



Views on Anti-Corruption Movement 2011: Editorial Analysis of Two National English Dailies of India

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ABSTRACT *The Indian Anti-Corruption Movement 2011 provided platform for the common masses to stage protest against the escalating acts of scams and scandals. Anna Hazare being the leader, the popular movement has been one of the most successful events in independent India and often equated as the second independence movement by various critics and media professionals. The research takes into account certain editorials along with letters-to-editor of this mass movement by two select national English newspapers of India in order to find the importance given by respective newspaper of different editions to it. The analysis helps understand the relation that exists between editorials and readers' viewpoints about the movement and the extent of consonance and dissonance between the two, for each newspaper, thereby clarifying the stand taken by the selected papers in portraying the reactions of the public about the movement.*

1. Introduction

Anna Hazare led the Anti-Corruption Movement of India, 2011 along with the support from civil society group. Gaining momentum since April 5, 2011, the whole nation joined the fight against corruption. Initially reluctant, the government finally accepted the proposal and April 16, 2011 was notified the due date of negotiation between them and the civil society members in drafting a joint Lokpal Bill (NDTV, April 17, 2011).

Swami Ramdev followed next in his fight to bring stashed black money in foreign banks. The activity of government in evicting supporters from RamlilaMaidan at midnight further incited the civil society (NDTV, June 6, 2011). The showcase of such brutality and the deepening rift between the members of the drafting committee agitated Hazare to restart his hunger strike on August 16, 2011 (PTI, Hindustan Times, June 8, 2011).

The arrest of Anna and other members of civil society on due date by the Government heightened the fury and within hours turned Tihar as the epicenter of the movement (Saxena & Mishra, The Week, 2011). When Anna refused to leave jail, his release orders given, the pressurized government had to finally accept all his twenty two demands, and he went on triumphantly on August 19, 2011 the fourth day of his fast, to RamlilaMaidan where he continued his hunger strike for another eight days breaking it on August 28, 2011 after the Lokpal Bill finally reached the Standing Committee.

The movement broke all barriers of class, age, gender and even religion (Raman, Outlook, 2011). From villages across India (Dasgupta, Outlook, 2011) to Indian-Americans (International Business Times, August 25, 2011), all supported the cause. The coverage of this movement has been non stop across Indian media world and social sites further streamlined it. Facebook alone has 542 fan pages by Anna's name (Economic Times, August 22, 2011). The role media played in making the movement popular is distinct.

1.2 Theoretical perspective

The researcher takes cognitive dissonance theory to identify its applicability regarding the movement with the selected newspapers concerned. According to Leon Festinger, the theory helps understand the attitude of the people regarding a particular issue or event and how internal consistency is achieved (Festinger, 1957).

2. Review of literature

Research conducted on popular movements has been

quite exhaustive and its dimensions cover various aspects from education, women to social stigmas. In their writing Choudhury and Kapoor (2010) explores the dynamics, politics, and richness of knowledge production in social movements and social activist contexts. Dr. M. Novelli in his writings (Novelli & Ferus-Comelo, 2009), focuses the way trade union movements respond with educational initiatives in the knowledge production processes. Role of women in popular movement against privatization has been studied by Dosh and Kligerman (2008) answering the questions regarding women leaders role in shaping the movements. Veronica Schild in her study (2006) highlights the untouched question on popular movement debate about the politics of gendered participation. Women became the centre of agenda in the works of InduAgnihotri and RajniPalriwala (2001) highlighting the fight for their rights and survival.

Popular movement's role with democracy has been studied at length by various researchers. Whether it is the impact of urban popular movements on attaining democratic goals (Hellman, 1994), or the role of popular movement in ending an authoritarian regime to began a democratic society (Haber, 2006) or popular movements and the process of consolidation of democracy (Cordosa, 1989), their relation has been found to be of much greater value.

3. Objective of the study

The main objectives of the study include-

- To conduct a qualitative assessment of editorials on Anti-Corruption Movement led by Anna.
- To assess the letters-to-editor corresponding to the editorial on the movement.
- To compare the newspapers on the above mentioned criterion.

4. Methodology

The researcher uses qualitative content analysis method to understand the study. The unit of analysis taken is an editorial and corresponding letter/s published on it. The sample of the study includes two national English dailies of India and is selected on purposive sampling. The newspapers include The Hindu, Kolkata edition and The Indian Express, Delhi edition. Though the period of the study is from April 5, 2011 to August 29, 2011, the editorials are selected from three months (April, June, August) when the movement has been popular. Following research questions are analyzed:

What kind of treatment has been provided to editorial on the movement?

What kind of letter has been published in regard to the editorial?

What is the relation between editorial view and readers view on the movement?

5. Findings (Editorial analysis)

5.1 The Hindu

5.1.1 The stand-off over corruption (April 9, 2011)

The editorial write up seems more positively inclined towards the civil society group. The editorial begins with the popularity of Hazare-led movement to point the dilemma for government to come to an agreement with the civil society group. Speaking directly about the flaws of government version of the bill, the editorial justifies the protest of the civil society members against it. But the editorial also highlights the drawbacks attached with Hazare version of the bill. The language of the editorial is simple, easy understanding and in an overall aspect speaks for the civil society group.

The editorial generated positive response as is evident by the letters published on April 11, 2011. Titled 'Success at last', the letter which is written directly addressing the editorial speaks of the popularity of Anna Hazare and his movement against corruption. According to the letter, the reaction of common masses against government is natural for the later has failed to pass the lokpal for last forty years. Other letters published also reflected similar sentiments and all of them supported Hazare for his effort towards corruption.

5.1.2 From Ram to Ramdev (June 9, 2011)

In the editorial, the editor takes on the present standings of BJP on its various accounts. Bringing the Ramdev factor into concern, the editorial points the rejuvenation of the party if it is to survive in political arena. The BJP is portrayed in a weaker light and inefficient to carry its activities against corruption which has been filled by non-political actors.

The two letters published on June 10, 2011 in response to the editorial further negates BJP in their writing. Titled 'BJP's responses', the letters speak directly against the unwanted stand which the opposition party has taken in favor of Ramdev in his protest against corruption. The letters, as with the editorial, criticizes BJP and their way of finding benefit from the whole issue.

5.1.3 Corrupt, repressive and stupid (August 17, 2011)

The editorial straight away speaks of the loop holes of government and their illogical act in arresting Anna Hazare to stop his fight against incorporation of Jan Lokpal Bill and the crusade against corruption. Highlighting the right of every citizen of India who are allowed to carry out peaceful rally or protest any where, the editor identifies the act of government to be illegitimate and beyond the ethics of constitution. The editorial in all respect turns heavy for the insufficient handling of the issue by the government, it is clearly anti-government in its attitude.

The editorial generated a mixed response among the readers as is clear from the letters published on August 18, 2011. Of the thirteen letters published in response, ten spoke in favor of the editorial while the remaining three offered an opposite view. The letters favoring editorial clubbed under the heading 'Stupid indeed' clearly accepts the government's move to arrest and detain Anna and their way of handling the whole issue purely nonsensical and incredulous, for most of the letters stressed to analyze the 'mood of public' in order to justify their comment. On the other hand, under the title 'The other side' the letters seemed less supportive and do not hold government responsible for such because for them the process adopted by Hazare is illogical, for they fear anybody can go on a fast-unto-death and hurt the credibility of democracy. For these writers corruption can be removed not by such protest rather by spreading awareness among the people about it.

5.1.4 Anna is not India nor India Anna (August 20, 2011)

In the editorial, the editor turns his focus away from both the government as well as Anna Hazare to a more realistic sight. The victory of Anna pressuring the government to allow him to do fast for the incorporation of Jan Lokpal Bill and the subsequent low level negotiations on the part of government to bring an effective Lokpal has been identified as two ends of a spectrum. Neither of which has been given a due importance in the column. In fact, the editorial strives to focus on a more stringent and authenticate version of reality. The way to curb corruption is essential but so also to respect the superiority of constitution and ways to abide by it.

The editorial is further supported by the letters published on August 22, 2011. Of the nine letters published under the title 'Anna and India', six spoke in favor of the editorial. The letters which supported mostly asked the basic question whether lokpal can change the mindset of the people who receive or provide bribe. The letters consider the whole aspect to be an act of exaggeration on the part of media to showcase Hazare as the messiah. The last three letters on the other hand spoke rather softly and in tune with Hazare. They stressed the necessity of such protest in strengthening the parliamentary form and the fulfillment of the need of a leader.

5.1.5 The way out (August 23, 2011)

In the editorial, the editor tries to revise the whole issue of lokpal with its jurisdictions but in an overall analysis speaks in favor of Anna Hazare and his version of Jan Lokpal Bill. Considering the government's move to be ineffective against the movement, the editorial provides certain 'contentious' questions attached with lokpal like the composition of the bill, its boundary in regards to enclose judicial systems and prime minister within its ambit, the provision of Lokayukta, and grievance redressal system. The editorial supports the existence and inclusion of lokpal to check all levels of public corruption.

The two letters published in relation to the editorial on August 24, 2011 speaks in a mixed tone. Titled 'Way out', both the letter traces the bridge like the editorial in bringing a strong lokpal. The government must withdraw courage to reduce the loopholes of Lokpal Bill and also the Hazare team must clear off the unconstitutional provisions. The letters reflect the maturity on the part of writers who are keen to have an effective lokpal rather than a fruitless debate between government and civil society.

5.2 The Indian Express

5.2.1 Carnival society (April 8, 2011)

In the editorial, the editor tries to find the nature of the civil society and give it a more concrete figure. Speaking negatively, the editor is in doubt as to who actually represents the civil society group as many termed it as second freedom movement. Though the editorial supports the various reforms that occurred in due time to strengthen the constitution right from its beginning but in case of Anna, and the way of justifying his demand is looked down for it breathes an act against constitutional means with media further saturating with their coverage.

The letter published on April 11, 2011 titled 'Tip of the iceberg' in respect to this editorial speaks in a different tone. The letter urges the media to analyze who actually the civil society represents to understand the nature of it. According to the letter the gathering near JantarMantar is neither a carnival nor a threat for it is only selected few who joined, but if actual masses (agitated by corruption) do join than it would have been difficult for government to control.

5.2.2 Arrest this chaos (June 6, 2011)

The editorial stands as a warning on the part of the government to take fruitful step in order to maintain its stability in the future election. It(editorial) straightly offers suggestion as to what the government should do in order to save it from

chaotic situation that it has helped generated by eviction of Baba Ramdev on his campaign against black money and corruption. The editor clearly asks the government to negate the illusion of careless handling of the civil society members for it can seriously tarnish the image of constitution, and work effectively in bringing a strong lokpal.

The letter published in respect to this editorial straightway supports its ideas. Published on June 8, 2011 titled 'Chaos and after' the writer though condemns the act of eviction of Ramdev as inhuman but negates the timing of Ramdev to conduct his fast, as according to the letter it is an act of coming to limelight both for Ramdev as well as the opposition party. The call for an urgent session by government is the need of the hour.

5.2.3 Father courage (August 15, 2011)

The editorial is a clear write up on the part of editor attacking the weak procedures of civil society members to compel the government to accept their demands. The editorial succinctly point the drawbacks or unwanted means Hazare group undertook in order to establish their demands which they think to be more authenticate. The editorial negates the ways adopted by civil society groups to fulfill their demands and holds high the democratic means of solving problem.

The response the editorial received has been sharp. The letters published under the title 'Anna's critics' on August 16, 2011 criticizes the editor for such a negative stand against Anna and the movement. One of the letter projects people to be more superior to government and parliament for it is formed by common masses. The other letter proposes a situation as to even if we accept Anna being corrupt (as accused by Congress) than how the top leaders could indulge in any conversation with him which is equally a crime. The letters in a direct manner provided defense for Hazare and his movement.

5.2.4 No middle ground? (August 17, 2011)

This editorial has been one where the editor finds loopholes of the government in dealing with Anna led movement. Depicting in a negative light, the editor stresses the reasons for which the government faces trouble in handling the situation of mass protest. The editorial finishes with a recommendation on the part of the government to take effective and justified measures in handling the situation.

The letters published in response to this editorial on August 18, 2011 shows more of positive tone towards Hazare and his movement. The letter titled 'Mismanaged' stresses on the lack of managerial quality on the part of government in handling the situation. The letter titled 'Isolated' speaks of increase of rift between government and common masses as the later are tired of increasing price hike and corruption and thereby supports Hazare for his attempt. Another letter titled 'A gamble?' looks the whole scenario in a different light and speaks of cunning quality of government.

5.2.5 No more seventies (August 19, 2011)

This is a piece of writing where the concern of the editor for the government is reflected. Though no direct means used

but the style of writing is more pro-institution and perhaps less Anna inclined. At the very outset the editorial clarifies the importance Anna or his movement received is only perhaps for the wrong moves on the part of the government. These instances are highlighted in order to make the government aware of their lack of adequate decisions in handling the situation and advices to adopt far-sighted political strategy in order to save guard its image.

The letter 'Big picture' published in regard to the editorial on August 20, 2011 speaks in a different tone. It is not about allegations that each group tries to attach with each other, rather it is more about bringing proper economic norms that can only help to overcome the situation. Unless this happens, according to the letter, no laws or any movement can help eradicate corruption.

6. Discussion

The above study helps clarify certain points as far as the relation between the editorial viewpoint and readers' attitude is concerned in understanding the applicability of the theory of cognitive dissonance.

The Hindu provides a diverse view regarding the movement. The editorial published offers various dimensions of the movement and the stand taken by the respective groups with regard to it. Government and civil society relation has been captured in its words with a mix of subjective attitude. Of the five editorials selected, each provides a different tone in its write up. The letters generated in response to those editorials has been varied. Though most of the letters supports the editorial and only few tend to deviate. Thus there seems to exist, a direct relation between the views that the editorials raised and its corresponding acceptance by the readers.

As far as The Indian Express is considered the situation is quite different. The editorials mostly revolved around the government's deed on the movement, their faults and how to tackle the situation. The letters in response to it too has been quite similar. Majority of the letters spoke against the editorial and the ones who supported it has been less specific. The relation in this case, between views of editorial and readers, seems reverse and contradicting.

The theory of cognitive dissonance holds more strongly for The Indian Express with the letters effectively trying to justify their support for Anna and his movement against corruption. Even certain flaws about Hazare seem to be true, the readers (a major chunk) seem to overlook them and support the movement with full force. The Hindu on the other hand scores less on cognitive dissonance i.e., it highlights a greater cognitive consonance. Whether in favor of the movement or against it the readers seems to accept the editorial views without much questioning and thereby fails to project the opposing views. Thus it can be summarized that The Indian Express provides a more varied and contradicting views in their issues regarding the movement giving the common readers higher scope to present their views more deliberately than The Hindu which mostly thrives on letters that sounds more pro to its editorial.

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