# The Solution to the Problems of Democracy is More Democracy

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Across the world, citizens speak of mounting disillusionment with government, based on concerns about corruption, lack of responsiveness to the needs of the poor and the absence of a sense of connection with their elected representatives and bureaucrats. The Westminster model of democracy is failing. Institutional failures and erosion is a central element in the broader problems of governance failure. Policy makers and aid agencies have come up with different sets of "reform" programmes as a solution to the problem of governance failure. One of the most important strategies in this direction is to change the huge monolithic structure of the government and bring it closer to the citizens by creating "small governments'' at the local level, the Indian model of which is the Panchayati Raj. The power of the "small government" is premised on the assumption that local authorities have better access to information about their constituents and that they are more easily held accountable by the local population. This will improve governance not only by increasing the efficiency, but also by increasing its transparency and responsiveness.

But, this is only a formal architecture and structural extension of democracy to the lower levels, which is commonly known as "devolution of power", meaning a form of power sharing with the sub-national levels of the government. In order to improve governance and enrich the quality of democracy, this formal extension of democracy to the lower levels is a necessary condition, but not a sufficient condition. In itself, it does not guarantee the quality of democracy. It is merely the skeleton, the flesh and blood comes from citizens engagement, which is the more substantive element of democracy. Formal extension of democracy through Constitutional changes, without this substantive element will not go very far in deepening democracy. Constitutional and legal changes open up an "invited space" for democratic participation only'. They represent the "supply-driven" approach to the extension of democracy. In the absence of the practice of citizenship by' the people in their everyday lives, this "space" comes under the danger of abuse, capture. and monopoly by the spurious elements, thus defeating its very purpose. This happens when there is a shortfall in the "demand side". This is the current problem with our Panchayati Raj system. We need to mobilize the "demand side" and bridge the supply- demand gap. The power of citizenship is in its practice.

Recent scholarship in the field of Democracy' and Citizenship studies have challenged the earlier liberal view of citizenship as a set of Rights and Responsibilities bestowed by the State. More recent grounded theorists have

advanced a more robust concept of Citizenship as a multidimensional concept, which includes identity, agency and the actions of the people themselves. Citizenship is more than a legal status; it is an everyday political practice. We have got the status; we need to put it into practice. We need to practice the rigors of citizenship in our everyday lives. This requires a socio-political mobilization for citizenship building. That is the "second democratic revolution", which we need as a solution to the problems of the first one. If the essence of the first democratic revolution was the construction of the formal architecture of the structure of the Panchayati Raj through the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, the essence of the second revolution is to create the social infrastructure for these institutions. The first revolution was legal-political in nature, the second is socio-cultural in nature. The result of the first revolution was the birth of the institution of small governments at the local levels in India, the outcome of the second will be their maturity. At the moment, these institutions are very fragile.

There is a critical need to change the existing nature of the State-Society relationship. The State is the "giver" and the people are the recipients and "beneficiaries". People the "users and choosers" but not makers and shapers" of their lives. State officials are Baboos, not public servants. The state bureaucracy even at the local level is too complex, rigourous, and insensitive to the simple needs of the poor people. The common people find it too difficult to deal with these Baboos, and don't know how to communicate. They are not treated with respect. Of late, the Baboos have become corrupt. The everyday life common experience of the people with the government is not good. Peoples' trust in their government is rapidly eroding. Often the State and the Society meet at wrong points – points of

conflict – people are "more reactive" than "proactive" in their relationship with the government. "Entitlement failure" is the cause of poverty as has been rightly explained by Amartya Sen.

The practice of citizenship requires the development of civic competencies, which large sections of our people lack  primarily due to the 'various asymmetries in our social lives, based on gender, class, caste etc. Social Capital is a resource and we learn from social researchers like Robert Putnam and others that the health of an democracy critically depends on this resource. This is more so in the context of the local self governments. Because of these asymmetries and the hierarchical nature of our society, the abundant social capital base is "fractured" in our communities. This makes collective action, community management of natural resources, participation in development programmes etc. extremely difficult. Sociologists have long since explained the increasing role of institutions like caste and religion in the modern Indian democratic life. This is what often plagues our democracy, and subverts all our efforts to deepen it, to improve its quality, and to make it inclusive and plural. Therefore, the issue is to change "primordial sentiments" to "civil sentiments", to change ethnos into demos. Local society and sociopolitical institutions (such as the PRIs) are the spaces for a new democratic engagement" created by the 73rd Amendment. Panchayat is the site for exercising the agencies of the subaltern groups; it is the breeding ground for deepening democracy and building up an inclusive, plural, and democratic life. Panchayat is the focus of civic republicanism and communitarianism.

At the centre of the success of the second democratic revolution, is a focus on active and empowered citizens who can participate in

decision making, claim rights, and hold institutions as well as their officials accountable. There are very powerful connections and critical relationships between effective states and engaged and empowered citizens in an inclusive democracy. Citizens who are active and empowered gradually emerge through local level action around livelihoods and access to basic services which relate to their immediate everyday lives. This implies that support (both through state as well as non-state agencies) to participation, building community-based organizations of the poor, and building community capacity for different forms of local action do have very important positive, long-term outcomes in terms of state building. There is a need to continue and to expand efforts to build a more inclusive society based on respect. equality and the full participation of all citizens, regardless of caste, religion, language, sex or other distinctions. Training programmes now offered for PRI representatives which mostly are focused around political literacy are extremely inadequate, in terms of quantitative coverage and in terms of their thematic range and scope as also in their training methodologies. We need to broaden and deepen these training prorammes to cover not just the elected representatives but to all sections of the people including the youth and the children.

Further programmes should be designed to sensitize the people to the values of inclusion, anti-discrimination and human rights, and increase their competencies through skill building in areas like inclusive citizenship, peaceful conflict resolution, understanding cultural diversity, community planning and resource management, environmental planning, disaster mitigation etc. Looking at this enormous need, the capacity of our support institutions (e.g.. training institutions) is currently extremely inadequate. Therefore we should think more innovatively to pull resources and capacities at different levels (training and research institutions, government agencies, NGOs, Universities, Corporations, Political Parties etc.) and harness their collective capacities towards this goal on a priority basis through University-Community linkages, Public-Private Partnerships, coalition building and networking among various institutions, Business-Community Partnerships etc. This is our public responsibility.

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