



Corruption in India and the Meliorist Anna Hazare

KEYWORDS

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ABSTRACT *Corruption is a global phenomenon. It is found almost in every society in one or the other form since time immemorial. Since ancient times to present corruption present every sphere in society. In recent times corruption is so rampant in India. Today, both at the central and the state levels, the number of ministers with an honest image can be counted on fingers. Corruption has penetrated so deep that only a strong social movement could put an end to it. Apart from the fact of corruption, there exists a mythology of corruption which is even more destructive of public morality. In this context one who has strong moral fibre can change the face of a generation through his morality. Anna Hazare gave us the belief against corruption and he also act as a crusader against it.*

It is widely accepted that the level of corruption has a vital posture on the quality of governance; corruption is an element in the development matrix and has linkages with every other element including poverty, income distribution, public health, education and the like. It is surprising that such an unenlightened comment could have come from an articulate, vocal and prominent member of the cabinet. Corruption has spread over in the society in several forms. Of these, the major ones are: bribe, nepotism, misappropriation, patronage and favouritism.

Corruption has grown phenomenally during the last 30 years and no area of life is free from it. Over the years corruption has come to be accepted as a fact of life and it is widely known that the citizen has to pay officials and politicians for permits, licenses and other favours. Corruption has penetrated so deep that only a strong social movement could put an end to it. Apart from the fact of corruption, there exists a mythology of corruption which is even more destructive of public morality. In this context one who has strong moral fibre can change the face of a generation through his morality. Anna Hazare, is one of this character, can lead the society against corruption.

In primitive times, the judges received bribes in Egyptian, Babilonian and Hebrew societies. In Rome bribe was a common feature in elections to public offices. In France, judicial officers were sold during the fifteenth century. In the nineteenth century corruption was so rearing in Britain. In India, Kautilya has referred in his Arthashastra to misappropriation by government servants out of the state revenue. During Ashoka's regime, corruption dominated on a lower scale. In medieval society, scope for corruption was minimal because there were very few authorities existed for the collection of taxes. During the British rule, bribes were accepted not only by the Indian officials but by the highly placed British officials too. Clive and Warren Hastings were found corrupt to an extent that they were tried by a parliamentary committee after their return to England. After independence, in spite of top political elite at the national level stayed very honest for about one and a half decades but from the third and fourth general elections the new political elite lost people's confidence of being honest. The government employees in all public concerns at all levels started accepting huge bribes even for small considerations. Today, both at the central and state

levels, the number of ministers with an honest image can be counted on fingers. In the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s and the 2000s several union ministers and Chief Ministers, ministers of top level bureaucrats in almost all states have been accused of enriching themselves illegitimately and practising nepotism. The licensing system of the government, the control regulations and the expansion of the public sectors spread corruption in every sphere of life. At present, India is viewed as the seventh most corrupt country in the world according to non-governmental German organisation called 'Transparency International'⁽¹⁾. This organisation ranks countries for the honesty or corruption in their transactions. In a study conducted in 1995, this organisation found New Zealand, Denmark, and Singapore as honest countries and Indonesia, China, Pakistan, Venezuela, Brazil, India, Thailand, Italy and Mexico as corrupt countries.

It is well known that a large number of politicians not only in India but almost in every country are corrupt. People never feel shocked when politicians' corruption exposed. Honest politicians are rare breed today. Corrupt politicians not only go unharmed and unpunished but they manage to ruffle on the political stage as honourable leaders. Examples of ministers like Lal Bahadur Shastri and Sardar Vallabhai Patel are rare who had very little bank balance at the time of death.

In the last two decades or so, several scandal and financial irregularities, including paying of massive commissions, pay-offs and kickbacks have been reported in our country. Mostly, it is the Chief Ministers, ministers, leaders holding important political positions, bureaucrats and big businessmen who are reported to be involved in these scams but nothing tangible has been done in uncovering, tracing, apprehending, prosecuting and punishing the culprits on the plea of 'inadequate evidence'. We can find some notorious scandals like those of Bofors, Stock market Securities, Hawala, Sugar, Animal Husbandry, Sarada scam, Rose valley and Telecommunication and few others.

The Prevention of Corruption Act came into force in September, 1988. It consolidated the provisions of the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1947, some sections of the Indian Penal Code, the Criminal Procedure Code and the Criminal Law Act, 1952. The sole idea was to bring all relevant provisions in a single Act. A committee on Prevention Cor-

ruption was appointed by the Government of India in 1960 under the chairmanship of K. Shanthanam². This committee gave report in 1962. The recommendations concerned to various aspects of corruption. It was on the basis of the recommendations of this committee that the Central Vigilance Commission was set up in 1964 for investigating into the cases of corruption against the central government and other employees. In last fifty years, more than twenty commissions have been appointed by the government of India to inquire into the charges of corruption against politicians and public companies.

In a democratic country like India, will people ever realize that they have to play a crucial role in fighting evils like corruption? In fact, much of the corruption exists because of peoples' tolerance or complete lack of public feedback against it, as well as the absence of a strong public forum to oppose it. A combined effort by the responsible citizens can surely make a serious impact in the corruption level. Appointing Lokpal and Lokayuktas could be proved an effective measure in containing corruption. At present, Lokayuktas in eleven states have been tendered impotent because of the numerous disabilities. Learning from the experiences, the powers of Lokpal should be expanded. The Lokpal should have independent investigative machinery for the disposal of corruption. For implementing strong Lokpal in centre the 2011 Indian anti-corruption movement was a protest against Government of India intended to seek strong legislation against graft, considered as corruption. The protest had centred on a proposal bill, called Jan Lokpal Bill. The movement had gained momentum in particular since 4th April 2011, when Anna Hazare first went on hunger strike which he called a "fast unto death".

Before 4th April, Anna was an unknown face for Delhi but he, like Gandhi, gave hope to a generation of people condemned as political. He also became an agent of change, a kind of revolution that a few months ago were unthinkable. Anna was incidental. It could have been anybody who has a strong moral fibre. So, on the morning of 5th April, when Anna reached Jantar Mantar faceless, voiceless common men and women were ready to lend their voices to protest against the corrupt political establishment. His specific demand was that 'civil society' should have a say in drafting an anti-corruption law, the Lokpal Bill. There may be a mythical connection between the people at Tahir Square who were proclaiming "We Are All Khaleed Saeed" thus, everyone became Anna, shouting, "*Main bhi Anna, tu bhi Anna, everyone is Anna*"³.

Anna was not very sure about the idea of sitting on a dharna in Delhi. He was not sure about people's response to his *Anashan*. He had suggested to his followers that he could easily organize a decent crowd of a few hundred in Maharashtra. Delhi was a new entity. He was hardly known outside Maharashtra and had never sat dharna outside the state. But 20,000 strong crowds was a major boost and there was an unexpected turnout at Ramlila rally that give the confidence to build a movement against corruption⁴. He proposed that Lokpal Bill could be an effective instru-

ment to fight corruption. He waited for an acknowledgment and when he did not receive any, he decided to sit on dharna. For Anna it was a big decision, because this time he needed to step outside his comfort zone and grab national attention and look for a national solution to this problem.

Hazare's fast and the huge number of support increases day by day. It represents a critical moment in our recent history. One who participated or watched from very nearby, will find it hard to disagree with this. The people were witnessing the birth of a new unnamed energy. They called his movement the second freedom struggle. When Anna broke his fast, it was considered as a historic moment, the beginning of the end of corruption in our country. This 'Anti-Corruption Movement' is a crucial movement in the history of the present. We may say that it is a social movement with the use of Gandhian way in limited sphere. Because we saw Gandhi was very much fond of compromise with the British, but Anna's procedures were completely different. Though the flashes of cameras was on Ramlila Maidan and enormous popularity distracted from the previous view. Anna was a creation of his followers. The historic significance of the movement may not lie in what it did or did not. It is too early to judge on that score, but the historical records of struggle against corruption have right lessons. A large number of Indians, mostly young Indians, participated to make a transition from being more subject to being active citizens. These passions have not died down yet.

Anna is not a professional politician in the strict sense. He was driven by his own passion and sense of his own rightness. Fisher said, about Gandhi same kind of word – "Mahatmaji, who through his life of dedication has made India his own truth, has commenced his vow of extreme self-sacrifices"⁵. Anna like Gandhi believed that one can drive and listen by his heart. So, they wanted to reach at the heart of common people. Team Anna knew that the fast had ended, but the battle was only just half won – war against the common man who accepted corruption as a moment part of life. The bigger question was whether things would change.

Things consciously start to change after Anna's anashan. We saw the film like 'Satyagraha' though the director, Prakash Jha denied that the film was not based on Anna's fast. Of late the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) will hold a 'Jal Satyagraha'⁶ at Sagar Dam from September 1, 2013. It was a kind of Satyagraha sitting in water. A similar Satyagraha took place last year at the Omkareswar and Indira Sagar projects to protest against the raising of the water level and demanding compensation and rehabilitation for local people.

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