ensure liberty and rule of law. Absence of both is a problem, not a stimulus for growth, in China. Nor do we need to diminish states role. What we need is a more effective and enlarged state's role, but in the right direction.

In India, there is a common mistrust of international experience and global trends. However, the present system that is in place is in itself an import, a relic of our colonial heritage. It is unsurprising that all democratic countries practice PR other than former colonies of the United Kingdom. Even in the United Kingdom, the 'Westminster model' is on its way out with elections to the European Parliament, the Welsh National Assembly, the London City Council and other local bodies all held through PR. A referendum on PR for the entire country is also expected shortly. The example of South Africa, with not only differences on the basis of race but also very strong tribal loyalties, is particularly encouraging. Due to PR, black and white South Africans are now forced to work together on issues that divided them during the decades of apartheid. For a country that has enjoyed universal suffrage for such a short time, South Africa has also done very well to limit local electoral corruption. It is unsurprising, therefore, that South Africa ranks 41st in the world corruption rankings, much higher than our 'democracy'.

India and PR

If PR sounds too radical a step for India to take, think again. At the 13th Desraj Chowdhury Memorial Lecture in 1996, former Prime Minister **Atal Behari Vajpayee** stated that, “democracy cannot survive on the pillars of people’s cynicism, lack of hope and absence of active participation”. He went on further to add, “The present First Past the Post system...weakens the representative character of elective bodies...This anomaly needs to be corrected by introducing *proportional representation* in at least

50 percent of the total number of seats in the Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabhas”. The **170th Report of the Law Commission of India** (1999) stated that, “we feel that a combination of FPP (FPTP) and the list systems...may best meet our needs”. Support for PR has also come from the other end of the political spectrum. The **CPI(M)**, in its 1999 election manifesto committed itself to electoral reforms including, “Proportional Representation with partial list system”. Similarly, in the South, the **DMK** and **MDMK** are both dedicated to PR, with the MDMK manifesto(2004) vowing to take, “Steps to bring in amendments to the Constitution and the Representation of the People's Act so that political parties could get proportional representation on the basis of votes they get in the Assembly and Lok Sabha elections, considering the coalition politics in future”. The **Indian United Muslim League** and the **Shiromani Akali Dal**, both the voice of large minority communities also support PR.

Who Supports PR?

Atal .Behari Vajpayee
Law Commission of India
CPI(M)
DMK
MDMK
Indian United Muslim League
Shiromani Akali Dal

*Cartoon of a bespectacled
Masterji with stick in hand*

Politics for the Politicians of Tomorrow
Masterji says ...

Even Indian politics can be reformed!

We Indians have a love-hate relationship with two passions: cricket and politics. One day everything appears promising and the players (of both kinds) seem to be doing nothing wrong. We are proud they are Indians. But, the very next day, India's future in cricket and politics looks anything but positive. Looks like things reverted back to their usual, unsatisfactory selves. You feel like complaining, *yaar*, India is never going to change..

This despair, at least with politics, is the result of focusing excessively on short-term individual performance. If we shift our focus to the performance of the overall system itself, then we stand a chance of finding the actual reasons for under-performance and the potential solutions.

(idea needs to be sharpened and polished)

Our political system is only an man made set-up that is constantly evolving. The last fifty seven years had seen a sea change in the way politics does tend to get rigidly stuck in particular modes, for years together. There is no reason to believe that our electoral and political system cannot be changed.

The key is having clearly defined goals that maximize common good, properly identified strategies to achieve those goals and choice of appropriate tactics while striving for political changes. Sun Tzu (~ 500 BC) was one of the greatest army generals of ancient China said: "strategy without tactics is the slowest route to victory. Tactics without strategy is the noise before defeat."

One key factor that influences the outcome is collaborating with the right groups of people and institutions in our democracy – the common citizens, media, professionals, entrepreneurs, etc. These sections become the prime movers of change, when properly mobilized. No section of the political area can afford to ignore the combined efforts of these change drivers. After that, even the most difficult-looking political reforms too become inevitable!