



## THE BANE OF CORRUPTION IN PUBLIC LIFE

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### ABSTRACT

*Corruption is a burning issue in our country which is eating into the vitals of democracy. It is not a new phenomenon. It is as old as the human society. In collusive corruption, the mutual interest between the recipient and the source of bribery make it difficult to unearth the evidence. The rationale behind this is no work however small or routine can be done without paying "something" to "someone"(speed money). There are many causes responsible for the spread of corruption. Such as elections, criminalization of politics, lack of public opinion, education and training, delay and cumbersome procedures etc. It has badly affected the polity, economy and society by causing hazards to safety, life and health. To cope with the problem the Government of India constituted Special Police Establishment, Central Bureau of Investigation, Santhanam Committee etc. But is not successful largely because there is no political will to remove it. The remedies suggested for the eradication of this evil are simplification of procedures in government offices and other departments, creation of a strong public opinion against the effects of corruption, making conditions of service attractive, ensuring high standards of conduct among both the politicians and the administrators would go a long way for the eradication of this national menace for the bright future of India.*

**KEY WORD:** Public life, absolute power, accountability, speed money, human values, electoral politics, black money, criminalization of politics, money power, political will, Lokpal, Lokayukta, moral conscience.

### INTRODUCTION

The study of the bane of corruption in public life is most important in democracy. Because, the people are sovereign in democracy. Corruption is a burning issue and is retarding the all – round development of the country. Corruption has become a bane on nation's development. Satyapal Dhang Communist leader of Punjab said that, "Corruption seems to have become the bane of Indian society. Corruption at the high level will damage the economy and the country in long run. Corruption at the root level has made the life of the people miserable". Hence, in the context of a developing country like India, the study of the bane of corruption in public life helps to know and identify the causes for the spread of cancer of corruption which has become a national menace today and thereby suggesting remedies for its eradication.



### PREVALENCE OF CORRUPTION

Corruption in politics, administration and public life is not a new phenomenon. As early as 1000 B.C. the Laws of Manu stated that, "corrupt officials who receive bribes from villagers are to be banished and their property should be seized". This speaks not only of the prevalence of corruption but the condemnation of such practices. Kautilya, the author of Arthashastra referred to it, "something inevitable" and categorized 40 different ways in which the King's crownies were likely to defraud the state of its revenues. Ibn Batuta, an arab visitor to

the court of Mohammed-Bin-Tughlaq ( in the 14<sup>th</sup> century) wrote about the foundness of Sultan for giving and receiving gifts. Edward Gibbon in his Introduction to the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire calls corruption as, “the most infallible symptom of constitutional liberty.” Lord Action in his Historial Essays and Studies said that, “power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men.”

### MEANING OF CORRUPTION

Corruption is an abstract form. According to World Bank Report 1997, “Abuse of public power for private gains” is described as corruption. But this appears to be too simplistic explanation of corruption. In fact, it is a multifaceted evil, which gradually kills a system. Paul Klitgardt has formulated an equation of corruption which is as follows;

$$C = M + D - A$$

Corruption = monopoly + discretion – accountability.

But in the broad understanding of people, corruption is associated with bribery. It is an impurity or rottenness in the moral fibre that then manifests itself in the taking of bribes. It has become a symptom of decaying society in the grip of a fatal disease. The Santhanam Committee reported that, “the prevailing corruption in our country is the ulcer in the stomach of India’s administration .” It has become so deep rooted and extensive that it extended every profession, walk of life and living . Within the span of 66 years of the country attaining independence, the corruption cancer had spread so much that an honest citizen cannot survive in this country even for a few hours, minutes or seconds, unless he is ready to corrupt and also willing to be corrupt. India has acquired the dubious distinction of being among the most corrupt countries in the world. A careful poll taken among business interests and financial journalists by Transparency International (TI), the reputed anti-corruption non-governmental organization, placed India 9<sup>th</sup> from the bottom in its list of 54 countries. India scored 2.63 on a scale with a maximum of 10 for the totally corruption free country.

### COLLUSIVE CORRUPTION

Several characteristics of corruption make it difficult to track its course, expose it and effectively punish the culprits. Corrupt transactions take place in secret. In collusive corruption, the mutual interest between the recipient and the source of bribery make it difficult to unearth the evidence, Above all, corrupt politicians and officials who occupy high positions in government are in a position to suppress evidence because of their privileged access to government records. The only occasion when a citizen gets angry about corruption is when it benefits someone else at his expense. For instance, a college seat being grabbed by someone else’s son or job lost to another candidate .It is this lukewarm attitude which helps the Government to get away with the charade of anti-corruption committees whose reports are shelved.

### THE RATIONALE

People now believe that no work however small or routine can be done without paying “something” to “someone” in government offices, educational institutions and even in legal matters. One may call it a “speed money” that which speeds up work. The fact remains that there is no aspect of life that corruption has not touched. We can explain it by saying that the rising population has added to the numbers everywhere, to the number of applications and increased the requirement of college seats, work positions and scarcity of resources. In other words, the supply has not kept with the demand. Hence, in order to avoid wasting time over red-tape and official procedures we prefer to advance our case or our place in the queue by offering bribes which we know will get the work done. We can further explain it saying that inflation erodes the salaries of employees who then expect to supplement their income by taking bribes. In order to get the bribe, he holds up or slows down the work which is his duty to do. Henceforth he will do nothing

without being offered the “incentive” to work. He not only corrupts himself but also corrupt the work ethics. This contributes to the tardy functioning of the government departments. We see that corruption as the taking of bribes is connected to the corruption as a fall in human values.

### CAUSES OF CORRUPTION

A recent paper on Corruption, Government activities and markets by Vito Tanzi of the International Monetary Fund states, “In some countries, corruption is prevalently an activity of the political leaders. In others, it is prevalently an activity of civil servants. In still others, it is an activity of both”.

A Times of India Survey in 1972, 7 out of 10 persons interviewed said our moral standards had touched a new low over the decades involving Ministers, MPs, MLAs and also the administrators

India is a developing country in which there is intense competition among both the affluent and the poor scarce resources in an environment of rising expectations. It is an active democracy in which the high cost of electoral politics has been a major factor in fuelling corruption in the electoral process and subsequently, governance. Elections have become too expensive and the expenditure has gone on increasing from one election to another. It is generally agreed that the expenses for a Lok Sabha seat run into several lakhs and those for an Assembly seat are proportionality less. The amounts now are vastly bigger than they used to be. The struggle for power is, in fact, a struggle for the license to indulge in corruption with impunity. The mushroom like growth of political parties in India confirms this fact.

The Santhanam Committee warned about the existence of black money was a major source of corruption. During the independence day celebrations of 1974 President V.V.Giri said, “This money power playing a dominant role in the elections to the legislatures to my mind is at the root of corruption and corrupt influences in public life”. According to M.C.Chagla, “elected members do not represent the people, they represent money power. The initial act of receipt of money for fighting elections is the starting point of political corruption which acts as foster mother of administrative corruption. It is said our politicians are patron saints of black money”. The industrialists, businessmen, contractors, smugglers, tax evaders mostly operators of the black money provide funds and expect to influence public policies and decisions.

Criminalisation of politics is another facet of corruption. A nexus has been established between criminals and politicians. The former Chief Election Commissioner Mr.T.N.Sesan has referred to this ignominious relations as a mix of four M’s: “Minister Power, Muscle Power, Money Power and Media Power.” According to the Vohra Committee Report, “ Money power is used to develop a network of muscle power which is also used by the Politicians during elections.” It is rapidly corrupting the mind of the new generation. Youth wings were formed to provide the muscle power and physically strong men to help parties in their political activities, particularly at the time of elections.

Lack of effective public opinion, education and training are the root causes of corruption as it is ruining the very basis of polity built with abounding faith and sincerity by Gandhiji and Nehruji. The average citizen finds himself helpless and is swept along with the tide.

The major cause of corruption in India is the lack of accountability on the part of bureaucracy and politician. Here anyone can do anything and get away with it if he/she has money or power.

The weakness of anti-corruption laws, cumbersome and dilatory procedures in Government offices provide fertile field for hidden corruption.

Divisions based on religion, caste and language are the other factors that have promoted corruption, nepotism and favouratism.

### CONSEQUENCES OF CORRUPTION

Corruption has adversely affected the polity, economy and society. The influence of corruption is insidious. It not only inflicts wrongs which are difficult to redress but it undermines the structure of administration and the confidence of the public in the administration. Corruption corrodes the legitimacy of government because of the widespread cynicism bred on a mixture of facts and perceptions concerning the

level of corruption . One result of such deterioration is political instability when one government after another is outvoted from office on the issue of corruption.

The adverse effects of corruption on the economy are manifold. Government expenditures are inflated and wasteful projects and programmes are taken up in order to obtain kickbacks. Standards get diluted in investment ( e.g., dams, roads, bridges and buildings) goods, (e.g., drugs), and services(e.g., quality of doctors, engineers, teachers, lawyers) causing hazards to safety, life and health. Government revenues get reduced on account of tax evasion. Subsidies and incentives are abused.

The poor the worst affected since they cannot pay bribes in order to obtain benefits which they are legitimately entitled. Worse, they are denied basic justice in the hands of corrupt officials such as the police and village officials. Corruption thus aggravates inequality in an already unequal society. It is gradually eroding the concept of morality in this land of moral values. In other words, it might not be an exaggeration today to talk about corruption in terms of a crisis endangering India's society, polity and economy.

### ANTI-CORRUPTION MACHINERY

To cope with the problem, the Government of India constituted in 1941 the Special Police Establishment (SPE) to investigate the cases of bribery and corruption in transactions with war and supply departments and railways. In 1963, the Central Bureau of Investigation was created. Based on the Santhanam Committee recommendations in 1964, the Government of India strengthened the S.P.E and vested it with additional powers.

The Administrative Reforms Commission in 1966, recommended the central government setting up of the institutions of Lokpal and Lokayukta to deal with the complaints of ministers, government secretaries and the rest of bureaucracy.

### HINDRANCES

In spite of all these efforts, it cannot be said that corruption has been eliminated or is under control. Far from it, corruption has entered every sphere of India's public life. This has happened largely because there is no political will to remove it. Even the Santhanam Committee observed, "the Government is against corruption but not always against the corrupt", which C. D Deshmukh said, "Corruption can be eliminated not by administrative reforms, but only by a fanatical intolerance of it".

### REMEDIES

David.H.Bayley has proposed three strategies to reduce corrupt practices.

Firstly, to adopt a policy to contain the grosser forms of corruption.

Secondly, corruption may be rooted out using the power of the state to contain repercussions and

Thirdly, the climate of opinion may be generated to reduce the temptation to corruption on the part of the briber of the bribed.

Some remedies suggested are:

1. Making conditions of service attractive,
2. Simplification of working of government machinery,
3. Creation of a strong public opinion against the effects of corruption,
4. Ensuring high standards of conduct among top personnel,
5. Ensuring accountability and responsiveness to the needs of the people,
6. By following deemed provision. If any application is not disposed within a deadline, it is deemed to have been agreed to,
7. All legislators including Ministers at all levels of the hierarchy should be compulsorily ordered by law to represent their balance sheets. The Lokpal and Lokayuktas should be the censors of corruption, regardless of the status of offenders,
8. Moral education should begin at home,

9. Educational institutions should have special session on values,
10. Patriotic and enlightened citizens.

Undertaking of control measures to this problems is like planting a mango tree, whose fruits we may not be able to enjoy but they will surely be enjoyed by our next generation, who have an opportunity to make India a developed nation.

### CONCLUSION

From this discussion, it can be concluded that corruption cannot be controlled by rules and regulations, but has to be tackled by other means like improvement in the moral fibre of the society in general and of public servants and politicians in particular. What is needed is non-violent mass movement lead by a band of dedicated leaders who should be capable of mobilizing the people against the canker of corruption which is eating into the vitals of our democratic polity. The need of the hour is to initiate the renaissance of moral conscience and halt the rampant corruption.

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