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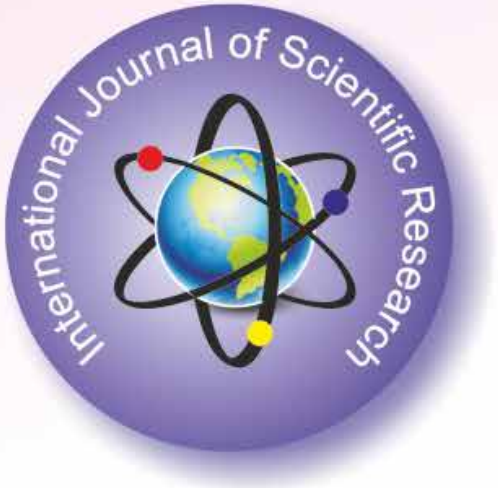

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Research Paper

Civil Society Role in Combating Corruption: A Small but Radical Idea

Social Sciences

KEYWORDS : Corruption, Civil Society, Transparency, Accountability

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ABSTRACT

Earlier the issue of terrorism and security of the nation was perceived by the Indians as key issues before the nation. But things now have changed in the recent past, that the issue of corruption has become major issue or concern for majority of the Indians. When the government is not showing any interest in combating corruption, the role of civil society in combating corruption has become inevitable. Majority of the people felt that the menace of corruption should be and completely weeded out from Indian soil and this can be possible only with the involvement of a movement called 'Civil Society' and a institution called a strong and wibrant Lokpal or 'Jan Lokpal'.

Kautilya in his classical work, Arthasastra, observes that there are 40 ways in which corrupt officers can cheat the government and the people. It further goes on:

"Just as fish moving under water cannot possibly be found out either as drinking or not drinking water, so government servants employed in the government work cannot be found out taking money".

Edward Gibbon, the celebrated author of the volumes on the Roman Empire was asked to summarise his monumental work. He said the reasons for the fall of Rome could also be summed up in one word and that word was "Corruption". Politicians are fully aware of the corruption and nepotism as the main reasons behind the fall of Roman Empire, the French Revolution, October Revolution in Russia, fall of Chiang Kai-Shek Government on the mainland of China and even the defeat of the mighty Congress party in India. But they are not ready to take any lesson from the pages of history (R.Upadhyan, 2001).

Corruption Concerns

From everyday experience, Indians know that acquiring a job, a place in medical or engineering school, or even a telephone, gas or electricity connection frequently entails a bribe to someone on the 'food chain'--the municipal councilor, the local political leader or legislator (or his agent), or some other official with the capacity to deliver opportunities and services. Corruption is endemic in all levels and spheres of public life, and has become deeply embedded in Indian society and the way it functions on an everyday basis. Political and public life in India has been increasingly dominated by the issue of corruption in the wake of Common Wealth Games scam, 2G Spectrum irregularities, Adarsh Housing Scam in Mumbai and Coal Mine Scam.

Table.1
Corruption Tops Indian Minds

Country	Issue	Persons share
India	Corruption	69 %
China	Climate Change	68%
Pakistan	Terrorism	64%
US, UK	State of Global Economy	61%
Russia	Extreme Hunger/ Poverty	59%

Source: Times of India, December 11, 2010.p.1.

Previously the issue of terrorism was perceived by the Indians as first and foremost issue that virtually poses threat to India's national security and integrity. But things now have changed in the recent past that the issue of corruption has become major issue or concern for majority of the Indians. For instance, a recent survey results reveal that the most talked topic this year among Indians was corruption. About a third of Indians reportedly talked about corruption with friends, co-workers and family. Topping the charts is the gigantic 2G spectrum political fallout. Then there were the Commonwealth Games scam, the UPA food scam, and a host of others. All these have preoccupied Indians like never before.

The survey was carried out by opinion research consultancy Globescan, for BBC world Service. Revealed that corruption/ greed was considered the most serious problem in 21 out of 26 countries surveyed. Over 68 per cent of people mentioned corruption as one of the most serious problems facing the world (Times of India, September 25, 2010).

Civil Society Role in Combating Corruption

In developing societies political parties exercise an influential role. They aim to achieve power and after having achieved it they wish to maintain it by several mechanisms; besides less awareness of the people about the true nature of the democratic system in such societies, there exist limited options to bring the government within a people-centric corruption-free framework.

In these societies the civil society too exists but in underdeveloped form. The situation may be different in developed countries where the liberal-democratic system has persisted for a long time and has allowed the civil society to grow in a significant manner while forcing the political parties to play a genuine role. This is true in India too where the first important civil society movement has been initiated by Team Anna Hazare. India is a developing country with a strong presence of political parties; the people are less aware about their rights, and sadly a weak civil society has existed here since Earlier such civil society movements mainly focused on environ-mental or social issues with more or less success. Therefore Anna Hazare's effort in the history of the civil society movement in post-independent India strikes a departure from the traditional path and moves into a new phase. independence.

Earlier such civil society movements mainly focused on environ-mental or social issues with more or less success. Therefore Anna Hazare's effort in the history of the civil society movement in post-independent India strikes a departure from the traditional path and moves into a new phase. His movement symbolises a landmark in the civil society history of this country as it attracted the people's attention in a sufficient manner and ended with success.In the last few months have therefore brought a new dimension to the Indian polity where civil society organisations are attempting to create a wider democratic space for the common people (Vivek Kumar Srivastava, 2011).

Success Story of Civil Societies

In the North East, Civil Societies role in combating corruption or minimizing has been good. It is significant to note that in this region the civil society has reached to grassroots level. Keeping an oversight on public money here may be relatively easier

because the civil society in the region exists more at the grass-roots level in different communities, durbars, women's groups etc. Awareness about corruption can logically be more among the people in the Northeast than in other parts of the country.

The civil society has a significant reach in the Northeast. Views of the communities tend to get more cohesively projected through community groups, particularly in tribal communities. Here the region has an inherent advantage and is in a better position to bring State organs and institutions closer to the people. Corrupt practices and activities can, therefore, get more easily highlighted before the urban people, as well as the rural folk and those in the distant hills and hamlets.(Gautam Sen http://www.sentinelassam.com).

Civil society has become one of the most effective allies of the state in forging anti-corruption coalition in many countries. Even India has successful stories of partnering with civil society organizations from awareness raining to policy formation to monitoring of the implementation of anti-graft legislations. With such coalition approach, India has augmented its capacity to contain corruption in recent decades. The level of empowerment and involvement of civil society in anti-corruption policy formation and implementation is a yardstick to measure the success of partnership approach in any country. Administrative accountability, transparency, participation, rule of law and prompt service delivery can be achieved more quickly in a country where there is an informed and vibrant civil society. And at the same time, civil society can also involve itself in monitoring the quality and delivery of public goods and services, mobilization of resources and make voices of the common people heard at the policy level. But the activism of the civil society depends on the responsiveness and cooperation of the state as well. To encourage the civil society, the state should accept it as a partner and an intermediary (Samudra Paudel, 2010)

Jan Lokpal Bill

Public opinion in fight against corruption in India were further ignited recently around Parliament's consideration of a draft Lok Pal, or ombudsman, bill that has been heavily criticized by civil society. Civil society organizations had rejected the government's draft proposal on grounds that it perpetuated the existing system that rewards corruption. The government's proposal also excluded government servants from its purview and had only an advisory role. The issue of corruption is a quixotic pursuit at the best of times. Hazare's fast was initially seen in this vein until it became clear that he meant what he said. Hazare's fast was the occasion to present a counter to the Lok Pal bill – the Jan Lok Pal bill – prepared by civil society activists seeking an independent body to investigate corruption cases. The civil society proposal calls for an independent people's ombudsman with overarching powers to investigate, charge, and prosecute corruption anywhere in government, all the way to the prime minister's office. Suddenly, the anti-corruption movement in the country had found an agenda, and a leader.

A major reason for the rampant corruption in India is the lack of an independent, empowered, and accountable anti-corruption institution that can be trusted to credibly investigate complaints of corruption and prosecute the guilty. The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) is controlled by the very people who are the fountainheads of this corruption and is required to seek the permission of very people who need to be investigated and prosecuted. The Central Vigilance Commissioner of India (CVC) is selected by the Prime Minister, the Home Minister, and the leader of opposition, who have a vested interest in ensuring that weak bureaucrats get selected. Moreover, the CVC has only recommendatory powers and most of his or her recommendations are disregarded by the government, which wants to protect corrupt public servants (The Hindu, June 19, 2011). The courts take years to conclude trials and there is also considerable corruption in the judiciary because of the lack of accountability of the higher judiciary and the lack of an effective anti-corruption agency to investigate corruption within its ranks. The Jan Lokpal Bill prepared by the civil society members is aiming to fill lacuna existing in the field of combating corruption by providing complete autonomy, powers and effective investigation over corruption allegations.

Conclusion

When the government itself is not showing any interest in combating corruption, the role of civil society in this regard has become inevitable. As already mentioned that both the ruling and opposition political parties are facing plethora of corruption charges, the ordinary citizens can able to effectively fight against corruption only with the help of the movement called civil society and institution called Jan Lokpal only. It is significant to note that more than the government, in the recent past, the civil society is providing enough political space for the ordinary citizen to exhibit their political opinion.

The people in India are perturbed and fed up with the pervasive corruption. There is a strong public opinion emerged in India against pervasive corruption. Majority of the people felt that the menace of corruption should be and completely weeded out from Indian soil and this can be possible only with the involvement of a movement called 'Civil Society' and a institution called a strong and wibrant Lokpal or 'Jan Lokpal'.

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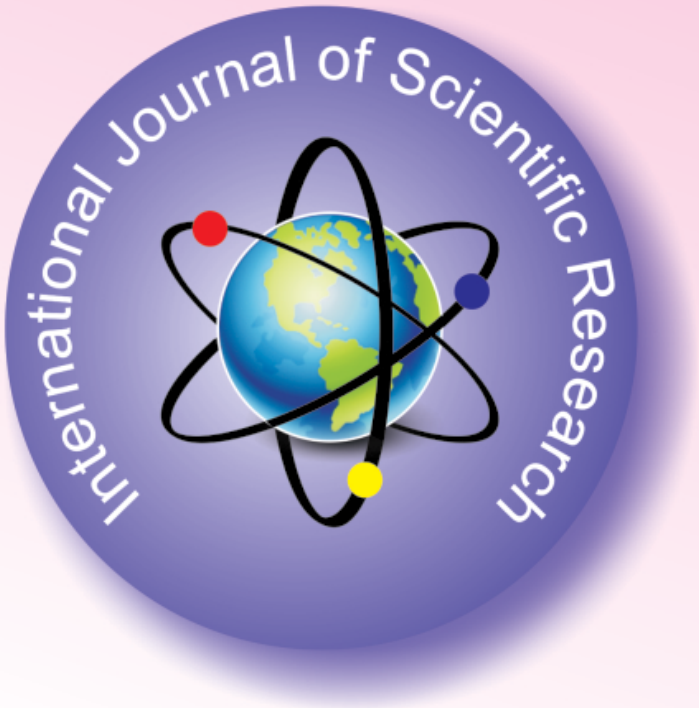

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