



## **Research Foundation for Governance: in India**

### ***Summary of the Book launch ceremony and Public Debate***

#### **“HOW DEMOCRATIC ARE OUR POLITICAL PARTIES?”**

**7<sup>th</sup> March, 2010**

**11 AM to 1 PM**

**Ahmedabad Management Association**

On Sunday, March 7<sup>th</sup> 2010, Research Foundation for Governance in India (RFGI) held a book-launch of RFGI’s report “Democracy Within and Without: A report on inner-party democracy in India” at the Ahmedabad Management Association. The launch was followed by an interactive session on *“How democratic are our political parties?”*

RFGI was privileged to have Shri Saurabh Patel, Hon’ble Minister, State of Gujarat (BJP), Shri Arjun Modhwadia, M.L.A. and Chief Spokesperson Gujarat Congress, Smt Manjula Subramaniam, Chief Vigilance Commissioner and Former Chief Secretary, State of Gujarat and Shri Jagdeep Chhokar, Former Dean of Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad and Founder Member of Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) as the Chief Guests.

Founder of RFGI, Kanan Dhru, opened the event by introducing the Foundation and explaining its objectives; to help create strong processes of governance and an aware citizenry, primarily through seeking reforms in the legal and political arena. With the reference to the topic, she added that though political parties are primary vehicles of our democracy and decisions made by them impact the functioning of our country, people have little knowledge about the political parties and their functions. She pointed out that many youngsters avoid talking about politics or becoming active members of the political parties because of their misconception that politics is not for good people. She suggested that in order to change the system we have to understand the system first and that was the reason why RFGI commenced the study to understand functioning of political parties across the world.

Joshua J.M. Stark, RFGI intern from Canada introduced the book co-authored by himself with Ramiro A.E. Gomes Monterio, RFGI intern from the Netherlands. Explaining the content of the book, Joshua stated that the RFGI report on inner-



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party democracy in political parties in India included comparison between Indian political parties and political parties of 40 different countries. He stated that political parties act as bridge between citizens and government. It is through political parties that society's demand and desires are translated into actual policy proposal and inner party democracy makes political parties better at doing this.

Shri Jagdeep Chhokar then initiated the debate. He said that there is a dire need for transparency in internal policy and financial matters of political parties. He added that the only job of political parties at present is to win elections and there is no internal debate within parties. "If there is a voice of dissent, either the member is barred or they float a new political party. The internal democratic system within the parties will greatly help the governance in country", said Chhokar. He accepted the fact that political parties have upheld democracy out but not within themselves. He suggested to make or to amend laws to strengthen internal democracy in parties.

Smt. Manjula Subramaniam continued the debate by lamenting the fact that majority of work done by elected representatives revolves around administrative issues such as transfers and promotions in the government instead giving time to issues related to growth and development of their respective constituencies. She also suggested that each citizen should also be responsible and act sensibly in electing their representatives, who should be capable of articulating and managing various issues.

She also appreciated the efforts of RFGI and said "Democracy is an evolutionary thing and constantly needs correction and the initiatives taken by organisations like RFGI are important."

Shri Arjun Modhwadia emphasized teaching the value of democracy at grass root level. He said that Inner party democracy was fully present in the parties before independence but the level of democracy started lowering after independence. He said that right to dissent is an important factor in a mature democracy. He also gave the example of democratising reforms adopted by the Youth Congress in improving and developing inner party democracy by organising elections at grass root level. Accepting the need to revive the system in the country Shri Arjun Modhwadia added that the naxalite and the problems in the North-East are not problems of law but should be taken care of through inclusive planning.

Shri Saurabh Patel pointed out the positive aspects of politics. He said that politics is an area which is neglected by youth. He added that those politicians, who are not corrupt are also blamed for corruption due to wrong inferences.



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He also pointed out that one of the foremost reasons for the youth to shy away from politics is the fact that there is a very poor financial incentive mechanism built for those who are politically inclined. The media can also help by promoting more positive aspects of politics. He also stated that sometimes decision making can be more effective through the system of consensus building.

The talks of the distinguished guests were then followed by the book release function and showcasing of RFGI vox populi film on politics. Thereafter, the audience had an opportunity to ask the panellists questions in order to further the debate.

The event successfully facilitated a discussion about need for democracy in Indian political parties. The feedback from all the panellists and members of the audience has been very encouraging! RFGI plans to continue its research on this topic, in the hope to further spread awareness about the issue of inner party democracy. The event was attended by around 270 young professionals, student politicians, lawyers, senior academicians, NGO-leaders and interested individuals from various walks of life. Many thanks to the panellists and also to the members of the public who attended the event.