

Press Release

March 23rd, 2013

9th Annual Conference on Electoral and Political Reforms

-Management-style Working and unaccounted Money of Political Parties are the biggest threats to our Democracy: says Kumar Ketkar

-Financial Transparency of the Political Parties is of utmost importance for the electoral process in the country: says Aruna Roy

Jaipur, 23rd March 2013: Terming the contemporary culture of the increasing role of money and decreasing base of volunteers in the Political Parties as “Corporate Fascism”, Kumar Ketkar said that this new changed dynamics inside the Political Parties is the single biggest threat to Indian Democracy. While speaking at the inaugural session of the 9th Annual Conference on Electoral and Political Reforms organised by National Election Watch (NEW) and Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR), Mr. Ketkar also stressed on the idea that we as the citizen of the country can’t be anti-politics and still desire for the betterment of the democracy. Aruna Roy (of MKSS), while inaugurating the Conference, also touched upon the idea of financial transparency of Political Parties. Prof Trilochan Sastry said that the malaise that we see every day in the politics and governance is actually a ‘Tsunami’ the source of which is the earthquake caused by the humongous sum of money involved in elections and ticket distributions by the political parties.

The representation from various Political Parties was invited to seek their views on the Political Party Bill meant to regulate the functioning of Political Parties. Commenting on the bill, the National Secretary of CPI Amarjeet Kaur stated that Political Parties should come under RTI and that the parties should have a functioning internal-democracy inside their structures and systems. She also proposed to ban corporate funding for the Political Parties and also the establishment of fast tracking of cases of the candidates against whom the electoral complaints are filed. State funding of elections was also recommended as an alternative model by various speakers.. All the speakers from various political parties commenting on political reforms said that there should be women reservation inside the parties. Sushil Sharma, Gen Sec of Rajasthan Congress Pradesh Committee, informed the forum that Congress party under the chairmanship of Ambika Soni has constituted a committee on political and electoral reforms and that the government is working with priority on the electoral and political reforms.

Sharing their experiences from various State Election Watch bodies, the state coordinators of the NEW put forward their proposals for the Electoral Reform agenda. The presence of “None of the Above” button (under Rule 49-O) on Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) was the foremost demand by everyone. The analysis and audit of legislative performance of MLAs and MPs was also demanded by all the state coordinators. It was also demanded that the consolidated report of funds spent by MLAs and MPs (from MPLAD & MLALAD funds) should be annually presented in the Parliament/Assembly and there should be discussion in the house on this report. One matter that particularly emerged was the inability of the State Election Commissions to provide the affidavits of contesting candidates in the Panchayat and local body elections. Orissa and Punjab incidents were discussed in this regard. It was also resolved during the discussion that the electorate especially youth should be sensitized towards the electoral process through various engagement strategies.

Conveying her views on the relationship between People’s Movement and Elections, Aruna Roy said that there is space in politics where people’s movements play an important role to raise vital issues related to the people but the politics of this nature doesn’t necessarily mean the electoral politics. Prem Kishan Sharma of PUCL said that first principle of people’s movement should be to express their political desire and dimensions of the people and communities. He further added that if citizens fail to express themselves through the movements then the politicians of the land will stop the movements when they come to power. Presenting his nuanced observations on electoral vs. non-electoral politics Bhanwar Meghwanshi of MKSS said that unlike electoral politics, non-electoral politics through people’s movements is never fearful of taking up matters that may be

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unpopular among certain section of the societies. People's Movements have the capacity to go against the popular sentiments and still achieve the necessary policies needed to address the real needs of the people.

Expressing in his satiric fashion, Narayan Bareth (of BBC), commented on the ticket distribution by Political Parties that earlier political leaders used to emerge from either Social Movements or National Movements but these days they emerge from "Socialiate" Movements. He further added that the candidates claim their candidature for the party ticket by projecting themselves as possessing the following: Gas agency, a petrol pump, a toll contract, a mining contract or owns a shopping mall.

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