



## Politics can be clean

*Neither corruption nor handouts are required to succeed*

K J Alphons

Most people in this country believe that politics is dirty. I have spoken to over two million students over the past 33 years. One question was constant: "How many of you want to become politicians?" The answer was always the same: "We hate politicians." My argument that we have some good clean politicians cut no ice with these innocent hearts.

Then, the strangest thing happened in 2006. Just 45 days from the Kerala poll date, a known politician from the Left asked me: "Are you willing to contest the next assembly elections from your home constituency, Kanjirappally, if we give you the seat? You can contest as an independent and the Left will support you."

I decided to chase my own dreams. I quit the comforts of my office and took a train to my village in a second-class coach. I thought there would be a stampede to receive me. This was my city and I was the district collector here about 15 years back. There was no one to receive me at Kottayam railway station, except the railway coolies.

Most people predicted that I would lose my deposit; there were two Left rebel candidates, who were prominent community leaders. My opponent was a veteran who was the general secretary of the Congress party. This constituency has always been a Congress citadel.

My campaign was based on some fundamental principles: No money will be collected from the constituency. No money will be paid to a voter. No liquor will be provided. And there will be no character assassination of the opponent. We ran the most scientific campaign with focus only on one thing: my track record of having worked for people when I was the district collector.

 Election was held on the 32<sup>nd</sup> day after my resignation. I won with a majority of 12,000 votes, one of the highest margins in Kerala. I had spent less than Rs 10 lakh on the entire election campaign. Not a drop of liquor was served. My opponent was still my good friend.

It didn't end there; it was just the beginning. Now I had to prove that an MLA could be clean. I decided that I was going to be different and adopted two fundamental responsibilities: Be the voice of the people in the assembly and bring development to the constituency.

In four-and-a-half years, I got Rs 350 crore into my constituency. It is not just that we got the money; we did things. Every project was finished before schedule. I was the first one to be re-nominated by the Left election committee to contest 2011 assembly elections. The next day, I announced that I was not contesting as I did not want to be an MLA from the richest constituency in Kerala, when half of India was starving. I said that I was willing to be in national politics if there were any takers. Nitin Gadkari called me and I joined the BJP. I have a simple agenda: I want food on every table, I want every child to go to school, I want every able-bodied man to have a job.

When I asked the students at a Kanjirappally school recently if anybody wanted to join politics, almost a hundred hands went up. Good news for Indian democracy.

What are the lessons for national politics from Kanjirappally? Many. I enumerate a few. Politics can be clean. I didn't make one rupee from politics. You don't need to spend a fortune on fighting elections if you have done good work. People never forget the good work. An MLA or an MP can do miracles in his constituency if he wants to - and he can get bipartisan support if he performs.

You don't have to be a thug or a mafia leader to win elections. Decent people can win elections.

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