

Jaago Re!

“Nothing is done right. Nothing works. Too many people taking bribes; the law is inefficient. The politicians are corrupt. The system is useless”. The list of complaints is never ending. It is very easy to point a finger at others.

Why not use this same finger to sow the seeds of change? A simple step of casting your vote, can be the first in setting things right.

Charged up by this idea was Jasmine Shah, a member of Bangalore based *Janaagraha Centre for Citizenship and Democracy*. Deliberations and speculations led to hope. With the partnership of Tata Tea, the idea shaped into the **Jaago Re! One Billion Votes campaign**.

Jaago Re! One Billion Votes is a non-partisan campaign to facilitate informed civic participation amongst youth. By simplifying the voter registration process through www.jaagore.com and enabling youth to be the agents of change, it aims to improve the functioning of Indian democracy.

It addresses the ignorance, indifference and hopelessness among the youth that have chequered the confidence in the functioning of the government.

The campaign aims not only at awakening the citizens to the importance of their votes but also at simplifying the registration process. With the mission to empower and enable the citizens to their right to vote, the campaign is capitalizing on its belief in youth as agents of change and what better way to tap these youngsters than via the internet? The campaign is harnessing technology to simplify the registration process. www.jaagore.com is out to become the complete repository for voting and election related information.

With close to two and a half lakh people already registered as voters through this campaign, it has certainly become the most successful voter registration drive in India. People have been sensitised as more and more are stepping forward to make a difference. Lack of guidance and information has most often been the reason for inaction. The campaign has leveraged technology to develop the website for exhaustive information and guidance on the voting know-how. This has made registering to vote a matter of minutes, right at your desktop. The idea of sitting at home or the workplace and still being able to avail the form and fill it up with all the relevant information has been a key to the success of this campaign. The website gives a one route simple method to obtain the voter's id. It also uses a Geographical Information Systems (GIS) map to help voters to identify their constituency and where exactly the forms have to be submitted.

Once the form is submitted, the engine tracks the status of any registration form till it appears on the voters' list. Any glitches en-route to the electoral roll and the subsequent errors in details can also be detected while providing for corrective measures through relevant forms.

If you already are a voter, the site also keeps you posted on the latest in election news, voting related information and the option of correcting or changing your details on the voter list or voter information. It also provides a forum for debate via the issues and blog section.

Jaago Re! One Billion Votes is on the road to getting the entire country to begin participating in the administration of the country, by taking the first step of voting. In addition to the website and driving people to it is the outreach team of the campaign. This team has held talks and conducted voter registration drives in several colleges and corporates across the country with the able partnership of PRIA (Society for Participatory Research in Asia) in the North and Prantakatha in the East. Host Institutions include corporate and education giants like Infosys, Wipro and IITs which have taken the lead in striving towards 100% registration.

By taking the registration drive right to their campus, college students and office-goers have the ease of time and the availability of information to their advantage. The team trains volunteers at the Host Institution to help spread the message across and enable the employees or students to register.

This movement has received the support of not just the youth, but also of senior mentors who have guided the campaign through personal involvement and interaction. Infosys Chairman Narayana Murthy has taken keen interest in this effort and is also a part of the eminent advisory board of the JROBV campaign, which includes Film maker Rakeysh Om Prakash Mehra, former Chief Election Commissioner T.S. Krishnamurthy and Tariq Ansari, Managing Director - Mid-Day Multimedia Ltd.

The campaign aims at securing one billion votes in the next five years. In short, the purpose is to convert all the citizens of the country into active voters. The immediate manifestation is to get maximum number of citizens in the 35 major cities identified to participate in the upcoming 2009 general elections.

So don't be left out in the race to make the country a 100% voters' registered nation. Registering to vote is the first step to take this campaign forward. To find out how you can help the campaign and India, visit www.jaagore.com now!

- *Surya Adavi*