

# **15<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON ELECTORAL AND POLITICAL REFORMS**

**Organized by**  
Uttar Pradesh Election Watch (UP EW)  
&  
Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR)

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**Venue**  
DDU State Institute of Rural Development, Lucknow

**Date**  
2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> March, 2019

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### मेदो

# जनता रोजगार को लेकर गंभीर

## एडीआर रिपोर्ट का दावा, 31 माननीयों की संपत्ति का ब्योरा किया पेश

राजधानी, 3 मार्च 2019। एडीआर रिपोर्ट का दावा, 31 माननीयों की संपत्ति का ब्योरा किया पेश। एडीआर रिपोर्ट का दावा, 31 माननीयों की संपत्ति का ब्योरा किया पेश। एडीआर रिपोर्ट का दावा, 31 माननीयों की संपत्ति का ब्योरा किया पेश।



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### अमर उजाला

# लोकतंत्र की मजबूती के लिए बढ़ाएं मतदान प्रतिशत

## वरिष्ठ उप निर्वाचन आयुक्त उमेश सिन्हा ने की अपील, कहा-लोकतंत्र के महापर्व में हो सबकी सहभागिता

राजधानी, 3 मार्च 2019। लोकतंत्र की मजबूती के लिए बढ़ाएं मतदान प्रतिशत। वरिष्ठ उप निर्वाचन आयुक्त उमेश सिन्हा ने की अपील, कहा-लोकतंत्र के महापर्व में हो सबकी सहभागिता। लोकतंत्र की मजबूती के लिए बढ़ाएं मतदान प्रतिशत।



लोकतंत्र की मजबूती के लिए बढ़ाएं मतदान प्रतिशत। वरिष्ठ उप निर्वाचन आयुक्त उमेश सिन्हा ने की अपील, कहा-लोकतंत्र के महापर्व में हो सबकी सहभागिता। लोकतंत्र की मजबूती के लिए बढ़ाएं मतदान प्रतिशत।

### राजकाज

# महिला वोटर बढ़ाने में जुटा आयोग

## महिला वोटर बढ़ाने में जुटा आयोग

राजकाज, 3 मार्च 2019। महिला वोटर बढ़ाने में जुटा आयोग। महिला वोटर बढ़ाने में जुटा आयोग। महिला वोटर बढ़ाने में जुटा आयोग।



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### राजधानी/आस

# वोटरों को केवल अधिकांश ही नहीं, दायित्व भी बताएं: सिन्हा

## चुनाव व राजनीतिक सुधार पर 15वें वार्षिक राष्ट्रीय सम्मेलन में विमर्श

राजधानी, 3 मार्च 2019। वोटरों को केवल अधिकांश ही नहीं, दायित्व भी बताएं: सिन्हा। चुनाव व राजनीतिक सुधार पर 15वें वार्षिक राष्ट्रीय सम्मेलन में विमर्श। वोटरों को केवल अधिकांश ही नहीं, दायित्व भी बताएं: सिन्हा।



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### Parties react strongly to ADR report on criminals in polls

Commission of 18,971 candidates... Parties react strongly to ADR report on criminals in polls. Parties react strongly to ADR report on criminals in polls. Parties react strongly to ADR report on criminals in polls.

### स्वतंत्र चेतना

# चेता कैमरे

स्वतंत्र चेतना, चेता कैमरे। स्वतंत्र चेतना, चेता कैमरे। स्वतंत्र चेतना, चेता कैमरे।



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### EC LAUNCHES EXERCISE TO INCREASE POLL PERCENTAGE

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## Acknowledgement

We take this opportunity to thank Shri Sanjay Singh, Shri Anil Sharma, Shri Santosh Srivastava and the entire team of Uttar Pradesh Election Watch (UP EW) for making the 15<sup>th</sup> National Conference on Electoral and Political Reforms, a grand success. We express special thanks to Shri D C Upadhyaya, Additional Director of DeenDayal Upadhyaya State Institute of Rural Development, Lucknow, for extending all possible support for the conduct of the conference.

We would like to express our deepest gratitude to **Shri Umesh Sinha, Senior Deputy Election Commissioner**, Election Commission of India (ECI), for his presence and inputs at the Conference and are extremely appreciative of ECI for its constant support to our efforts. We would also like to thank all the other dignitaries, whose participation added impetus and synergy to our work.

The Conference would not have been a possibility without the eminent speakers and participants; we thank them for their participation and valuable inputs. Special thanks to the media and the journalists who have always been supportive of our work and have been one of the important mediums to reach out to the masses.

Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) would like to thank participants of various political parties, the ECI, NGOs and others who dispassionately reviewed our past efforts on electoral and political reforms and came forward with thought-provoking suggestions to remedy prevailing issues.

Last but not the least, we are deeply grateful to all our State Election Watch coordinators and partners for their participation and support in reaching out to citizens across the country. We conclude by thanking the Management and Administrative staff of DeenDayal Upadhyaya State Institute of Rural Development, Lucknow, for their consistent support before and during the event.

## Executive Summary

The Annual National Conference was held in Lucknow with the primary focus on Electoral and Political Reforms. The Conference was held with the aim of bringing together and synergizing efforts towards strengthening democracy in our country.

The Senior Deputy Election Commissioner, **Shri Umesh Sinha**, inaugurated the Conference. Representatives of the National Election Watch (NEW) from each state chapter, members of political parties, government institutions and media were present to deliberate on issues related to electoral and political reforms in the country. The National Conference was an opportunity for us to add impetus and synergy to our work by bringing together all stakeholders. Their participation and inputs were instrumental in making the Conference a success.

Topics of discussion during the National Conference ranged from *'Electoral and Political Reforms: A lack of Political Will?'*, *'Electoral and Political Reforms and the Role of Judiciary'*, *'Electoral Bonds and Financial Opacity'*, to *'Local and Urban Governance'*, and *'Information & Communication Technology for Better Governance'* and *'Role of Youth & Voter Awareness: In Preparation for General Elections, 2019'*. These discussions were enriched by the participation of eminent people including the Senior Deputy Election Commissioner **Shri Umesh Sinha**, representatives of political parties, bureaucrats, academicians, students, civil society and the media.

At the end of the Conference, the house unanimously came up with recommendations addressing issues ailing our political and electoral system.

## 15<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL NATIONAL CONFERENCE

On

### ‘ELECTORAL & POLITICAL REFORMS’

Organized by Uttar Pradesh Election Watch (UP EW) & Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR)

**Date:** 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> March, 2019

**Venue:** DeenDayal Upadhyaya State Institute of Rural Development, Lucknow

### Agenda

#### 2<sup>nd</sup> March, 2019 - Auditorium

9:00 – 10:00	<b>Registration</b>
10:00 – 10:30	<p><b>National Anthem and Lamp lighting</b></p> <p><b>Guest of Honor:</b> Shri Umesh Sinha, Hon’ble Senior Deputy Election Commissioner, Election Commission of India</p> <p><b>Inauguration &amp; Welcome Address:</b> Prof Trilochan Sastry (Founder member &amp; Trustee – ADR/NEW), Maj Gen Anil Verma (Retd.) (Head-ADR/NEW), Shri Sanjay Singh (Coordinator – UP Election Watch)</p>
10:30 – 11:00	<p><b>Address by Shri Umesh Sinha, Hon’ble Senior Deputy Election Commissioner, Election Commission of India</b></p> <p><b>Chairperson</b> – Dr Ajit Ranade (Founder member and Trustee – ADR/NEW)</p> <p><b>Book release</b> – ‘All India Survey Report, 2018’ &amp; ‘Report on ‘15 years of Uttar Pradesh Election Watch’</p>
11:00 – 11:45	<p><b>Electoral &amp; Political Reforms: A lack of political will?</b></p> <p><b>Chairperson:</b> Prof. Trilochan Sastry</p> <p><b>Panelists:</b> Shri Arun Gurtoo (Retired DGP -Madhya Pradesh), Dr Niranjana Sahoo (Senior Fellow, ORF), Dr Ajit Ranade (Founder member and Trustee – ADR/NEW)</p>
11:45- 12:00	<b>Open Discussion</b>
12:00- 12:20	<b>Tea Break</b>
12:20 – 13:10	<p><b>Electoral &amp; Political Reforms and the Role of Judiciary</b></p> <p><b>Chairperson:</b> Dr Ajit Ranade (Founder member and Trustee- ADR/NEW)</p> <p><b>Panelists:</b> Shri Shaktikanta Srivastava (Retired District Judge), Ms. Kamini Jaiswal (Senior Advocate – Supreme Court, Trustee – ADR), Shri Amit Puri (Spokesperson – BJP), Shri Arvind Singh Gope (Spokesperson – SP)</p>
13:10 – 13:30	<b>Open Discussion</b>

13:30 – 14:30	<b>Lunch</b>
14:30 – 15:15	<b>Electoral Bonds and financial opacity</b>  <b>Chairperson:</b> Maj Gen Anil Verma (Retd.) (Head – ADR & NEW) <b>Panelists:</b> Shri Rakesh Reddy Dubbudu (Founder – Factly.in, State Coordinator – Andhra Pradesh and Telangana), Shri Suchindran Baskar Narayan (Advocate, Supreme Court of India and Madras High Court), Shri Sanjay Singh (Secretary – Parmarth, State Coordinator – Uttar Pradesh /NEW)
15:15 – 15:45	<b>Open discussion</b>
15:45 – 16:30	<b>Local and Urban governance</b>  <b>Chairperson:</b> Prof Sudarsan Padmanabhan (Trustee – ADR) <b>Panelists:</b> Shri Sudhir Pal (Chief Functionary – Manthan, State Coordinator - Jharkhand/NEW), Ms. Pankti Jog (Executive Director – MAGP, Gujarat State Coordinator, NEW), Ms. Mukta Soni (President – Talbehat Municipal Corporation)
16:30 – 17:00	<b>Open discussion</b>
17:00 – 17:10	<b>Vote of Thanks:</b> Shri Sanjay Singh (Coordinator - UP EW)
17:10 – 17:30	<b>Tea Break</b>
18:00 – 19:30	<b>Cultural Programme</b>

### 3<sup>rd</sup> March, 2019 – Conference Hall

09:30 – 10:00	<b>Registration</b>
10:00 – 11:15	<b>Information &amp; Communication Technology for Better Governance</b>  <b>Chairperson:</b> Maj Gen Anil Verma (Retd) <b>Panelists:</b> Shri Jaskirat Singh (Trustee – ADR/NEW, Founder – CRAMAT), Shri Rakesh Reddy Dubbudu (Founder-Factly.in, State Coordinator – Andhra Pradesh and Telangana), Shri Chandrakant Naidu (Chief Editor, NewsNest), Ms. Shelley Thakral (Head of Programs, Facebook)
11:15 – 11:30	<b>Open Discussion</b>
11:30 – 11:45	<b>Tea</b>
11:45 – 13:00	<b>Role of Youth &amp; Voter Awareness: In Preparation for General Elections, 2019</b>  <b>Chairperson:</b> Dr Vipul Mudgal (Director of Common Cause, Trustee of ADR) <b>Panelists:</b> Shri Lakku Venkateshwarlu, IAS (CEO of UP), Prof Sudarsan Padmanabhan (Trustee – ADR/NEW), Shri Heera Lal, IAS (DM Banda), Shri Ranjan Mohanty (Secretary – PECUC, Odisha State Coordinator, NEW), Shri Mohd Zeeshan (Founder of YES Foundation, Lucknow)
13:00 – 13:15	<b>Open Discussion</b>
13:15 – 13:30	<b>Resolutions and ‘Next Steps for NEW’</b>



	<b>Chairperson:</b> Prof Trilochan Sastry
13:30 onwards	<b>Lunch &amp; Dispersal</b>

### Documents Distributed to the Participants

- **15 years of Uttar Pradesh Election Watch Report.**
- **ADR Handbook.**
- **Background notes on Panel Discussion themes:** ‘Electoral and Political Reforms: A Lack of Political Will?’, ‘Electoral and Political Reforms and the Role of Judiciary,’ ‘Electoral Bonds and Financial Opacity,’ ‘Local and Urban Governance’, ‘Information & Communication Technology For Better Governance’, and ‘Role of Youth & Voter Awareness: In Preparation for General Elections, 2019’

The above documents can be found at [www.adrindia.org](http://www.adrindia.org)

## Minutes of the Sessions

Day – 1 (2<sup>nd</sup> March,'19)

### Inauguration & Welcome Address



*(From Left to Right) Shri Sanjay Singh (Secretary – Parmarth, State Coordinator - Uttar Pradesh /NEW), Shri Umesh Sinha (Senior Deputy Election Commissioner, Election Commission of India), Dr Ajit Ranade (Founder member and Trustee, ADR), Shri Lakku Venkateshwarlu, IAS (Chief Electoral Officer, Uttar Pradesh) and Prof Trilochan Sastry (Founder member and Trustee, ADR)*

#### **Professor Trilochan Sastry (Founder member and Trustee, ADR)**

Prof Sastry welcomed the **Guest of Honour of the event, Shri Umesh Sinha** (Senior Deputy Election Commissioner, Election Commission of India), and all other guests and participants to the 15th Annual National Conference on Political and Electoral Reforms on behalf of ADR and Uttar Pradesh Election Watch. He encouraged all those present for the conference to exercise their right to vote actively and responsibly. He also invited everyone to participate in the conference that he hoped would generate highly constructive and enriching debates.

Prof Sastry spoke about the dangers of financial opacity and illicit means of campaign funding in elections. He added that a significant issue faced by the Indian political system is the use of unethical finances and high expenditures for elections and gaining political power. Prof Sastry also said that there is a relationship between high election expenditure and poor governance, since the elected representatives who rise to power through high funds do not prioritize welfare or effective

governance. To combat this problem, Prof Sastry explained that the Election Commission of India launched an application called cVIGIL which would enable the public to anonymously report violation of election expenditure, such as distribution of items like liquor, cash and other freebies, by political parties in exchange for votes.

Prof Sastry also spoke about the criminalization of politics and the importance of checking the backgrounds and criminal records of candidates before casting a vote. He stated that according to a report by ADR, 30-35% Members of Parliament in India have declared criminal cases against themselves. He emphasized the importance of awareness and accountability while choosing one's political representative.

### **Maj Gen Anil Verma (Retd) (Head of ADR)**

Maj General Verma welcomed and invited Shri Umesh Sinha, Dr Ajit Ranade, Prof Trilochan Sastry, Shri Lakku Venkateshwaralu and Shri Sanjay Singh for lamp lighting ceremony to mark the beginning of the two-day National Conference. After the lamp lighting ceremony, he also invited the guests on stage for the book release.

Maj Gen Verma announced the release of two new reports and proceeded to brief the guests about each of them. The first was the All India Survey on Governance Issues and Voting Behavior 2018 by ADR. He said that this survey tried to analyze the perception and expectations of the voters from the government, and the analysis of government's performance based on different parameters. The survey was done in 534 constituencies of the Lok Sabha, and more than 2 lakh people were interviewed, belonging to rural, semi-urban and urban settings. The second report released was on the background information of all MPs and MLAs in Uttar Pradesh for the past 15 years. Maj Gen Verma then invited the guests to release the two reports.





**Address by Shri Umesh Sinha,  
Senior Deputy Election Commissioner, Election Commission of India  
Chairperson – Dr Ajit Ranade**



**Dr Ajit Ranade (Founder member and Trustee, ADR)**

Dr Ranade welcomed the Guest of Honor and keynote speaker of the **15<sup>th</sup> Annual National Conference, Shri Umesh Sinha, Senior Deputy Election Commissioner**. Dr Ranade spoke about the extent of the work put in by National Election Watch (NEW), and described the work of both NEW and ADR. He expressed satisfaction at the enhanced reach of NEW in almost every state of India. He also highlighted that this year was especially significant, as it is the 20th year since the inception of ADR.

Dr Ranade said that the effect of the political reforms which ADR has been working towards for the past two decades is a slow and long-drawn process, and results will be visible in the long run. He stated that the focus of elections was not parties or candidates, but the voters themselves. He introduced Shri Sinha to the audience and requested him to deliver the keynote address.

**Shri Umesh Sinha (Text of the Speech)**

Shri Sinha began by commending the work done by ADR and the National Election Watch on behalf of the Election Commission of India. He said that the EC was honored to work with ADR, and it hoped to be able to work together with the organization to bring India's electoral process to a higher standard. He appreciated ADR for publishing documents that improve the transparency of the election procedure.



The Sr. Dy EC emphasized that the Election Commission of India considers the voters and all stakeholders to play a very crucial role in elections. He said that elections have to be conducted in co-ordination and active participation of all stakeholders: voters, political parties and candidates, civil society and NGOs, youth organizations like the NCC, and the media. He said that the ECI works closely



with these actors, and hopes to build the relationship. The Sr. Dy EC also stressed on the EC's belief that stronger democracy depends on more participation in the electoral process. He mentioned that in the last National Election of India, the voter participation increased from 59% to 66%. He said that these figures, however, were not sufficient.

Shri Sinha presented a new perspective for increasing electoral participation by encouraging ADR and NEW to direct its efforts in a different dimension. He suggested that the NEW must "not remain the National Election Watch, but be a National Actor." He proposed that people should not be limited to simply being watchful, but should be encouraged to take action. He also emphasized that the voter, or the citizen, is the foundation of a democracy, and participation is hence paramount. He said, "It is important to have not only participation of every voter, but ethical and informed participation." He advised the audience to be mindful of unethical election practices like vote buying, and take steps to be an educator and motivator against unethical voting behavior.

The Sr. Dy EC explained that the strength of the democracy is the youth, who are the leaders of the family and the society. He advised the youth to actively play a role as a voter, educator, and a motivator in their neighborhood and society. He also stressed the importance of being a vigilant citizen.

Shri Sinha explained that the Election Commission of India faced three major obstacles in conducting free and fair elections: extorting votes using violence or fear, extorting votes using bribes and money, and the widespread presence of fake news over press or social media. Because of these issues, he pointed out the importance of turning rural and urban voters into responsible voters at the grassroots level. He proceeded to highlight the value of the right to vote, which was received after a long struggle for independence, which people misuse and fail to exercise despite its significance. He also stated that India's election process was internationally renowned for its high standard, drawing attention to the fact that despite diversity of religion, caste, regions, language, and class, elections were periodically conducted freely and fairly for the past 68 years. He said that this was a cause for pride. He motivated the youth to inculcate a commitment towards democracy among all voters and encouraged the public to act as vigilant citizens.

The Sr. Dy EC described the infrastructure available to encourage responsible voting among citizens. He spoke about the national helpline number (1950) which enabled citizens to check if they were registered as voters, and instructed the youth to register themselves online as voters. He introduced the new focus of the Election Commission of India, which was the accessibility of polling stations to differently-abled voters. He encouraged the youth and adolescents to volunteer to assist the disabled and senior citizens to reach the polling stations. He added that women would also be able to avail a faster voting process at double the speed of male voters, so as to minimize the time away from domestic work. He concluded by emphasizing that the General Elections were the festival of democracy, and urged the audience to participate in it with earnestness and responsibility.

### **Open Discussion**

**Q1.** Whether the Election Commission of India (ECI) has plans to improve the strength of the NOTA vote, considering how a majority of the NOTA votes did not affect the election outcome at present?

**Ans. The Sr. Dy EC** expressed that the provision of the NOTA was promoted by the ECI in 2004, before its manifestation later. He said that it was a dissent note by the people towards the candidate, and until a precedent was reached whereby the NOTA received a majority vote, no action was necessary.

**Q2.** Whether the ECI, seeing the prevalence of use of hate speech for election campaigns, would consider hate speech as a *suo motu* offence and make provisions against it?

**Ans. The Sr. Dy EC** responded that the ECI has set up a committee headed by him on the regulation of the contents of media during the onset of elections. He stated that there had already been a recommendation for an amendment in the law to develop a grievance-redressal system on social media, which would enable the ECI to push content creators to remove hate speech from the media as soon as reported. He mentioned the role played by the District and State levels of the Media Certification and Monitoring Committee (MCMC) in taking action against misinformation. He added that campaigning actions were monitored not only by the model code of conduct, but also by the substantive law.

**Q3.** An audience member of the Madhya Pradesh Election Watch proposed that affidavits provided by candidates to the ECI be presented at polling stations, as many voters did not have access to online

portals. He stated that this was done in the elections in MP, and proposed this measure to be replicated overall.

**Dr Ranade**, adding to this question, by mentioning the Supreme Court judgement which spoke about wide publicity of affidavit information to the public, and supported the idea of displaying these affidavits at polling booths nationwide.

**Ans. The Sr. Dy EC** explained that the ECI does not conduct analyses of the affidavits, but only makes it accessible online within 48 hours. He promised that this would be done across the country. He also added that according to the SC order, political parties and candidates with declared criminal cases were required to publish their criminal profiles (if any) on websites, TV channels and newspapers on three different dates before polling date. This and other steps like publicization of affidavits on media platforms would improve transparency.

**Q4.** A question was raised about the vulnerability of personal information uploaded on social media applications to misuse. Companies like Cambridge Analytica brought up the use of big data to appeal to voters by misusing personal information.

**Ans. The Sr. Dy EC** noted the fact that users choose to make themselves vulnerable to exploitation when they upload sensitive or private information online. He advised citizens to understand the significance of their rights and advised them to be responsible, informed, and ethical while voting.

## Electoral and Political Reforms: A lack of Political Will?

**Chairperson: Prof Trilochan Sastry**



*(From Left to Right) Dr Niranjana Sahoo (Senior Fellow, Observer Research Foundation), Prof Trilochan Sastry (Founder Member & Trustee, ADR), Shri Arun Gurtoo (Retired DGP -Madhya Pradesh), and Dr Ajit Ranade (Founder member and Trustee- ADR/NEW)*



### **Prof Trilochan Sastry (Founder Member & Trustee, ADR)**

At the outset, Chairperson Prof Trilochan Sastry, drawing the attention of the youth in the audience, emphasized the importance of electoral and political reforms. In response to a question raised from the audience on why political parties field candidates with criminal antecedents, he reiterated that because parties and not public field tainted candidates in elections, unless transparency is initiated within political parties, the situation will not change. He cited the example of the nomination process in the United States of America where Barack Obama and Donald Trump were selected by the people and not their respective parties to become party's presidential nominees, after which they had to compete with their opponents to emerge victorious. Compared to the US system, the Indian practice of distribution of tickets to the candidates by political parties is highly undemocratic. Furthermore, he raised concerns over transparency in financing of political parties and questioned the audience if they feel that they should be aware of the identity of donors of these political parties. He asked the audience to think if a political party, after winning elections, will work for the welfare of the citizens or their sponsors. According to him, there is absence of inner-party democracy as well as

growing opacity in the political parties' funding, which is why unfit candidates are able to contest elections and such state of affairs exists in our electoral politics. He added that this undermines the electoral process of the country, demonstrating the significance of electoral and political reforms to audience. He then introduced the panelists Shri Arun Gurtoo (Retired DGP -Madhya Pradesh), Dr Niranjan Sahoo (Senior Fellow, Observer Research Foundation) and Dr Ajit Ranade (Founder member and Trustee- ADR/NEW) to the audience.



#### **Shri Arun Gurtoo (Retired DGP - Madhya Pradesh)**

Shri Arun Gurtoo started the conversation by stating that it is only upon action from the Election Commission of India, Supreme Court of India or through writs filed by NGOs that political parties will initiate reforms such as inner party democracy and transparency in selection of candidates. Otherwise, in the existing environment, expecting the political parties to reform on their own looks far-fetched. It is widely accepted that political parties are integral to functioning of a democracy. Parties deliberate and discuss important issues, while in opposition they question the legislation and also connect with the masses on the grassroots level. He further added that although India had become a *functioning democracy* but is yet to become a *healthy democracy* given that the voting percentage has reached only 66%. He raised questions on the nature/character of political parties while referring to Central Information Commission's order declaring political parties as public authorities on writ petition filed by ADR and PUCL and the subsequent denial of Central government of this order. He added that it needs to be clarified whether political parties are private by nature or they have any social responsibility and accountability vis-à-vis the promises they make in their manifestos. Shri Gurtoo also spoke of the requirement for a minimum educational qualification for elected representatives while also referring to the need for financial credentials and clean criminal background. He added that someday the Judiciary will prevail this notion that the political class can't behave like a private company as per their wishes they must be regulated and made accountable as they are responsible for managing affairs of the biggest democracy in the world. He concluded by giving reference of conduct rules for government servants that allow suspension of the public servant once criminal charges are framed in cases involving moral turpitude like corruption, theft etc. Giving this example, he questioned why shouldn't elected representatives charged in similar



cases and facing a trial not be suspended given that they become 'public servant' upon winning the elections?

**Dr Niranjan Sahoo (Senior Fellow, Observers Research Foundation (ORF))**

Dr Niranjan Sahoo emphasized that political will is closely linked with the money power in politics. He also said that irrespective of numerous civil society struggles towards bringing good governance & other democratic reforms, the political class is putting stiff resistance to it basically due to their vested interests especially related to money.



Through a presentation, he demonstrated how in the upcoming General Elections 2019 India is going to overtake the US with regard to the expenses incurred in contesting elections as its going to cost Rs. 60,000 crores this time as compared to Rs. 40,000 crores spent during the General Elections 2014. Rs. 3-9 crores each need to be spent by candidates for each constituency election. In southern states like Andhra Pradesh, Telangana & Tamil Nadu, the minimum cost for contesting General Elections by candidates is Rs. 20-30 crores on an average. Dr Sahoo added that the Election Commission of India confiscated Rs. 4000 crores in cash in the last Assembly Elections held in Tamil Nadu which was just the tip of the iceberg. He said that one can't avoid the inevitable role of money power in electoral politics, however, one can reduce its quantum and bring it to an acceptable level.

He further emphasized on the *"huge size of parliamentary constituencies"* in India with a minimum of 10 lakh voters per constituency in sharp contrast with United Kingdom where it ranges between 20,000 voters to 2-3 lakh voters. As a result, it becomes mandatory for candidates to spend huge amount of money on contesting elections, as among India's population of 1.3 billion there are 900 million voters spread across 543 parliamentary constituencies. Through this, he intended to convey that to physically cover such a big constituency even when a candidate undertakes simple election campaigning (without spending on bribery, distribution of freebies etc.) a reasonable amount of funds are required.

He also spoke of the disappearance of traditional vote bank in the wake of new generation voters who do not follow the traditional voting pattern – swing voters percentage has gone up 7-8 % that can go in favor of any party.

Dr Sahoo pointed out that nowadays illegal black money largely donated by corporate companies/ private businesses is the main source of funding of any political party who bankroll most of the elections in the country. He said that another significant trend in the last 10-15 years is the rise of self-financed candidates who raise their own funds and the percentage of such candidates is approximately 30-40%. He substantiated by giving the example of Uttar Pradesh where candidates are supposed to raise and donate Rs. 2 crores to party funds if they want to contest MLA elections. The irony of such culture is that you can't expect the politician to behave like a saint when they indulge in corrupt practices in the process of raising party funds and would then be obligated to return favors to his sponsors once elected.

While discussing the outcome of this process, he said it is very dangerous for democracy when politicians and their parties raise party funds from all sources, legitimate as well as illegitimate. He substantiated this fact by referring to the Vohra Committee Report finding on the underworld funding of political parties and their election campaigns during the 1990s, which could still be in practice. This Committee further said that tenders, licenses and policies are easily passed in favor of those who bribe politicians before and after the elections. In this process, the democratic fabric of the country is harmed given that the elected representatives do not actually represent the aspirations of voters.

He said that politics had become a business nowadays as candidates become millionaires after saving from the actual election expenditures or by carrying out misappropriations. Hence, the number of crorepatis was seen as growing manifold and the increase their assets was easily visible.

Talking about few earlier intervention strategies that failed to reduce the menace of money power in elections, he supported the idea of state funding of elections subject to some set rules prevalent in 126 countries in one form or the other as the political class becomes dependent on businessmen due to high cost of contesting elections. He said once state provides them 60-70% of these funds, the dependency on corporate companies & other vested interests reduces drastically. This will also boost the morale of new political outfits and other genuine candidates who are losing elections due to

absence of level playing field and would also generate a healthy competition among political parties. He said state funding is very successful in Japan and Canada and time has come for India to think about it seriously.

**Dr Ajit Ranade (Founder Member and Trustee, ADR NEW)**

Dr. Ajit Ranade, referring to the session topic, concluded at the beginning itself that there is no political will or support for bringing electoral & political reforms among political class. He cited five examples as to why this could be concluded.

1. All political parties opposed the case against ECI in Delhi HC filed by ADR to introduce mandatory disclosure of candidate's criminal antecedents and financial background to the public.
2. All political parties opposed the Supreme Court judgement on disclosure of candidate's background information and all parties came together to overturn this landmark judgement in year 2002.
3. All political parties also contested the idea of being subjected to scrutiny under the Right to Information Act, 2005.
4. Political parties were prohibited from receiving foreign funding according to law, but the government amended the FCRA 1976 by adding a provision with retrospective effect which legitimized foreign funding from 42 years ago and none of the opposition parties opposed this amendment.
5. Political parties supported introduction of electoral bonds that are completely anonymous and ironically nobody opposed the same.



He concluded by reiterating that the above examples show that there is lack of political will to bring electoral & political reforms in this country and it can only be done by Civil Society Organizations (CSOs).

**Open Discussion**

**Q1.** Is there any scheme of centralization in finalizing our candidates? How to bring internal democracy within political parties? What is solution to all problems?

**Ans. Shri Arun Gurtoo** replied that unless the nature / characteristic of political parties is clarified as to whether they are private firms or public entities or NGOs, only then can the government restrictions be imposed on them. We see that political parties continue to shy away from social responsibility as well as accountability even though they are openly accepting public funds. He concluded that it is clear that parties would not show political will today and hence it is imperative for CSOs to go to the court of law to bring this reform in system; else, we should wait 15-20 years for their evolution to happen.

**Q2.** What is the guarantee that state funding of elections would not be misappropriated by parties and candidates?

**Ans. Dr Niranjan Sahoo** responded that State funding of elections should be provided as per the set rules and regulations without leaving any scope for misappropriations, as done in Japan & Canada successfully. In countries where state funding is successful, they have passed a dedicated law in their parliament considering all relevant issues holistically and there is no scope for any malpractices. These rules would involve a ceiling or cap on election expenditure, as well as a limit on maximum funds acceptable from corporates.

## Electoral & Political Reforms and the Role of Judiciary

**Chairperson: Dr Ajit Ranade**



*(From Left to Right) Shri Shaktikanta Srivastava (Retired District Judge), Dr Ajit Ranade (Founder member and Trustee- ADR/NEW), Shri Amit Puri (Spokesperson – BJP) and Ms Kamini Jaiswal (Senior Advocate – Supreme Court, Trustee – ADR)*



### **Shri Shaktikanta Srivastava (Retired District Judge)**

Shri Shaktikanta Srivastava began by stating that literacy and improving the socio-economic status of the public can pave way for electoral reforms. He said that no political party is interested in improving these parameters and are guilty of bribery and purchase of votes. He also added that the ordinary citizens have to struggle for basic needs like food, water, shelter, education etc. and this makes them vulnerable to unethical election tactics like bribery. Shri Srivastava also cited an example of a Surat factory that manufactured saris with the pictures of popular politicians to be used during campaigns. He said that such grey areas were not under the jurisdiction of subordinate courts but the higher courts like Supreme Court and High Courts could certainly take action against such tactics.

He also added that the most critical role of the judiciary is to decide cases expeditiously. He stated that in the High Court's election petitions are not decided in a time bound manner. He also mentioned about the violations committed by the political class against judgements on electoral reforms and the lack of contempt action taken against the violators by the courts.





**Ms Kamini Jaiswal (Senior Advocate – Supreme Court of India, Trustee – ADR)**

Ms Kamini Jaiswal spoke on the role of judiciary in electoral reforms and highlighted three landmark judgments. First, she mentioned about the 2002/2003 Supreme Court judgement that had ordered candidates to disclose on affidavits (Form 26) information about their criminal, financial and educational antecedents. Second judgment was about the 2013 Supreme Court ruling which had ordered the elected representatives to vacate his/her seat upon conviction. She said that this judgement resulted in the resignation of the Chief Ministers of Bihar and Tamil Nadu. The third important judgment Ms Jaiswal discussed was regarding the provision of unrestricted freedom to hold caste-based campaign rallies, contrary to the Representation of Peoples Act. Ms Jaiswal also pointed out that the judiciary could only pass judgements as enforcement and implementation is highly difficult unless violations are specifically brought to court's notice. To achieve this, she stressed on the responsibility of the public in being vigilant about violation of the laws and directions issued by the courts. She also highlighted the role of the citizens in filing petitions in order to bring such violations before the courts.

Ms Kamini Jaiswal also expressed that the real concern does not lie in the lack of fast-track judgements by the judiciary. She said that the biggest problem currently being faced by the courts is lack of competent judges. She also stated that most High Courts are operating at 56-60% of its strength only, whereas the population is rising alongside citizen's awareness of their own rights. This leads to many petitions and appeals being stashed away in the courts. In this context, Ms Jaiswal also highlighted some key electoral issues that she suggested should be pursued by the judiciary on an urgent basis:

1. She said that the trial of MPs and MLAs should be done expeditiously and, in a time, bound manner.
2. She also mentioned the amendments brought to the Foreign Contributions Regulations Act, 1976 and 2010 (FCRA) which has removed the ban on foreign corporate donations to political parties. She said that while hundreds of NGOs are deregistered and penalized for minor violations, political parties are immune to even the most major violations under law. She added that no party will ever be ready to support actions/directions/ laws which will undermine their financial interest and this was the sole reason behind the amendment being passed in the Parliament sans opposition.

3. She also spoke about the electoral bonds scheme and removal of company's limit to donate and expressed concern that such arbitrary provisions severely undermine the transparency of election financing as such provisions will only lead to anonymity and will also give immense powers to private corporations. She felt that because the parties are financed by big companies, these companies are the ones ruling the government. She hoped that the judiciary would pursue this issue and take a proactive stand against the scheme.
4. She also highlighted the importance of 'NOTA' ('None of the Above') vote calling it a "positive development." However, she also expressed regret over the fact that NOTA vote has little power in influencing the outcome of the elections since the next highest candidate is elected in case NOTA wins the majority of the votes. She proposed that the NOTA should be given more power so that political parties are forced to select clean candidates. She added that the lack of power in NOTA vote has forced voters to choose a candidate they do not wish to vote for.

Ms Kamini Jaiswal also stated that while judges may have their own political philosophy, the issues raised in the judiciary or by the citizens should not be polarized in favour of one party or the other. She concluded by saying that the judiciary needs pro-people judges who would proactively take up these matters and advance pro-public political reforms.

#### **Shri Amit Puri (Spokesperson – BJP)**

Shri Amit Puri stated that opposing views and outlook are the hallmark of a lively democracy. He said that the judiciary could only pass judgements and give directions but the implementation of these orders is difficult as political will is also necessary for the execution of judicial orders.



Shri Amit Puri said that although elections are expensive but political navigation by parties during five years is even costlier. He also raised the issue of money power in the electoral and political process and reminisced about the time when political parties and politicians were respected because of their beliefs and principles and not their wealth. He condemned the use of unethical finances by politicians and parties and expressed appreciation for the judiciary for enabling effective legislation on the Fugitive Economic Offenders Act 2018. He also supported the development of special courts for the trial of accused MPs and MLAs. He was also in favour of raising

a voice against the issue of freebies.

Shri Amit Puri stated that the Indian democracy is slowly maturing. He said that democracy is not time-bound, but flexible and dynamic. He agreed that NOTA was introduced to remove the pressure on people to choose from a restricted set of political recipes. He said that his party welcomes the proposal of making the NOTA more effective through a legal order for re-election upon a majority NOTA vote. He also mentioned that his party had proposed that parliamentary and state elections should be conducted simultaneously in the spirit of democracy and to reduce election expenditure. He also highlighted that his party has been vocal about state-funded elections although the policy has its own limitations and external costs and other technicalities need to be considered.

Shri Amit Puri stated that the rationale behind the electoral bonds scheme is to curb the problems of cronyism and money politics to exchange bribes for votes and expressed that the electoral bonds were introduced to target these issues. He also reiterated the importance of unity and dialogue between parties, the government and the citizens and encouraged the public to reach out to the government with suggestions and proposals.

### **Open Discussion**

**Q1.** A question was raised that before the elections, one can find front-page advertisements spreading propaganda on behalf of parties in TV and newspapers and whether there was any scope for the judiciary to intervene in this issue at any point.

**Ans. Shri Srivastava** replied that obstacles in reforming the election process were not related to the distortion of the judicial functioning, but to the distortion of the legislative and political deficiencies. Therefore, these issues can be tackled when the public reports them and mobilizes against them. On the issue of advertisements, he stated that these publications were useless as they did not provide constructive data or information. He added that resolutions curbing expenditure could be taken up in the Parliament, while petitions could be filed in courts by civil actors simultaneously.

## Electoral Bonds and Financial Opacity *Chairperson – Maj Gen Anil Verma (Retd.)*



**(From Left to Right)** Shri Sanjay Singh (Secretary – Parmarth, State Coordinator – Uttar Pradesh /NEW), Shri Rakesh Reddy Dubbudu (Founder – Factly.in, State Coordinator – Andhra Pradesh and Telangana), Maj Gen Anil Verma (Retd) (Head of ADR) and Shri Suchindran Baskar Narayan (Advocate, Supreme Court of India and Madras High Court)



### **Maj Gen Anil Verma (Retd.) (Head – ADR & NEW)**

Maj Gen Anil Verma introduced all the panel members to the audience. He began the discussion by familiarizing the audience with Electoral Bonds, first announced by the Finance Minister Arun Jaitley in his budget speech in 2017 and thereafter formalized in form of the Electoral Bonds Scheme in January 2018. He further described the manner in which these bonds, which are like promissory notes and issued in multiples of Rs 1000, Rs 10,000, Rs 1 lakh, Rs 10 lakhs and Rs 1 crore, can be purchased using KYC details to make donations to political parties.

He opined that the biggest limitation of the Electoral Bonds Scheme was the fact that it did not reveal the identity of the donor as well as that of the political party to which contributions are made via these bonds. This is in stark contrast with the stand taken by the Election Commission of India (ECI) and the Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) on ensuring transparency and accountability in political funding. He also pointed out that although the former Chief Election Commissioners of India opposed the scheme,

the government went ahead with the implementation of the scheme and amended the Reserve Bank of India Act and Income-Tax Act.

Gen Verma also mentioned that all the donations through Electoral Bonds are mostly in denominations of Rs 10 lakhs and Rs 1 crore and given the nature of the scheme, these remain anonymous contributions or contributions from unknown sources; thereby, undermining the transparency in electoral funding. He further revealed that a report by ADR on *Analysis of Donations declared by National Parties, FY 2017-18* found that political parties received a total of Rs 222 crores rupees through bonds. Of this amount, Rs 210 crores (95% of the total) is received by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Rs 5 crores is declared by the Indian National Congress (INC) while the remaining Rs 6 crores is received by the regional party JDS. Gen Verma expressed that opposition parties do not object to this scheme which favors the current ruling party since it would benefit them whenever they come to power in future. He contended that the knowledge of the details of sale of electoral bonds lies with the State Bank of India, Reserve Bank of India and for obvious reasons, with the Government of India. He concluded that the scheme acts as a means for ensuring that financial opacity is maintained.

**Shri Suchindran Baskar Narayan (Advocate, Supreme Court of India and Madras High Court)**

Shri Narayan began by pointing out the larger picture encapsulating the idea of Electoral Bonds. He stated that the issue with India's democracy like others such as the United States is the absence of a Constitutional provision for regulation of political parties. He added that in his opinion all political and electoral reforms in India have happened when minority governments were in power. According to him, the reason behind this was that major parties usually have common vested interests in opposing reforms and regulations. He pointed out that Electoral Bonds were sold in Parliament under the impression that they will protect anonymity and prevent political reprisals. He added, 'anonymity is a myth' and 'whoever needs to know who gave the money and where it came from, will know (pointing to SBI, RBI and the Government of the day). He called the scheme the worst political reform in the last 60 years.



Shri Narayan said that it was only gradually after the independence of India when problems started to arise that steps were taken to introduce regulations in matters of electoral funding and empower the civil society. He gave the example of the letters written by Rajaji of the Swatantra Party to Nehru and other leaders raising concerns about the issues with electoral funding. He mentioned how the Congress Party relied on the integrity of its members in the colonial era for managing its funds, whenever it was proscribed by the British and its accounts were taken over. However, he added that such integrity is absent today and as a result, it becomes imperative to innovate new systems and curb the monster i.e. the political parties.

He opined that the Indian judiciary also failed to prevent the opacity in electoral funding. He recounted the 1994 judgment in the *Kuldeep Nayar case*, whereby the journalist challenged an amendment to domicile requirements for Rajya Sabha elections. He explained that this amendment undermined the federal nature of India and allowed the party high commands to nominate leaders to represent states they did not belong to. He also pointed out how the Speaker of the Lok Sabha has become an authority unto herself and can certify any bill as Money Bills, where the ultimate decision-making power lies with the Lower House. He mentioned that this was how the Electoral Bonds Scheme was introduced in the Parliament and called it an erosion of the democracy.

On the Electoral Bonds scheme, Shri Narayan expressed that the new electoral laws along with the Electoral Bonds Scheme will prevent new players from coming in, given the requirement that only registered political parties that secured 1% of the votes polled in the last General Elections were eligible to receive these bonds. He stated that the easy entry of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in politics incited older parties to introduce checks and balances against new entrants to preserve their power. Referring to the Government's efforts in making Aadhaar compulsory, he concluded that there are noticeably only two schemes where Aadhaar is not required – The New Arms Rule and the Electoral Bonds Scheme, indicating the intent behind both the schemes.

He concluded by stating that despite many organizations which could take up this issue such as the Editorials guild, the Indian Newspaper Society, Indian Broadcasting Federation, Press Council of India, the Election Commission of India, there has been no forward movement in curbing the issue of paid news.





**Shri Rakesh Reddy Dubbudu (Founder-Factly.in, State Coordinator – Andhra Pradesh and Telangana)**

Shri Rakesh Reddy Dubbudu began by briefing the audience about how the Electoral Bonds Scheme gives ruling government advantage over others. He mentioned that the decisive authority on bonds is the government which decides the period of sale of bonds among other things. He mentioned that in 2018, bonds were sold for the first time in four major metro cities of India namely Chennai, Mumbai, Delhi and Kolkata. Later, this was extended to authorized branches of the State Bank of India in all other state capitals.

He said that in the run up to the General Elections 2019, these bonds will be made available for a total of 45 days in the months of March, April and May together and pointed out that so far Rs 1407 crores worth bonds were sold over seven phases. He highlighted the cities that saw maximum sale of these bonds include Kolkata (Rs 424 crores) largest in the country, followed by Mumbai (Rs 407 crores) and Delhi (Rs 173 crores). Additionally, he mentioned that out of a total of Rs 1407 crores, Rs 1034 crores worth Electoral Bonds were encashed in Delhi where the offices of National Parties are located. He predicted that the 2017 instance of the ruling party receiving the maximum number of bonds would be repeated in 2018-19 according to the trends visible from the latest available data. He added that Rs 1404 crores (99%) worth bonds were in the denominations of Rs 10 lakhs and Rs 1 crore, indicating that these bonds are largely being purchased by corporate houses and not individuals, and mostly given to National Parties. He also reiterated the fact that it is the Government of the day that ultimately controls the functioning of the Scheme and possess all the information while the rest remain clueless about the identity of the donors.

He concluded by stating that this scheme posed problems for two set of parties – new parties, given the requirement for securing 1% of the votes polled in the last General Elections to be eligible to obtain donations through these bonds and Regional Parties, who did not receive any substantial funds through Electoral Bonds as shown by the data.



**Shri Sanjay Singh (Secretary – Parmarth, State Coordinator - Uttar Pradesh /NEW)**

Shri Sanjay Singh began by focusing on the intended objective behind the introduction of the Electoral Bonds Scheme. He said that while announcing the Electoral Bonds Scheme, the Government stressed on the objective of improving transparency in party funding. However, in his opinion, what was said and what was

delivered turned out to be very different. He said that this measure facilitated the flow of black money to political parties and enabled the exploitation of political power since the most powerful parties were the ones that received the highest funding through bonds. He added, “This scheme is a means to support political corruption”.

He illustrated how corporates may also seek favors from parties in exchange of their contributions to parties via Electoral Bonds, thereby giving rise to the possibility of crony capitalism.

He concluded that the scheme permitted increased government control and promoted flow of black money as mentioned earlier. According to him, the scheme interfered with the traditional rural customs/ attitudes of political funding to candidates/parties in cash and also has the potential to promote bad practices in matters of political financing.

**Open Discussion**

**Q1.** How Electoral Bonds could facilitate the flow of black money if they are regulated by banks given that the banks maintained records of all transactions?

**Ans. Maj Gen Anil Verma** answered that there were some initial provisions which required corporate companies that donated to parties to be profit-based companies only. However, such provisions were removed, and hence, there is little accountability as to where the funds are coming from – from credible sources or from shell companies. Gen Verma said that the original source of the money remains unknown, and therefore, there is room for money laundering.

**Q2.** What is the role of the Electoral Bonds Scheme in promoting a two-party system in India, since other parties might get disbanded because of lack of funding?

**Ans. Shri Rakesh Reddy Dubbudu** responded that this was for the regional parties to debate over given that only few such parties have raised this concern despite the fact that it is detrimental to their future.

**Shri Suchindran Baskar Narayan** said that the two-party system is detrimental in the absence of inner-party democracy, and may compound India's current problem.

**Gen Verma** added that even before Electoral Bonds were used, the ruling party received the highest funding, as is the case now.

**Q3.** A question was asked whether upon purchasing an Electoral Bond, one has to declare it in their income tax returns that the sum was used to buy an Electoral Bond?

**Ans.** The panelists answered that both the donor and the recipient would receive 100% tax exemption on the purchase of bonds.

**Maj Gen Verma** said that for political parties, returns were filed with the income tax authorities without enough scrutiny of the finances as done for individuals. He added that an inquiry of the increase in assets of consecutively elected MLAs was filed in the Supreme Court, of which 300 were declared to be scrutinized. However, this scrutiny was done through the courts, and is not part of normal procedure.

## Local and Urban Governance

### *Chairperson – Prof Sudarsan Padmanabhan*



**(From Left to Right)** Ms Mukta Soni (President – Talbehat Municipal Corporation), Ms. Pankti Jog (Executive Director – MAGP, Gujarat State Coordinator, NEW), Prof Sudarsan Padmanabhan (Trustee – ADR) and Shri Sudhir Pal (Chief Functionary – Manthan, State Coordinator - Jharkhand/NEW)



#### **Prof Sudarsan Padmanabhan (Trustee – ADR)**

Prof Padmanabhan initiated the panel discussion by stating that in 2016 during the Tamil Nadu Assembly Elections, almost 35% of the voters were below 30 years. In view of this, the CEO TN Shri Rajesh Lakhani undertook several efforts to increase student voter awareness under SVEEP by organizing programmes, distributing T-shirts, conducting online quiz programs, campaigning on social media like Facebook, etc. This resulted in 3% increase in voter percentage. In 2019, more than 12 crore young voters would decide the fate of the contesting candidates for the General Elections. Giving examples of youth organizations like Yuva and Arappor Iyakkam, a social service NGO for local and urban governance, he said that “political activism” is difficult as well as dangerous in the present scenario in India. He then introduced the distinguished speakers of the session to the audience.



**Shri Sudhir Pal (Chief Functionary – Manthan, State Coordinator - Jharkhand/NEW)**

Thanking Prof Padmanabhan, Shri Sudhir Pal initiated the discussion by addressing the close relationship between the public and the local self-government institutions like Panchayats or municipal corporations at the grassroots level. He spoke about the 73rd and 74th amendments which gave Constitutional status to Panchayats and Municipalities

He highlighted that the main reform that took place after 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment was the formation of the District Planning Committee (DPC). It has become more relevant in the present scenario after the Planning Committee was dissolved; as now DPCs are the sole planning authority that have constitutional status. 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> amendments talk about Social & Economic justice as well as need-based decentralized planning.

He also said that while the Gram Sabhas have become very powerful and autonomous in terms of sanctioning and passing of welfare schemes at village level; at the city level, Mohalla / Ward Sabhas have room to improve. He said that rural as well as urban local bodies only act as an extended arm of the government and are merely like “contractors” who implement government welfare schemes rather than as independent self-ruled governments. All major decisions with regard to planning and implementing the affairs of the local bodies are taken by state governments instead of them.

Shri Pal briefly spoke about the collapse of the delivery mechanism of higher governments at the Centre or State levels. Policies and schemes introduced at the Centre would not reach the lower levels of administration, and consequently, did not reach the grassroots of civil society. He concluded by saying that the public’s expectations with local self-governance bodies like Gram Panchayats and municipalities remain unfulfilled, and that these bodies failed to develop as autonomous decision-making authorities.

Throwing light on the rampant corruption and the large sum of money given to the “Mukhiya” (Sarpanch) of the village in Jharkhand, he said there is intense competition among people to become Mukhiya (Sarpanch) as they are not interested in occupying other local body posts which are not as lucrative. Giving the example of the central funds pumped in the smart city development, he said candidates spend more on becoming Mayors / Deputy Mayors of municipal corporations as compared



to MLAs of the State. This is because once elected as Mayor, all municipal contracts go to their family, and this makes them cash rich. Shri Pal also spoke about the Smart City Initiative, and its implications for cities like Ranchi. He said that the project resulted in severe drainage of the main river in the city, which was almost reduced to a canal. He mentioned a statue which was erected in the city with a cost of 22 crore rupees. This disrupted the water table of the city as well as the lives of hundreds of people that sustained on the water daily. He suggested empowerment of Mohalla / Ward Sabhas to exercise checks and balances on such malpractices existing in the system and to involve the public with these projects and procedures to a larger extent.

**Ms. Pankti Jog (Executive Director – MAGP, Gujarat State Coordinator, NEW)**

Ms. Jog began her speech by introducing her organization Mahiti Adhikar Gujarat Pahal (MAGP) that has been promoting RTI since 2003. She said that one of their major achievements was receiving 6 lakh calls (from remote villages as well as from other states) on the RTI helpline number launched in 2006 to empower the common man. She added that they received various types of complaints majorly related to ineffectiveness of the village Gram Sabhas. They observed contradictions and malfunctioning in NREGA scheme, as what was happening in reality was totally opposite to what was envisaged, compelling them to initiate awareness campaigns at the grassroots level.



The primary focus was on strengthening Gram Sabhas, especially in tribal areas, through community outreach programs to ensure effective participation in the decision-making process and fortunately, tangible outcomes were observed of such efforts. Ms. Jog said, “Mobilization happens often, but how many people exercise their franchise remains a question.” She added that elected women representatives did not attend sessions or begin duties, and her organization tried to remedy this.

The dominance of the husbands of elected women representatives was so imposing that elected women did not attend the Panchayat meetings or training programs and even if they did, they would hesitate to sit on the chairs reserved for them, thanks to the newly introduced system of showing online photo of the women Sarpanch sitting on her seat.

Ms. Jog highlighted that the first achievement of the efforts undertaken was the successful demand of accountability in the form of the “Action Taken Report” on resolutions passed in the first Gram Sabha. This was to inculcate a habit of reporting to the Gram Sabha formed by people who are at the grassroots level as everybody is reporting to the top-level authorities in the democracy. She said that during elections especially, bodies like the Gram Sabha must give the public a report of their actions in the past term. To disseminate such information, she strongly recommended the use of ICT and online applications, especially to appeal to the youth. She also recommended the increased accountability of local service providers in the Gram Sabha: PDS shops, schools, anganwadis, and health centres. This process enabled citizens’ understanding, ensured their active participation in governance, and empowered them to become better voters for future elections.

The second achievement was the extensive downloading and use of internet applications on the smartphones by villagers on issues like Gram Sabha, NREGA, etc. for information dissemination, where they could check the various features of the welfare schemes online. For example, how much funding was allocated under a scheme in the village, budget allocation etc. Ms. Jog added that the youngsters were finding it very interesting and empowering given that they could access all such information now readily available on their smartphones without having to file RTIs to get desired information. She mentioned that there was a need to improve the accountability by making all essential service providers like PDS shops, health centers, schools, Panchayat, aanganwadis etc. answerable to the Gram Sabhas to ensure the smooth flow of essential services to the people and avoid lengthy administrative complaint procedures in case of any disputes. She also touched the issue of fixing accountability of the elected representatives to the public by activating the Block, District and State Coordination Committees, presently defunct, at the respective levels. The elected representatives will have to answer various questions in the monthly review meetings of these Coordination Committees; such a process enhances the learnings and can empower them to represent their constituency in a better way in the Legislative Assembly or the House of People.

She further discussed that there was extensive work done on capacity building of the elected representatives who were not properly trained and unaware of the budget or other processes, schemes, policies, new GR, GPDP plans, etc. This training enabled elected representatives also to file RTIs for getting information useful for their constituency.

As a model in four districts of Gujarat, the organization (MAGP) implemented a unique project whereby all three major stakeholders – the administration, elected representatives and people at large sat together on one platform and prioritized their objectives. After this process, elected representatives instructed the administration to implement a welfare scheme and the administration had to brainstorm to find a lawful way to implement that scheme. The impact of this model project was that it restored the confidence of the common man in the democratic process and also the Block/ District / State Coordination Committees at the respective levels that could transform into spaces for meaningful discussions.

Ms. Jog also informed that there is an organized form of corruption in the mechanisms such as PDS and threats are given to people who challenge the prevailing nexus that facilitates such corruption; as a result, local people feel helpless as the enforcement mechanisms are paralyzed in the State and made totally defunct. She said that the corruption in the PDS system is related to tampering with private information and the removal of names of beneficiaries from the rations list if they had not linked their Aadhaar card to their ration cards, although the State government had said that Aadhaar card information was not mandatory for obtaining rations through PDS. The software was being manipulated to delete the names of beneficiaries in absence of their Aadhaar card details.

#### **Prof Sudarsan Padmanabhan (Trustee – ADR)**

Informing the audience about the non-occurrence of local body elections in Tamil Nadu since last 3 years, Prof Sudarsan Padmanabhan emphasized the need for decentralization of power. He said that centralization by the colonial administration as well as our own Indian governments has led to corruption in the functioning of local bodies. Prof Padmanabhan also discussed that India always had a tradition for nurturing the local government and punishing acts of corruption. He pointed out the system used by the Chola Dynasty wherein officials and their families were exiled if found guilty of corruption. He hoped that this tradition would continue in democratic India in a stronger way.



**Ms. Mukta Soni (President – Talbehat Municipal Corporation)**

Ms. Mukta Soni started her talk by highlighting her achievements of winning elections as an independent candidate three times consecutively and spoke about winning the Ideal Nagar Panchayat Award twice under her Presidency.

She said that if we wanted to strengthen our democracy, we should think like a voter as well as an elected public representative. In her view in the recent elections, rival candidates were luring voters of her constituency through money power (Rs 2000-3000 per vote) so that she was defeated but the womenfolk unconditionally voted her in as she worked very hard for their well-being during her tenure. This happened despite the fact that they took cash for votes from the rival candidates.

She emphasized that many complexities have arisen in our democracy due to the influence of money and muscle power. There is an urgent need to educate women and make them aware as women don't have decision-making power during elections and the decision to vote for a particular candidate or party is taken by the male (husband, brother, father, etc.) on their behalf. If this phenomenon is stopped by making womenfolk strong, they would vote for the right candidate resulting in reduced influence of money power.

While concluding she appreciated the efforts of ADR for strengthening democracy and its fight against money and muscle power. She was glad to see the gathering of like-minded persons and organizations with the objective to fight against social evils and expressed hope that someday the culture of money and muscle power will get defeated. She appealed to the audience to vote after listening to the inner conscience as it will surely pave the way for a vibrant democracy in the true sense.

**Open Discussion**

**Q1. Prof Sastry** asked **Ms Mukta Soni** about how she won her first election. He further asked, "What was the strategy or process adopted? What work you did to engage with your constituency that went in your favour for winning further elections?"

**Ans. Ms Soni** explained that at 30 years, she was the youngest candidate to run for office in Uttar Pradesh, and the people saw the face of change in her. The youth yearned for change and reform, because of which she was able to attract their votes. She also spoke about her initiatives as President.

She added that when she stood for her first election, she witnessed that the youth wanted change as the sitting representative had not done enough good work for the constituency; thus, anti-incumbency factor and voters' aspirations for change helped her won the election with huge margin. The work she did in her constituency included the overhauling the 100 year old Mela into Mahotsav (a grand celebration), development of tourism in her area by forming a Boat Club, worked relentlessly with veteran activist Mr Rajendra Singh to save water, conceptualised 'Voice of Talbehat' under which speakers were installed in all strategic locations of her tehsil –public announcements were made from her office that reached the whole city.

**Q2.** How would you handle pressure from contractors while undertaking civil and infrastructure works like construction of roads and sewerage?

**Ans. Ms Soni** responded that the quality of road, sewerage and other civic amenities in her constituency is of superior quality. She has to face contractors but has become confident in handling them over time.

**Q3.** A question was raised about the regulation of the use of funds provided by the Government to local bodies like the DPC, and whether the local bodies were held accountable on their use of funds for developmental activities?

**Ans. Shri Pal** explained that the Constitution had empowered the Gram Sabha with the mechanism of checks and balances for any scheme or initiative which was proposed. He added that strengthening this body was the way to account for the proper usage of finances supplied to local institutions, because the Sabha would ensure that once funds were received for a specific project, they were used according to the estimates. He also said that the Gram Sabhas had the power to conduct social audits or monitoring which was rarely done. Secondly, the Sabha should conduct financial audits after the completion of a scheme or project, which it was currently incapable of doing. Ms Pankti Jog added to this by saying that the public could also conduct social audits by joining Social Audit Societies in every state. She pointed out eight schemes for which financial data could be obtained on the Gram Samvaad online application.



**Day – 2  
(3<sup>rd</sup> March'19)**

**Information & Communication Technology for Better Governance**

***Chairperson: Maj Gen Anil Verma (Retd)***



***(From Left to Right)*** Ms. Shelley Thakral (Head of Programs, Facebook), Maj Gen Anil Verma (Retd.) (Head of ADR), Shri Rakesh Reddy Dubbudu (Founder-Factly.in, State Coordinator – Andhra Pradesh and Telangana), Shri Jaskirat Singh (Trustee – ADR/NEW) and Shri Chandrakant Naidu (Chief Editor, NewsNest)



**Maj Gen Anil Verma (Retd) (Head of ADR)**

Maj Gen Anil Verma welcomed the guests to the first session of day two of the National Conference, and hoped that it would be a vibrant and fruitful discussion with active participation from the audience. He welcomed the panelists and introduced them to the audience. He initiated the discussion by reflecting on the importance of using innovative ICT solutions to improve election processes. He acknowledged the positive steps already taken in this direction in the form of e-registration of voters and the creation of the NVSP online portal. He also noted the disadvantages of the use of ICT by political parties in the form of fake news, and emphasized the need to positively empower the voters through information technology and awareness by holding representatives accountable.

### **Shri Chandrakant Naidu (Chief Editor at NewsNest)**

Shri Naidu began with an experiment with information technology conducted in a rural village in Gujarat. In this project, the classrooms of school children were equipped with information technology infrastructure to provide fully digitized learning. He mentioned that digitization of processes allows the identification of its misuse and exploitation as well. In this context, he highlighted the VYAPAM scam in Madhya Pradesh as an example. He also spoke about the limitations of e-tendering, whereby bidders could track the lowest bid that was made and secure an unethical advantage by bidding lower. Shri Naidu noted that besides developing and implementing ICT infrastructure in governance and elections, the capacity to tackle misuse of digital platforms should also be developed. He spoke about software manipulation in the case of distribution of rations under the PDS, which was addressed by Ms. Pankti Jog in the session on Local and Urban Governance. He mentioned that the ability to delete details of a number of people from the list of ration card owners remotely, by tampering with software, would allow these rations to be sold in the black market and create a mafia of sorts. Shri Naidu also provided the example of deliberate tampering of voters' lists in Madhya Pradesh. He stated that devising solutions against the misuse and manipulation of data would be a significant contribution to the use of ICT infrastructure. He concluded, "Internet technology is not a novel thing anymore... nor is the misuse of it; but perhaps, we, as people responsible to bring order in the society, should be working towards eliminating the errors that have crept in."



### **Shri Jaskirat Singh (Trustee and Founder ADR)**

Shri Singh began by saying, "Technology is just a force multiplier." He pointed out that technology was merely a tool whose usage depended on intention, whether it was being used for good governance or for malpractice. He mentioned the example of railway reservations in India 20 years ago, which could only be done by standing in long queues. He said that this highly inefficient process was improved through the use of technology, which also reduced corruption in the railway ticket system. Shri Singh warned against the potential to misuse well-intentioned technology efforts in India, although it also improved transparency in the system of governance.

Regarding the Election Watch, Shri Singh said that technology was already being employed variedly and it helped expand the outreach of the NEW, provided the means to cross-check information, and increased transparency and reliable data.

**Shri Rakesh Reddy Dubbudu (Founder- Factly.in, State Coordinator – Andhra Pradesh and Telangana)**



Shri Rakesh Reddy Dubbudu began by addressing the introduction of ICT in Indian governance. He said that ICT was employed to solve a number of issues:

- 1) To simplify the processes of governance for citizens,
- 2) To remove middle-men and reduce corruption,
- 3) To improve transparency and accountability in the system,

4) To reduce the time consumed by the processes and make them efficient.

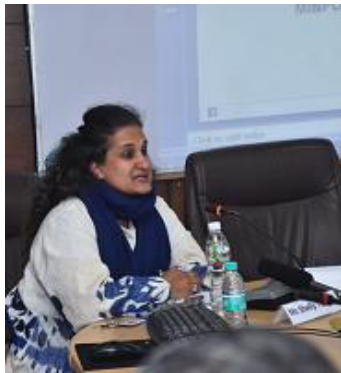
He explained that the usage of ICT in India could be divided into two areas- where human interaction is not involved, and only transactions are taking place; this is an area where ICT was working satisfactorily, for example; the online railway ticketing system, or the MyNeta website. On the other hand, where human interfaces are involved, ICT is not doing so well. Shri Dubbudu gave the example of Municipal Corporation complaint redressal applications. He said that in many such cases, online complaints were closed without being resolved by employees.

Technology was completing half the task, whereas the half that involved humans was not satisfactorily performed. Shri Dubbudu addressed the issue of allegations against deletion of voters without sufficient reason as another example where the human-technology synthesis had failed to happen effectively. He said that it was important to distinguish these two domains when talking about ICT in governance. As most malpractice occurred in systems with human involvement, Shri Dubbudu pointed out the importance of check and balances against human operators.

Shri Dubbudu then spoke about social media in politics, saying that one can no longer discount the power of social media. He said that the evolution of using technology in India was very different from the West, where it was gradual and step-by-step. In India, most people began using smartphones directly, without prior background of older technology and interfaces. This meant that digital literacy

curricula designed by the government only dwelt on accessing services like the Internet, and not on understanding information. He felt that this is a limitation of the digital literacy education in the country. He gave the example of a global survey which showed that early users of technology were more susceptible to fake news than experienced or digitally mature users.

To overcome this limitation, Shri Dubbudu expressed that awareness should be provided both by the social media or online platform as well as the government. He concluded by summing up his opinions: he believed that the government's focus on digital literacy should extend beyond transactional systems, and extend to instructing users on how to interact with information.



**Ms. Shelley Thakral (Head of Programs, Facebook)**

Ms. Thakral commenced by introducing the popularity of Facebook. She said that the platform had 2 billion users, making information its biggest responsibility. She explained that the multiple stakeholders on the Internet- creators of information, intermediaries, and consumers of information, all had a role to play in critical cycles like elections. She reinforced her platform's principle that every user on the interface must feel safe, especially individuals from minority groups. She said, "It is important, if we talk about virality and how we share information, are we responsible? Are we demonstrating good behavior?" She mentioned the example of cases of lynching in 2018 which caused the social media giant WhatsApp to create rules limiting the number of forward messages users could send to five, because of the rampant use of polarizing and provocative nature of such messages.

Ms. Thakral spoke about the steps taken by Facebook to ensure informed and ethical social media behavior. She mentioned the fact-checking systems and the humanized machine-learning processes developed globally. She said that Facebook takes this responsibility very seriously, and attempts to adapt and engage with the community every day. She also spoke about community standards that ensure coordination and adaptation to the context in which the platform operates.

Lastly, Ms. Thakral spoke about civic harm in the form of hate speech, fake news, or misinformation. She mentioned that Facebook undertook teaching through digital literacy programs to instruct how consumers can report and take action against civic harm, as well as seek redress. For the same, Facebook worked with academic institutions, the Election Commission, organizations like ADR, and

the civil society to ensure that the concerns of different groups were received and addressed. She gave the example of including caste in the global community guidelines for India, to make sure that the principles were effectively related to their context. She emphasized the need for women to feel safe on online platforms. She said: “There needs to be the assurance that we, as a company- a private company- are doing everything we can to make sure that communities online feels safe and that action is being taken. It also needs to be clear that we are not the arbiters of truth.” She expressed that while Facebook was a platform for free expression, there were third-party checks against false information and inauthentic online behavior. She said that in the last six months, Facebook took down nearly one billion fake accounts. She noted that in a highly sensitive period like the elections, Facebook was working to increase digital literacy among first time voters.

Ms. Thakral concluded by acknowledging the presence of good and harmful actors online, and stated that the responsibility of platforms was to enhance the experience of social media for all groups, while also taking serious action about the possibility of civic harm.

### **Open Discussion**

**Q1.** How fake news should be dealt with?

**Ans. Shri Dubbudu** said that fake news would require a multi-pronged approach. He said that government regulation would not help. He said that too much attention was given to extreme cases of polarization, and the vulnerability of neutral actors in consuming fake news was overlooked. He also said that stopping producers of fake news would not work because of the agents that funded them for their own interests. However, if consumption of fake news stops, this will weaken the spread. He highlighted that in the preceding weeks, there was a barrage of fake news on Facebook, citing an instance of a manipulated video posted by a laborer from Telangana based in the Middle East. The user was not aware that the video circulated by him was duplicated, and took it down immediately. Using this incident, Shri Dubbudu said that it was important to educate neutral social media consumers on misinformation through a multi-pronged approach using the government, media, fact-checking agencies, and companies.

**Shri Chandrakant Naidu** added that the question of invasion by the government and data agencies of the personal details and information of individuals also had to be addressed. He also spoke about a



case in Madhya Pradesh where an organization was being paid by the government to publish posts that threatened communal harmony.

**Q2.** What a platform like Facebook could do to deal with fake news especially since it could involve propaganda and violence, among other volatile discourse?

**Ans. Ms. Thakral** answered that there should be a bottom-up approach to this by building civic responsibility. She also spoke about the need for proper verification, removing fake accounts, and having zero tolerance towards hate speech was critical to this. She spoke about Facebook's digital literacy programs and the Youth Ambassador program with ADR as initiatives in this direction.

**Q3.** How Facebook distinguishes between lies and fake news circulated online?

**Ans. Ms. Thakral** responded that while the lines are blurred, there needs to be room for opinions and freedom of expression. She admitted how it was difficult to distinguish between political satire and defamation.

## Role of Youth & Voter Awareness: In Preparation for General Elections 2019

**Chairperson: Dr Vipul Mudgal**



**(From Left to Right)** Prof Sudarsan Padmanabhan (Trustee – ADR/NEW), Dr Vipul Mudgal (Director of Common Cause, Trustee of ADR), Shri Lakku Venkateshwarlu, IAS (Chief Electoral Officer of UP), Shri Heera Lal, IAS (District Magistrate, Banda), Shri Ranjan Mohanty (Secretary – PECUC, Odisha State Coordinator, NEW) and Shri Mohd Zeeshan (Founder of YES Foundation, Lucknow)



**Dr Vipul Mudgal (Director of Common Cause, Trustee of ADR)**

Dr Mudgal welcomed the distinguished members of the panel and the audience to the last session of the 15th National Conference. He expressed admiration for the unwavering attendance at the proceedings. He also acknowledged the work of ADR regarding the provision and facilitation of data, and spoke about the renown that the organization had earned nationally and internationally. He further stated that ADR firmly believed that civil society and the government were not distinct or compartmentalized and expressed conviction that voter awareness was the need of the hour, and would resolve many related democratic concerns of India as a nation. On the role of the youth, he said that India would soon have the largest population of educated youth in the world. He then introduced the panelists Shri Lakku Venkateswarlu, IAS (CEO of UP), Prof Sudarsan Padmanabhan (Trustee – ADR/NEW), Shri Heera Lal, IAS (District Magistrate of Banda), Shri Ranjan Mohanty (Secretary – PECUC, Odisha State Coordinator, NEW), Shri Mohd Zeeshan (Founder of YES Foundation, Lucknow).

**Shri Heera Lal, IAS (District Magistrate, Banda)**

Shri Lal commenced by stating that his mission was to achieve 90% voter turnout in his district, Banda (U.P.) during Lok Sabha polls. In this mission, he emphasized that he has made ADR his knowledge partner. He further gave a power point presentation showing the efforts put forth by his team in increasing the voter turnout in Banda. In this regard, he pointed out that to appeal to the voters he had interlinked percentage of voter turnout to the pride of Banda and was using cultural programs as the main medium for Sampark-Samvad-Sahyog with the voters. Besides Voter Awareness Campaigns were being conducted at the janpad, tehsil/block and district level.



Shri Lal spoke about the empowerment of differently abled voters in his district, with a presence of more than 9000 differently abled citizens. He elaborated on the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) created especially for the disabled, to redress their concerns and complaints of the community and represent them effectively. He also presented the district's initiative to improve voter turnout by celebrating the Election Day as the Election Fair, with dress codes, informative cultural programmes, and other arrangements at the polling centres. Shri Lal further spoke about the design of a standard

operating procedure at polling stations and referred to monitoring mechanisms that were in place to ensure better implementation of his plan. At the end, he mentioned about the media coverage around his efforts in Banda and the efforts taken to motivate new voters aged 18-21 years.



**Prof Sudarsan Padmanabhan (Trustee – ADR/NEW)**

Prof Padmanabhan began by congratulating Shri Heera Lal for his efforts in enhancing voters' participation in Banda. Further, he asserted that he himself was collaborating with several organizations to augment youth awareness regarding elections in Tamil Nadu. In addition to this, he listed the objectives of his team, which centered around empowering the youth in India:

- a) To devise ways for attracting the youth in political campaigns.
- b) To work with regional partners who have strong presence amongst youth in their respective regions.
- c) To make students aware of the political system/parliamentary democracy, via quiz competitions, debates etc. similar to what Election Commission of India had conducted in the past.
- d) To conduct interactive session/discussions on politics with students.

Prof Padmanabhan acknowledged the endeavors of ADR (through Hum Badlenge Apna Bharat, Campus Ambassador Program), the Election Commission of India, and the new CEO of Tamil Nadu, for their proactive role in engaging youth in the country.

**Shri Ranjan Mohanty (Secretary – PECUC, Odisha State Coordinator, NEW)**

Shri Mohanty began by presenting data on youth voters in India. In this process, he informed the audience that barely 1.5% of the eligible youth voters in the age group of 18-20 years exercise their franchise, which according to him was a major challenge that everyone needs to be concerned about. He also noted that the participation of youth in democratic processes would potentially neutralize their vulnerability



towards crime and violence by providing them with a constructive role in the system. Shri Mohanty said that the youth population could be divided into two groups: young, ineligible youth aged 15-17 years, and eligible voters aged 18-35 years. He added that the spirit of responsible voting (ethical voting) and vote-giving must be inculcated amongst the youth. He also said that the youth must be engaged to become catalysts, social agents, and actors in a democracy. He believed that the negative perceptions of the youth about politics e.g. on issues like populism, corruption, and 'dirty politics' had to be resolved. He proposed the use of social media and the engagement of youth icons and celebrities to spread vote-giving behavior. Shri Mohanty also emphasized that the political participation of youth should not be limited to voting. He believed that youngsters must be encouraged to participate in politics as legislators as well.

He explained that youth aged 15-17 years, being in the formative stage of development, must be trained as responsible voters and change makers, so that they are message bearers to their family and the community. Finally, he briefed his experience regarding the programs undertaken by Odisha Election Watch: (i) Hum Badlenge Apna Bharat, (ii) District level Convention, (iii) State level quiz competitions on the occasion of National Voters' Day, (iv) Launching of Blue Button Express as a part of My Vote My Country: My Vote Not For Sale.



**Mr. Mohd Zeeshan (Founder of YES Foundation, Lucknow)**

Mr. Zeeshan began by stating that for a country with a youth population as large as India's, the youth is the future of the country. He further added that according to Census 2011, every year 2 crore young voters are added as newly eligible voters. He pointed out further at the generation gap between the mature voters of the last national election and the new voters who will vote for the first time in this election.

Therefore, Mr. Zeeshan thought it was necessary to pay attention to what attracted a new voter. He said that a majority of youth citizens are ignorant, or disinterested in voting, or migrate between cities for education and employment, which is why they do not prioritize voting. Therefore, for better engagement of youth, he emphasized youth centric development.

### **Shri Lakku Venkateshwarlu, IAS (Chief Electoral Officer of UP)**

Shri Venkateshwarlu lauded ADR for its work on voter awareness and the initiative to improve democracy as a whole. He began by introducing a metaphor of a lamp, expressing that while a lamp could only be lit by all components driven by the idea to dispel darkness; similarly, individuals could, on their own, change the entire system with the help of an idea. He quoted Mahatma Gandhi and his belief that even a singular individual had immense potential, potential that they were



themselves unaware of. Shri Venkateshwarlu further said that the individual needed a thinker to channelize this powerful and creative energy and make a change. He quoted a Sanskrit text, *“Aksharam Amantram nasti/ nasti moolam anoushadam/ ayogyah purusho nasti/ yojakah tatra durlabhah.”* He explained, *“There is no letter incapable of forming a mantra, no root incapable of generating medicine, and likewise, no individual that is unfit or incapable. All of these need a thinker, a planner, who understands the mechanism deeply.”* He stated that the individual always thinks about their own future, rather than that of the nation or society. Stating the example of India’s freedom fighters, he said that the individual must understand the urgency and significance of the greater purpose.

Further, Shri Venkateshwarlu spoke about the magnitude of the exercise of empowering voters, particularly youth and emphasized on using Sampark, Samvad and Sahyog. The CEO said that there were several organizations involved in discussion with his office, such as defense organizations, industrial associations, youth organizations like NCC, and social organizations like pensioners’ association, senior citizens’ associations. All of these were rooted in democracy, even though they operated in different areas like defense, environment, or welfare. He pointed out that our representatives, from the Gram Panchayats to the Parliament, are not committed to the real values of democracy (like Justice, Equality and Fraternity) instead, they are driven by vested and sectarian interests. He said that the importance given by people towards electing ethical and responsible representatives should be examined, especially in village panchayats where the voter turnouts are exceptionally high. The CEO reminisced the struggles of national leaders in advancing the cause for freedom against colonialism, a cause that aimed to provide a life of dignity to every Indian citizen. The result of these rigorous efforts, according to him, was the Constitution of India, which encompassed all values withheld by the Indian democracy. He said that the society should dismiss religious and



caste-based ideologies and reject those values, which do not conform to the Constitutional values. He posed the question, *“How can somebody who does not conform to the Constitutional values be an effective representative?”*

Shri Venkateshwarlu pointed out the dual narrative in the election of candidates with criminal antecedents. He said that candidates with benevolent intentions and a commitment to constitutional values were rarely elected. He said that university students and voters often posed the question as to why unscrupulous leaders were still being elected. Conversely, candidates would say that people preferred to vote for such representatives because of material benefits like money. He said that voters often preferred instant gratification offered by candidates in the form of bribes or gifts, and ignored the five years of suffering which would result by electing a corrupt leader. He also spoke about the peoples’ underestimation of the value of their vote.

Shri Venkateshwarlu concluded with the statement that the problems with India’s democracy were not solely due to unscrupulous or negative actors, but due to the carelessness and passivity of positive actors. In this context, he further quoted a verse by Kabir, *“Boond samai samunder mein, yeh janai sab koi, Samunder samaya boond mein, jaane birla koi.”* He explained, *“Everyone knows that the democracy involves the vote. But seldom do we understand, that it is the vote which makes the democracy. The integrity of your vote will reflect in the glory of the democracy.”* He also elaborated that the devotion of every citizen towards the greater good could only be achieved when each of them understood the meaning and purpose of this cause. Finally, he motivated the audience by saying that true happiness comes only upon working for a larger, selfless cause like building India as a genuine democracy.

### **Open Discussion**

**Q1.** A question was asked to **Shri Heera Lal** that after working out the number of voters in the district and the number of polling booths, each booth would expect more than 800 voters. As the total time for every booth was 10 hours, each voter would get up to 1.5 minutes to vote. Considering this time-frame, would 90% voter turnout be actually realizable if the time was not increased?

**Ans. Shri Lal** explained that every voter who came towards the end of the day was still handed a voting slip, so they could wait even after the station had closed and still vote at the machine.



**Q2.** Whether the election commission could provide the facility of online voting to students, youth and labourers. He also asked if it was possible to put out a list of names of people who did not vote, rather than simply percentages of non-voters. Another member asked how youth who had migrated to other cities for work, and could not return for voting, might be able to vote remotely?

**Ans. Shri Venkateshwarlu** appreciated the suggestion but expressed concern that voters may not be able to vote independently, freely, and confidentially online. He also advised that individuals should register to be voters in the region they knew they could naturally vote from. He said that the provision for voting by post was available only for officers in service or on election duty.

**Q3. Shri Lal** was asked about a strategy to invite youth who had migrated to other cities for work to return and vote.

**Ans. Shri Lal** answered that there were three targets for increasing voter turnout. These were the people who lived within the boundaries of the district, those who lived near the borders, and those who lived outside the district like migrant labourers, students etc. He said that there was a SoP designed for these groups specifically, and 80 departments (including Kotedars, Jan Seva Kendras, Pensioners and Veterans etc.) would request the voters who are outside the district to come and cast their vote.

**Q4. Shri Arvind Gurtoo** suggested that the polling booths should have physical copies of the candidate affidavits with criminal and financial information available to the public.

**Ans. Shri Lal** appreciated the suggestion and said that there would be attempts to ensure the publicizing of the affidavits at booth. He requested the ADR District coordinators to coordinate with the DEO to distribute these affidavits as pamphlets or in newspapers to the public. However, he was doubtful of this implementation as this could begrudge the candidates themselves, who were essential in influencing the public to vote.

**Q5.** A member of the audience asked about the affidavits provided by candidates on their criminal and financial background. He asked if the media could be used to give more publicity to this information so it was known to the public.

**Maj Gen Verma** added to this question by asking the CEO how the Election Commission was supervising the publication of the affidavits effectively after the 2013 Supreme Court judgment making disclosure of financial and criminal information mandatory for candidates. He said that often, the information in the affidavits was inaccurate, false, or incomplete.

**Ans. Shri Venkateshwarlu** replied that other actors should be involved in verifying the information disclosed by candidates. He said that the decision ultimately lied in the hands of voters, who had to understand that a candidate who published false or inaccurate information would not serve the public loyally if elected. He said that the details also served as the means to identify whether voters willingly chose representatives who had criminal antecedents and why they did so.

## Strategy Workshop – National Election Watch Partners’ Meeting

Date and Venue: 1<sup>st</sup> March, 2019

DeenDayal Upadhyaya State Institute of Rural Development, Lucknow

### AGENDA

Time	Session
14:30 – 14:45	<b>Welcome address and Background to the meeting</b> Maj. Gen. Anil Verma (Retd.)
14:45 – 15:00	<b>General instructions</b>
15:00 – 15:45	<b>Strategy Building – Preparation for Lok Sabha elections, 2019</b> <b>Group discussion – region-wise:</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Broad activities envisioned <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Target groups</li> <li>Communication &amp; Outreach methods</li> <li>Research &amp; Advocacy to be undertaken</li> <li>Network and alliance partners</li> </ol> </li> <li>Resources required (human, knowledge, skill, technology, finance etc.)</li> <li>Ideas on how the resources can be enhanced (<i>including generating them locally</i>)</li> </ol> <p><b>Group I</b> (Assam, Tripura, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh)  <b>Group II</b> (West Bengal, Odisha, Jharkhand, Bihar, Chhattisgarh)  <b>Group III</b> (J&amp;K, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand)  <b>Group IV</b> (Goa, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan)  <b>Group V</b> (Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh &amp; Telangana, Puducherry)</p>
15:45 – 16:00	<b>Tea Break</b>
16:00 – 16:45	<b>Presentation by all groups</b> Maj Gen Anil Verma (Retd.)
16:45 – 17:15	Youth Outreach Programs of ADR – Presentation by Ms Nandini Raj
17:15 – 17:30	<b>Future Plans and Way Forward</b> Prof. Trilochan Sastry
17:30	Tea Break and Dispersal

## Welcome address and Background to the meeting

### ***Chairperson- Maj. Gen. Anil Verma (Retd.) (Head of ADR)***



#### **Maj Gen Anil Verma (Retd) (Head, ADR)**

Maj Gen Anil Verma (Retd) welcomed all the State Partners who came from all across the country to attend the 15<sup>th</sup> Annual National Conference in Lucknow. He briefed all the partners about the work undertaken so far and apprised them of the reports scheduled for release during the National Conference.

Gen Verma appreciated the innovative ideas and activities executed by State Partners during the past few State Assembly elections and informed that they were well-received by media, public and Election Commission representatives. He stressed that the main strength of ADR comes from its State Partners who undertake the grassroots level work while ADR supports and helps them execute their plans. He further stated that some of the State Partners were requested by the State CEOs to collaborate on voters awareness campaigns, organize strategy sessions and training for trainers/CEO officers at different places.

He said that since it is one of ADR's key strategies to focus on youth, ADR launched the Campus Ambassador Program (CAP) to select campus ambassadors from colleges of all states and guide/sponsor for undertaking maximum of 6 programs in one calendar year with the aim of promoting democracy and good governance. He requested all partners to support and implement this program in their respective states. In another flagship program titled *Hum Badlengi Apna Bharat*, a youth engagement program, one hour long workshops are organized in schools to make the youth aware of the challenges facing the Indian democracy and what can be done to reduce money and muscle power. He said that even if 20-25% student participants (future voters) implement whatever is learnt by them, it would make a great impact in future. He added that these model projects were like readymade capsules that need to be implemented in all states across the country. He stated that empowering and educating the youth would reform the democracy and help in fighting issues like money and muscle power in the longer run.

He emphasized that ADR has decided to focus on increasing voter awareness at the grassroots level where human interaction is involved. He suggested that the expenditure on advertisements and the use of media should be substituted for one-on-one public interaction.

He further expressed the need for adopting cost-effective strategies like door to door campaigns, increased interactive methods, making voter awareness videos in regional languages, compiling professional videos, making them viral on social media, etc. for community outreach activities in lieu of expensive voter awareness methods like costly hoardings, buying advertising space, sending bulk SMS, etc. wherein the payments are disbursed to commercial enterprises. He said that ADR has a data bank of voter awareness videos that can be made viral on social media by all State Partners in a cost-effective manner; some videos can be dubbed in regional languages.

He also recommended that State Partners should follow the example of Karnataka and Himachal Pradesh, and launch campaigns only in selected districts where criminality is high or money power is rampant. They could also focus on doing intensive surveys as was done in Karnataka as well as for the National Voters' Survey. One of the interesting findings he shared about the National Survey was that 35-36% people were ignorant and unaware of any platform from where background information about the contesting candidates could be obtained. He informed the audience that ADR would be releasing findings of this survey in a phase-wise manner prior to the upcoming general elections. He highlighted how media houses made intensive use of the ADR survey in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections.

Gen Verma appealed to the partners to raise and generate funds at the local level and requested all State Partners to form region-wise groups to discuss the strategies after zeroing down broad activities envisioned, resources required and ideas on how the resources can be enhanced.

Lastly, he informed every one about the agenda of the 15<sup>th</sup> Annual National Conference and initiated a quick round of introduction by all the participants, followed by group presentations.

## Presentation by Groups

### Group I (Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Manipur)



1. Group I observed that in the State Assembly elections of the past year, dissemination methods like SMS or hoardings did not have much impact on voters' awareness and hence, work with rural communities and students was started. They also spoke about targeting organizations like the Mothers' Union in Meghalaya, Labour Unions, the media, churches, tea workers in Assam, self-help groups, youth, tribal population as well as Bengali-speaking Muslims.
2. They focused on adoption of communication strategies such as voter awareness through street plays, theatre, cycle rallies, social media campaigns, community meetings and clan-wise meetings. According to them, methods like street plays, cycle rallies and theatre were found to work well in the past. Regional languages and local dialects were also incorporated for information dissemination.
3. They also suggested undertaking research and advocacy in regional languages and local dialects.
4. The group perceived resource generation as a big challenge since seeking donations turned out to be difficult. Given that most corporates invested in funding of the Swachh Bharat Campaign, the team relied on donations, leaving few avenues for funding of their activities.



## **Group II (West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Odisha)**



1. The target groups identified by Group II included women, new electors, political parties, voters, youth, print, electronic and web media etc.
2. Communications strategy proposed by the group include voter awareness campaigns on social media, community meetings, use of local dialects, development of ICU material, SMS service, messages in local languages, working with celebrities and providing a helpline number to voters. Audio-visual tools and posters in regional languages were also proposed. The group suggested conducting of community and multiple-stakeholder meetings, working with NSS and Bharat Scouts and Guides. They spoke about the use of goodwill ambassadors or celebrity icons as well as a regional helpline number.
3. Group II suggested that research and advocacy to be undertaken in the form of manifesto analysis of all political parties and its dissemination, affidavit analysis for identification of criminal cases, identifying electoral violence both before and after elections, and tracking its dissemination through media. Advocacy with media and political parties to promote clean candidates was also proposed.
4. They also suggested networking and alliances with universities and other educational institutions. The Group stressed the need for building capacities of alliance partners.
5. Resources required for undertaking the aforementioned activities to include paid interns, fellowships, training/skill development of volunteers, technology support from ADR, time to time sharing of ECI guidelines etc. The group also established the need for popularization of apps for

reporting electoral violence. Linkage of State Partners with the ECI via ADR was also proposed for resource sharing.

6. The Group recommended that given the time taken to translate and publish national level reports in the states in regional languages, reports should be shared as soon as they are compiled to ensure faster translation and dissemination.
7. Ideas generated for enhancing resources include focus on youth projects, tapping SVEEP funds from ECI, use of local infrastructure of partners and at community level, scouting for institutional donors, etc.

**Group III (Punjab, Jammu and Kashmir, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand)**



1. Group III focused on the strategies that were practical and economical, as well as reflected on the major problems faced by the states. These include the issue of deletion of names from electoral rolls. The group proposed that the maxim of 'Register and Check' must be promoted instead of just 'Register to Vote.' It was also suggested that educated youth like students, who are savvy with Internet, should be targeted to advance this maxim.
2. They expressed the need for wider publication of the background details of contesting candidates in leading newspapers. The group further suggested that election machinery should be utilized to make this information physically and directly available to voters. The Group suggested that criminal records of candidates should be handed over to voters along with the voter slips.
3. They raised the point about parties distributing tickets to undeserving candidates. In this regard, they suggested the need for putting pressure on authorities to increase the font size of the criminal

and financial background information of the candidates with the objective to improve the dissemination of candidate information among voters.

4. Himachal Pradesh EW organized a campaign by identifying and training points of contact in circle groups. This included a training campaign for barbers, who disseminated information to their clients to register themselves as voters.

#### **Group IV (Goa, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan)**



1. The target groups identified by Group IV include youth, slums, first-time voters, areas where voting percentage is low, sensitive constituencies, tribal and migrant communities etc.
2. Their communication and outreach methods would include voter awareness campaigns by organizing *Jan Manch* (people's platform) as was being done in Goa and Rajasthan, wherein all political party heads and media houses were called into the state capital and live debates were conducted with questions from the youth audience. Apart from this, use of street theatre, campaigns through social media, multimedia, helpline numbers etc. was also proposed.
3. They suggested that research and advocacy would be undertaken by asking for a Constituency Development Plan from the parties, compiling and making Citizen's Charter, downloading android apps on mobiles and checking names in voters' lists, making peoples' manifesto, NOTA campaign, etc. Also, the research focus would be on the participation of elected representatives. The Group requested ADR to homogenize the analysis parameters nationally to avoid discrepancies among states. The peoples' manifestos were another research focus in the region, where the concerns and aspirations of citizens were compiled by holding public meetings.



4. They also suggested networking and alliances with the media, political parties, active citizens, students and the youth. It was proposed that WhatsApp groups of all districts be made and messages be circulated using this platform.

**Group V (Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, Puducherry)**



1. Target groups identified by Group V include youth (as they are the largest demographic and can be targeted through social media), urban voters (who have little turnout in elections), urban poor (who must be encouraged to vote without accepting bribes) and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs).
2. The outreach methods would include voter awareness campaigns on social media, especially on YouTube, WhatsApp; door to door campaigns, printing badges with slogans like “Don’t Vote for Money”, putting stickers on public transport, selecting campus ambassadors in colleges/universities, etc. The use of local language and dialects was also recommended as an effective strategy.
3. The group would conduct marathons and runs which would generate awareness as well as help raising funds. They would also use quiz competitions and campus ambassadors in universities to conduct registration drives.
4. Research and advocacy would be undertaken through campaigns on making NOTA effective, advocacy on heinous crimes, participation of elected representatives, establishing correlation between money power and winning elections, and dissemination of available research work to the public. The focus of Group V was on promoting the use of the NOTA button and barring representatives from State Assemblies after poor attendance.

5. They suggested focus on four main network and alliance partners - Government, CSOs, both government and private educational institutions, corporate houses etc.
6. Resources required by them for undertaking the aforementioned activities are requisite manpower and a large number of volunteers.
7. Ideas generated for enhancing resources included organizing “Run for Democracy” of 5-10 kms, using methods of revenue generation such as selling tickets for the event and raising funds by tapping Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).

### **Presentation on ‘Hum Badlengi Apna Bharat’ Campaign and Youth Campus Ambassador Programme**

**Ms Nandini Raj (Programme Associate, ADR)**



Ms Nandini Raj informed the audience about the two flagship programs initiated by ADR all across the country namely *Hum Badlengi Apna Bharat* and Campus Ambassador Program (CAP), which aimed at the participation of youth in the process of electoral and political reforms.

*Hum Badlengi Apna Bharat* program aimed towards making the future generations informed and ethical voters by sensitizing them through workshops, essay competitions, poster competitions etc. Under this program, ADR targeted students around the age of 18 years who were introduced through workshops to MyNeta website and how it could be used to obtain information. The program was initiated in 2018, and six workshops had been conducted under it so far. The workshops gave two important messages: the significance of making the youth voter informed and that of their participation in elections.

Under ADR’s Campus Ambassador Program (CAP), a total of 16 activities have been carried out till date by campus ambassadors on informed voting. Ms. Raj mentioned that ADR intended to increase the scale of this campaign. The campaign included activities conducted by these ambassadors such as panel discussions, quiz, State Election Commission (SEC) tours of respective states, film screenings etc. She presented video messages of two campus ambassadors and their positive experience with the campaign.

## Presentations by State Partners

### Madhya Pradesh Election Watch (MP EW)

#### Ms Rolly Shivhare



Ms Rolly Shivhare spoke about the activities conducted during the MP State Assembly elections. She said the focus was on marginalized, slum-dwelling and low-income youth groups, for which the Election Watch engaged with Government colleges. She mentioned that they would send letters to political parties and discourage the distribution of tickets to candidates with serious criminal charges against them. They also provided women's organisations with information on candidates who had charges of crimes against women.

1. Ms Shivhare spoke about activities like kite rallies, where kites were used to write slogans/messages and publicise them. A short film contest on the theme of money and muscle power was also conducted for the youth. A multimedia van was inaugurated to bring awareness to areas with the lowest voter turnout in MP.
2. Festivals like Diwali were used for voter awareness by lighting lamps of democracy. A 'Halloween Rally' was also organized to encourage voters to 'vote without fear.' The band *Indian Ocean* accompanied by a street play group was also invited to address the youth on criminalisation of politics and voter responsibility.
3. The Election Commission of India (ECI) organized programmes to remove stereotypes like non-participation of elite voters in the elections involving street plays and theatre. An experience sharing workshop was held with the youth so the participants could share their experiences and feedback about the events.
4. Advocacy and campaigning was done to discourage voting in favour of candidates with criminal cases, RTIs were filed for obtaining and disseminating information related to MLA's attendance, questions raised in the legislature, books issued by MLAs, foreign tours undertaken by elected representatives, data on fast track courts, and status of pendency and disposal of cases.
5. For outreach and awareness, a street play workshop was conducted for the youth. Ms Shivhare mentioned that these street play groups were invited by the Election Commission to perform at



various events for generating voter awareness. A street play contest was also organized in all colleges in Bhopal. She also spoke about the strategy used to disseminate information by releasing reports in stages rather than all at once. This increased the coverage and outreach of the issue.

6. Extensive use of Cvigil App was exercised by the team to report complaints related to violation of Model Code of Conduct (MCC) to the ECI.

### **West Bengal Election Watch (WB EW)**

#### **Dr Ujjaini Halim**



Dr Halim began by giving an overview of the West Bengal EW. She stated that the non-partisan civil society platform had been collaborating with ADR for the past decade, and had 250 active members. The main goal of the West Bengal EW was to educate citizens on electoral democracy and encourage them to participate in it through a bottom-up approach. It also focused on enhancing democracy at all levels, by promoting money and muscle power free elections.

1. The West Bengal EW concentrated on strengthening the Gram Sabha as the Panchayat structure in the State was highly politicised, making it difficult to reform this body. Mass awareness generation with focus on youth and women was being enforced. She commented on the role of the media in giving coverage and the complications with the discrepancies within media.
2. Dr Halim said that youth awareness workshops were being conducted by the West Bengal EW in multiple colleges and universities to educate the youth on their rights and responsibilities. She added that the EW organised workshops in rural areas to instruct voters on the electoral processes in simple and colloquial language. The West Bengal EW also organized Press Conferences to disseminate the findings of their campaign.
3. Dr Halim said that many of these events saw maximum participation by women. She concluded by demonstrating the publications, media workshops, and brochures made by the West Bengal EW.

## **Odisha Election Watch (Odisha EW)**

### **Shri Ranjan Kumar Mohanty**



Shri Mohanty presented the activities and important campaigns organized by the Odisha EW in 2018. He spoke about the *Hum Badlenge Apna Bharat* campaign launched by ADR, for which the Odisha EW worked with the NSS.

1. They trained NSS officials to conduct this campaign in colleges, covered 80 colleges where 8247 students participated. He said that there would be a feedback session through WhatsApp to understand the effectiveness of the campaign.
2. He also spoke about a workshop conducted for the media on media ethics and accountability during elections. They reached 130 participants through media workshops that received good news coverage.
3. The Odisha EW also organized a District Level Convention. Shri Mohanty expressed satisfaction at the success of this event because of the participation of important office-bearers and public servants at the recommendation of the State CEO. He said that because of the Odisha EW's rapport with the Election Office and SVEEP, the EW had employed two multimedia vans decorated with slogans.
4. Shri Mohanty also mentioned the Press Conference organised by the Odisha EW to appeal political parties to give tickets to clean candidates without criminal backgrounds.
5. He spoke about the quiz contest held on National Voters' Day in partnership with the CEO office, NSS, and ADR. This was conducted at district and state levels.
6. An interesting video song by two famous local Odisha singers from Odisha was prepared on the theme "my vote is not for sale" and was made viral to increase voter awareness in the state.

## Goa Election Watch (Goa EW)

### Shri Manguirish Raikar



Shri Raikar began by talking about the politicization of grassroots level bodies like Panchayats. He said that the Goa EW tried to tackle this issue by conducting *Hum Badlenge Apna Bharat* campaign among rural youth in two villages in Goa.

1. The Goa EW formed Village Development Councils in two villages of their state under *Hum Badlenge Apna Bharat*. They shamed those voters who sold their votes, using strategies like satire. They targeted the youth to become their brand ambassadors.
2. The Goa EW went to the Gram Sabha and promoted the idea of self-governance by developing the Village Development Council. The Goa EW also asked the existing Gram Panchayats to appoint candidates from the Village Development Council on the elections.
3. Shri Raikar said that most support was generated for school teachers and youth below 25 years of age belonging to agricultural families, without any party affiliations. He said these candidates were approached by MLAs and parties upon being chosen, to appropriate them into their own parties. However, the candidates refused to indulge them and retained independence. He added that these candidates were required to campaign with zero expenditure and still managed to secure support.
4. Finally, he spoke about uniting the youth through ex-army men and school teachers who were not aligned with any parties. The students contacted by these agents were instructed to register to vote, were informed about the importance of exercising their franchise and asked to share this with their peers and families.

## Uttar Pradesh Election Watch (UP EW)

### Shri Anil Sharma



Shri Anil Sharma began his speech by lauding the democratic concept that 'The Citizens are Masters.' He told the audience about a few examples of getting a common man elected to the House of People.

1. The UP EW educated voters about the salaries and perks of MP/MLAs and made efforts towards reducing money and muscle power by creating awareness among masses. To analyse the effectiveness and consequences of their campaigns and initiatives by reaching out to the grassroots community.
2. They found that a municipality chairman, Uma Shankar, who contested elections using minimal expenditure obtained from public donations turned out victorious. They felicitated the voters in this district for resisting money and muscle power.
3. He also spoke about Ms Mukta Soni and two other such examples of candidates who won elections without resorting to bribery, excessive expenditure, or muscle power in Uttar Pradesh. In each case, the EW felicitated the public for voting for clean candidates.
4. Shri Sharma also spoke about the generation of awareness among voters. He noted that literate and educated citizens were unaware of basic processes and rights. He spoke about the need to inform voters about issues like the vast difference between the expenditure of MPs and MLAs in the same constituency.

**Maj Gen Anil Verma (Retd.)** addressed the issues raised by the groups in their presentations. He said that although most states were including the voters as the major target group, there should be some effort to shift the focus onto political parties as well. Parties must be pressurized for not fielding any candidate against whom criminal charges are framed in a court of law and encouraged to follow the due process and appoint clean candidates. He said that in nearly all parties, 33% of candidates having criminal charges and huge amount of assets were given tickets because of their winnability factor.

Gen Verma also spoke about sharing information among partners through district-wise WhatsApp groups. He proposed that WhatsApp groups should be used as was done in Ranchi for the Zilla Parishad elections to address questions and queries by the Election Commission. He added that ADR

reports, infographics, and messages could also be shared on this platform. He also advanced the idea of grassroots level campaigning in villages and towns.

He commented on the reporting of criminal cases by both parties and candidates. He said that according to the Supreme Court, both actors were obligated to publish details of criminal antecedents of candidates in newspapers and electronic media. He noted that parties were trying to evade this protocol by publishing such information as small and illegible sections in newspapers.

He added that when ADR compared the criminal details given in the affidavits with reports in newspapers, many disparities were found. Fewer cases were posted in newspapers than were reported in the affidavits. He requested the State Partners to correlate these details with the reports in their regional newspapers, as ADR at the national level did not have the same access to media publications as the State Partners. State Partners should also check and verify the data given in the advertisement by authorities highlighting criminal cases disclosed by the contesting candidates post Supreme Court order making it mandatory to disclose in newspapers.

In conclusion, Gen Verma addressed the issue of resource mobilization. He suggested that the use of volunteers be amplified as much as possible by devising innovative ways to plan events as done by Madhya Pradesh EW. He recommended to the partners to raise funds and to use cost-effective strategies, or if funds are required, they must be generated locally.

## **The Way Forward**

### **Prof Trilochan Sastry (Founder Trustee, ADR)**

Prof Sastry thanked everyone for participating in the meet. He congratulated the State Partners for their efforts and successful campaigns. Prof Sastry, in his concluding remarks, said that we all should be non-partisan and work for voters and not for political parties. He said that the popularity of ADR and the visibility of the campaigns was increasing everyday which is leading towards more scrutiny of its work. He requested all partners to be cautious about remaining non-partisan. He also emphasised the organization's firm foundation on facts.

Prof Sastry said that the issue of criminalization and money power was multiplying despite the efforts of CSOs. He said that possibly, this problem would have compounded to a greater extent had these steps not been taken. He felt that unless there were tangible results of the campaigns, beyond awareness, there would be need to make the efforts more powerful. On this issue, he brought up the Election Watch Reporter app of ADR which identified some Red Alert constituencies with criminalisation and money power. He proposed that local volunteers could be enlisted to identify these constituencies and use this app (as well as ECI's Cvigil app) and report wrongdoing. He stated that ADR takes responsibility for following up with these reports.

Prof Sastry also commented on the targeting of constituencies. He said that in Lok Sabha, 50-100 constituencies out of 543 had very low margins, driving parties to especially target these areas to swing votes in their favour. There were chances that black money would flow into these areas, therefore, ADR could use social media campaigns to deter bribery in these constituencies.

On a different note, he noted the ways in which parties put out fake news nearly every day and said that even though this was detrimental, it was something to learn from. Prof Sastry said that this could be exemplified in a constructive way by ADR and the EWs, who could put together a team and circulate factually correct data and messages every day.

He also proposed that parties should be persuaded with repeated messages indicating they would not win if they allotted tickets to unscrupulous candidates and some aggressive steps be taken to stop the election of such tainted candidates. He said that the ADR Survey could be used for this. He felt it



was important to let such parties know that they were being watched and there were consequences of their actions.

## **Resolutions and ‘Next Steps for National Election Watch (NEW)’**

Towards the close of the two-day conference, Prof Sastry expressed gratitude to all distinguished panelists and guest for participating in the 15th Annual National Conference. He extended thanks to the audience, and especially to the Senior Deputy Election Commissioner and the CEO Uttar Pradesh. He stated that if elections could be set aside for malpractice and corruption, it would be a big step forward, as this would set a precedent for a zero-tolerance policy against corruption. He proposed that some regional elections be disqualified if evidence for bribery was discovered. He stated that evidence had to be provided for the presence of corruption to the Election Commission and the media, upon which strict action could be taken.

## Photo Gallery



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