



General article : views and analysis

Corruption and its eradication in India

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Corruption, in its widest meaning, encompasses any action, which is evil or dishonest. But in no country of the world, the word corruption is used with its widest meaning. In its generally accepted sense, any misuse of public office for private gain is corruption.

Corruption is a very old social malady. It is significant to note that "Atharva Veda" warns people to refrain from corruption by the statement that the wealth earned through pious means flourishes and those who earn through dishonest means are destroyed. To my knowledge, corruption has been condemned in the holy Koran and Bible also. Kautilya's 'Arthashastra' written in the 4th century B.C., mentions forty modus operandi adopted by the corrupt people to misappropriate Government funds. Around 5th century BC, the corruption of the officials of different level of the Greek kingdom had become a matter of great concern of the kings. In the second and the first century BC, along with the growth of the Roman Empire in Europe, corruption had also embedded its tentacles in the official functions of the Romans. In the middle ages, corruption had polluted the entire machinery engaged in the task of collection of land revenue and other taxes in the European countries. India was no exception. The Sultan of Delhi, Allauddin Khilji (1296-1316 AD) had to considerably increase the pay of his land revenue staff to prevent them from indulging in corruption. He also had to award severe punishment to those found to be guilty of corruption. Corruption among the land revenue

personnel was quite high even during the rule of Sher Shah (1540-1545 AD) and Akbar (1556-1605 AD). Since 13th century onwards, Russian history mentions many incidents of bribe taking by Russian officials. In fact, during the reign of Tzar Alexander Mikhailovich, the residents of Moscow in 1648 demonstrated against rampant corruption in the administration and had even killed two corrupt Ministers. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, in his famous book "The Discovery of India" has written about widespread corruption among British Colonial rulers of India. Robert Clive (1725-1774 AD) was the most notorious in this respect. Since the second world war, corruption became much more pervasive in the administration of every country of the world.

People of India had fondly hoped that after the emancipation of our country from the yoke of British rule and taking over the reign of power by the revered leaders of the freedom movement, they would be able to enjoy the fruits of corruption free governance. But this hope was soon belied. Even before six months had passed since India attained independence, Gandhiji lamented "there is so much corruption today that it frightens me". In 1985, late Rajiv Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India, ruefully remarked that out of every rupee provided for the welfare of the people, only about fifteen paise, eventually, reached the actual beneficiaries. Transparency International, an international non Govt organisation based in Berlin, Germany, had recorded in its report "India Corruption Study-2005, that an

amount totalling Rs.21,068 crores is required to be paid as bribe annually by ordinary citizens of India for obtaining legitimate services from Government functionaries. According to a recent estimate made by "Bharat Swabhiman Trust" founded by Swami Ramdev of Hardwar, UP, there are about 400 lakhs crore black money of Indians, out of which around 75% has been kept concealed in different banks in Europe. Even the image of the Judiciary is not entirely clean in this respect. So far as the electoral process in India is concerned, Shri T.N. Seshan, one of the former Chief Election Commissioners of India, lamented many years ago that the election process in our country has been vitiated so much by cash, criminality and corruption that Indian elections have become a joke.

Just because corruption is an ancient malaise and it has contaminated every branch of our country's administration and a sizeable section of civil society, one should not become disheartened and entertain the notion that what cannot be cured must be endured. In the 18th century and first half of 19th century, the administrative system of England had become notorious for corruption. But William Ewart Gladstone, as Finance Minister of England in 1850 and thereafter as Prime Minister for four times from 1868, exhibited required political will to bring about necessary electoral reform and for removing loopholes in the administrative rules and regulations as a result of which corruption reduced so much that England earned a place among the first fifteen of the less corrupt countries. Similarly, because of the sincere desire and efforts of Lee Kuan Yew, a highly respected Prime Minister of Singapore, corruption in that country became so insignificant by the end of 20th century that Singapore could secure the 5th position in the list of countries, higher positions indicating progressively less corruption. It is, therefore, strongly believed that if the following important measures are properly acted upon, corruption in our country will also diminish to an insignificant level.

- A** Firstly, people have to ensure that only candidates having a clean image get elected to the Lok Sabha, State Assemblies and other public body. Naturally functioning of the Governments or any other public body constituted by such good people cannot be contaminated by corruption. Every lawful step should be taken by the people to persuade/compel the Parliament to amend the relevant election law, to enable the voters to cast their votes rejecting all the candidates, in case all of them, in their judgement, are unsuitable. Further election law needs also to be amended to authorize and enable Election Commission to bear legitimate election expenses of all candidates, of course, under certain realistically determined conditions,
- to free the election process from the evil influence of money power and thus to provide a level playing ground to all candidates, rich or poor. Another requirement to ensure victory of the true representatives of the people in any election, is to amend the election law so that no one is declared elected unless he/she secures minimum fifty percent of votes cast in the relevant constituency. It is also necessary to modify the election law to ensure that no one having any criminal record can contest in any election.
- B** It is very high time to enact and promulgate a strong and effective Lokpal Act by our Parliament, enabling Lokpal to take cognizance of specific allegations of corruption even against the Prime Minister of India. Of course, it is not desirable to bring the judiciary within its ambit for which there should be a separate 'Ombudsman'. Further, in order not to make the responsibility of Lokpal quite unwieldy, Group D personnel of Govt of India may not be placed within its jurisdiction. The allegations of corruption against them may be handled departmentally and/or by the C.B.I. as at present. The Lokpal should have suo-moto powers to take cognizance of allegations of corruption against the Public Servants within its jurisdiction and should have an investigating unit under its control. Within a year or so, every State Govt should enforce similarly strong and effective Lokayukta Act for their respective States.
- C** One of the common causes which enables corruption prone Public Servants to demand and obtain illegal gratification, which is commonly termed as speed money, is the non-enforcement of any fixed time limit for delivery of different public services. To remove this lacuna in the administrative procedure, Madhya Pradesh Govt got a law passed by the State Assembly in 2010 which is known as the 'Public Services Guarantee Act laying down reasonable time limits for delivery of different Govt services to the people. Last year (2011), Bihar Legislative Assembly also passed a similar Act named as "Right to Services Act". All other State Governments should also arrange to get similar Acts passed for their respective States so that no Govt servant gets the scope to extract speed money from people for delivery of various services within a reasonable time.
- D** All the rules, regulations, executive orders etc governing the functioning of the Government machinery, particularly about awards of contracts and purchase of articles, should be thoroughly reviewed and any loop hole or vagueness should be removed to prevent corrupt employees and also

persons having financial transactions with Government departments, from taking advantage of any such shortcoming.

- E** Close watch should be maintained on the life styles of all public servants and information should be gathered confidentially from time to time, about their general reputation and movable and immovable assets, to form an idea about whether they are indulging in corruption, to be able to take appropriate preventive and punitive action as warranted.
- F** Arrangements should be made to ensure security of the 'Whistle-blowers' and 'need to know' principle should be strictly followed as regards their identities and the information furnished by them.
- G** Last but not the least, there should be a sustained campaign to motivate the people to refrain from

corruption, whatever may be the sacrifice and inconvenience involved and also to socially boycott those people whom they know to be corrupt. Further, parents, guardians and the teachers should, more through their personal example, make every effort to enhance the moral values of the younger generation so that since their young age, they become ardent practitioners of simple living and high thinking and zero tolerance of corruption.

In conclusion, it will be worthwhile to draw people's attention to what valuable advice, Shri T.N. Seshan- one of the former Chief Election Commissioners of India, gave while exhorting the gathering in a public meeting in Chennai in 1994, to launch a crusade against corruption. He said 'Please light one candle, don't curse darkness'.