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Corrupt Mind Set – Need for Change

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Abstract:

Corruption, all over the world, continues to loom large and tears in to the fabric of governance. There is corruption in all spheres and common people get adversely affected in their day to day existence. Corruption is growing by leaps and bounds in India. As the nation grows, the corrupt also grows to invent new methods of cheating the government and public. Negligence, showing favours, abuse of power, acceptance of gifts, misappropriation, misuse, delay, cheating etc. are some faces of corruption.

In the year 2012, India ranked 94 out of 176 countries in the corruption perception index of transparency international. Other recent surveys also reveal that globally corruption has worsened in the last two years. Furthermore, if corruption is not contained, it will grow exponentially and we need to arrest this inimical growth which is tearing in to the fabric of our economy. More and more people all over the world are demanding greater transparency and accountability from public representatives. Not only the politicians or the government is responsible for it, rather it is deep rooted in the psyche of a common man. It has become part of the working culture of India. A large scale awareness needs to be imparted to the mass. People have to be conveyed the quantum of loss a country and the people themselves face, when the single act of corruption is committed. If it could be addressed properly, we get solution to the most of our problems. The main objectives of this paper is to highlight the extent of corruption in India by identifying the main causes of corruption in major sectors such as bureaucracy, judiciary and politics and suggest remedial measures.

1. Introduction

Corruption is widespread in India. India has been ranked 94 out of 176 countries in Transparency International's 2012 Corruption Perception Index (CPI). In this year's CPI India earned a very low score of 36 on a scale from 0 (most corrupt) to 100 (least corrupt). India has been ranked below neighbors Sri Lanka and China while it fared better than Iran, Nepal, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Transparency International attributed the low score to the recent scams and incidents of corruption in the public sector involving government officials, private officials and private companies. In its study conducted in year 2008, Transparency International reports about 40% of Indians had first hand experience of paying bribes or using a contact to get a job done in public office.

Corruption has taken the role of a pervasive aspect of Indian politics and bureaucracy. The economy of India was under socialist inspired policies for an entire generation from the 1950s until the 1980s. The economy was shackled by extensive regulation, protectionism and public ownership, leading to pervasive corruption and slow growth. Most of largest sources of corruption in India are entitlement programs and social spending schemes enacted by the Indian government. Examples include Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act and National rural health mission. Other daily sources of corruption include India's trucking industry which is forced to pay billions in bribes annually to numerous regulatory and police stops on its interstate highways.

The Indian bureaucracy once regarded as the 'steel frame' seems to have become rusty. It is no surprise that a Hongkong based political and economic consultancy rated it as one of the worst bureaucracies in Asia for bottlenecking key policies, widespread red tapism in everyday affairs, massive corruption, being un-innovative, insensitive and harboring generalist officers who lack expertise. Many state funded construction activities in India such as road building are dominated by construction mafia, which are groupings of corrupt public works officials, material suppliers, politicians and construction contractors.

Political parties are perceived to be the most corrupt institutions by Indians, according to 2009 global corruption barometer. For most political parties winning the elections become a sole obsession and increasing election expenses are often stated as a major cause for political corruption. In addition, an expensive and lavish lifestyle is the product of a consumerist culture and politicians also form part of the same culture.

In the last few years, the press has been replete with reports of scams and scandals. Certain chief ministers of states and union ministers have had to resign on account of being legally charged with corrupt practices. The Bofors scam, 2G spectrum scam, CWG scam, Telgi scam, Jain Hawala case, various land grab cases, HDW submarine case and certain defense purchases have been widely reported in the press and are now the subject matter of judicious scrutiny.

Political corruption has very high visibility and it makes sensational news. Corruption in the corporate sector is no less; only it makes less news. According to a report of international monetary fund, a lot of capital has been deposited in foreign banks.

Basically concealment of income, evasion of taxes and duties, black-marketing, rigging of share prices, manipulating the stock market and other such practices have led to smuggling and money laundering. Such trends have been associated with the generation of a parallel black economy and loss of a huge amount of revenue to the government. The business-politics nexus found to be implicit in the very nature of things, as it works to the mutual advantage of both parties.

Corruption is rampant in Indian courts also. According to Transparency International, judicial corruption in India is attributable to factors such as delays in the disposal of cases, shortage of judges and complex procedures, all of which are exacerbated by a preponderance of new laws. The judicial system is so expensive, dilatory and inefficient that it takes years and years for corruption cases to be decided. The result of such inordinate delay is that accused often escape punishment because a long time span has an adverse effect on the evidence in the case. The conviction rate in Indian courts is only 6%. There are 3 crore cases pending in the Indian courts and the average time taken for disposal of cases is 10-20 years. Justice delayed is justice denied in most cases of corruption. Anti-corruption tools such as the Right to Information Act, social audit, citizens' charters and use of technology are wonderful tools to check corruption, but majority of the population in the country is not aware of these instruments.

So corruption in India has wings, not wheels. As the nation grows, the corrupt also grows to invent new methods of cheating the government and public. The causes of corruption are many and complex, but some of the main causes of corruption are-

1. 1. Corruption is caused as well as increased because of the changes in the value system and ethical qualities of men who administer. The old ideals of morality, service and honesty are regarded as anachronistic.
2. 2. Vast size of population coupled with widespread illiteracy, lack of awareness, lack of employment and the poor economical infrastructure lead to economic corruption in public life.
3. 3. In a highly inflationary economy, low salaries of government officials compel them to resort to corruption.
4. 4. Emergence of a political elite which believes in interest oriented rather than nation oriented programs and policies.
5. 5. Artificial scarcity created by people with malevolent intentions wrecks the fabric of the economy.
6. 6. Tolerance of people towards corruption, complete lack of intense public outcry against corruption and the absence of a strong public forum to oppose corruption allow corruption to reign over people.
7. 7. Complex laws and procedures deter common people from seeking help from the government.

Corruption is as much a moral as a developmental issue. It can distort entire decision making processes on investment projects and other commercial transactions and the very social and political fabric of societies. It adversely affects economic performance, undermines employment opportunities and clouds prospects of poverty reduction. Petty corruption raises the cost of engaging in productive activities. Its burden falls disproportionately on poor people. For those without money or connections, corruption in public health or police services can have serious consequences. Corruption affects the lives of poor people through many other channels as well. It diverts public resources away from socially valuable goods such as education and infrastructure investments that would benefit poor people like health clinics, roads etc. Instead, it tends to increase public spending on capital intensive investments that offer more opportunities for kickbacks such as defense contracts. It lowers the quality of infrastructure since kickbacks are more lucrative on equipment purchases. Corruption also undermines public service delivery. Where corruption involves the transfer of funds outside the country, it seriously undermines economic development. The way funds are allocated gets distorted, foreign aids gets reduced and productive capacity gets further weakened resulting in loss of national wealth, inflation and rise of anti social elements.

2. Remedial Measure to Combat Corruption

Corruption is a cancer which every Indian must strive to cure. Many new leaders declare their determination to eradicate corruption but soon they themselves become corrupt and start amassing huge wealth. The World Report of 1997 says, "Incentive for corrupt behavior arises when public officials have wide discretion and little accountability". The World Development Report on poverty 2000-01 states that the state will deliver more effectively to all its citizens if public administrations implement policies efficiently and are accountable and responsive to users, corruption and harassment are curbed, and the power of the state is used to redistribute resources for actions benefiting poor people. Streamlining bureaucratic procedures, simplifying tax systems, eliminating excessive regulations, privatizing state owned enterprises and motivating public servants can help reduce the opportunities and scope of corruption.

Another important measure is disseminating information on budget allocations and spending which enables people to hold civil servants accountable, reducing inefficiency and corruption. Community participation and monitoring can keep it in check.

Accountability is necessary for good governance. This is possible through transparency in operations. Hence transparency in public life demand greater access to information, rules and regulations. Transparency in government is possible if there is freedom of information and the citizens have access to information. Recently several states have adopted the 'Right to Information Act' which empowers any person desiring information to make an application to the competent authority asking for relevant information. The competent authority is bound to provide the information within the time frame specified unless the same is refused on valid grounds. With the help of Right to Information Act, citizens should be empowered to ask for information related to public services etc. and this information should be made available to general public as and when required. Such stringent actions against corrupt officials will certainly have a deterrent impact.

Foolproof laws should be made so that there is no room for discretion for politicians and bureaucrats. The role of the politicians should be minimized. Application of the evolved policies should be left in the hands of an independent commission or authority in each area of public interest. The decision of the commission or authority should be challenged only in the courts.

More and more courts should be opened for speedy and inexpensive justice so that cases do not linger in courts for years and justice is delivered on time. Local bodies, independent of the government, like Lokpals, Lok Adalats and vigilance commissions

should be formed to provide speedy justice with low expenses. Cooperation of the people has to be obtained for successfully containing corruption. People should have a right to recall the elected representatives if they see them becoming indifferent to the electorate.

Funding of elections is at the core of the political corruption. Electoral reforms are crucial in this regard. Several reforms like state funding of election expenses for candidates, strict enforcement of statutory requirements like holding in-party elections, making political parties get their accounts audited regularly and filing income tax returns, denying persons with criminal records a chance to contest elections should be brought in. Responsiveness, accountability and transparency are a must for a clean system. Bureaucracy, the backbone of good governance, should be made more citizen-friendly, accountable, ethical and transparent.

Corruption flourishes because there are people in power who benefit from the present system. In India, the number of persons who actually benefit may not be more than 50 million out of over 1000 million. Unfortunately those who benefit from power are also those who have to initiate changes to check corruption. It is, therefore, important for people to play an active role in this regard. The public interest litigation is a route that can be used to approach the courts and thereby make the administration change policies or initiate action to check corruption. Citizens may approach agencies such as central vigilance commission and Lok Ayuktas.

With the advancement of and use of information technology in day-to-day life and even in governmental operations, speedy processing of information not only reduces the scope of corruption but also improves the quality of service to the citizens. The CVC has recommended that in addition to publicity of tenders through newspapers, trade journals and providing tender documents manually or through the post, etc., the complete bid documents along with application forms shall be published on the web site of the organization. The electronic and print media can be effectively used in shaping public opinion. NGOs can play an active role in taking up individual cases for fighting corruption or bringing about systematic changes. Members of the public can also report about the activities of public servants who are found to be living beyond their means.

Ethics should form part of the education system and children in the schools should be mobilized to create a social climate for making corruption unacceptable. Schools can reach large numbers of children and through them their parents and the community at large. The use of media for mobilizing the people against corruption can also be part of this effort.

Although corruption has become deeply entrenched, yet it is not impossible to get out of the corruption trap. A strong political will and commitment to a clear anti-corruption agenda is required. Efforts have to be made in different directions to reduce corruption. Certain changes are required in the legal framework such as suitable modification of Indian Official Secrets Act in order to develop greater transparency in public dealing. The promulgation of corrupt public servants (Forfeiture of Property Act), 1999 will ensure real punishment of corrupt public servants by way of confiscation of property. In our fight against corruption, good practices need to be adopted and encouraged. Strengthening of accounting standards and practices, establishing of accountability in administration and fostering responsibility at lower levels through decentralization, deregulation and elimination of unnecessary controls and developing transparency in the adoption of discretionary practices, tendering and procurement are certain such measures. Finally and most importantly healthy social values encouraging honesty in word and deed need to be inculcated through an active involvement of the family, the school and the community.

3. References

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