

CORRUPTION IN INDIA: CAUSES, AND STRATEGIES FOR ERADICATION

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ABSTRACT

During the Lok Sabha Election Campaign trail, in the year 2014 Shri Narendra Modi touted the catchy slogan, “Na khaunga na khane dunga”. If the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) were elected to power, Modi would neither indulge in corruption, nor tolerate it in his government. It was, in most part, on the basis of such pledges that BJP stormed to power in the 2014 general election, because people supported them who assured to eradicate Corruption. Consequently, Narendra Damodar Das Modi became 14th Prime Minister of India and assumed office on 26 May, 2014. Everybody understands that corruption retorts economic development of the country. It creates favourable conditions to raise casteism, linguism, communalism and terrorism. It increases violence and lawlessness in the society since the corrupt man has the money power to influence the executors of law to serve him. Its impact diminishes morality and destroys individual character. Corruption heightens inefficiency, nepotism, and lethargy and has created indiscipline in all fields of administration, making the life of a common man miserable. Due to prevailing corrupt practices in the society the credibility of officials reduces in the eyes of the masses. It helps to create increased black money in the country. Corruption mainly lead to induce people to adulteration in eatables, spurious drugs and duplicate consumer items during creation of false shortage of many consumer items consequent upon their illegal storage. This leads to deteriorating health and life support immunity system of the people. Corruption is a major social problem and is a curse to the society. This paper seeks to describe the causes of corrupt practices in administration and suggests strategies for eradication of corruption from the society.

Keywords: Corruption, social problem, administration, adulteration, eradication strategies.

INTRODUCTION

Corruption is a social evil. It is not only widespread in Indian civilization but also found in all the societies of the world. In some societies it is more rampant than some others. Corruption has caused maximum suffering to the people. The word corruption means destruction, ruining or spoiling a society or country. A corrupt society is characterized by immoral practice and lack of fear of rules and regulations or lack of respect for the law. It is a well known fact that corruption is anti-national, anti-people, and especially harmful to the poor and it is anti-economic development. Unfortunately, India is regarded as one of the countries in which corruption has become very much widespread during the past few decades. Former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's popular remark that only 15 paise of every rupee for welfare of the downtrodden reaches them found mention in the judgement of the Supreme Court which said this "malaise" can be taken care of by the Aadhaar scheme. A part of the judgement reads:

"A former prime minister of this country has gone on record to say that out of one rupee spent by the government for welfare of the downtrodden; only 15 paise thereof actually reaches those persons for whom it is meant. It cannot be doubted that with UID/Aadhaar much of the malaise in this field can be taken care of," a bench of justices A. K. Sikri and Ashok Bhushan said.¹ It said Aadhaar can take care of malaise of duplicate beneficiaries reaping the fruits of welfare schemes meant for the genuine deprived class. The bench said a major hurdle in transfer of the benefits to the genuine needy is the lack of means to correctly identify such persons. "Resultantly, lots of ghosts and duplicate beneficiaries are able to take undue and impermissible benefits," it said. The judges said it is the duty of a welfare State to come out with schemes to take care of needs of the deprived class and ensure adequate opportunities are provided to them. It noted that due to various reasons including corruption, the benefit of welfare schemes does not reach those who are supposed to receive them. Corruption is one of the factors that have contributed to the degradation of the Indian politics.

"Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely." The historian and moralist, who was otherwise known simply as Lord Acton, expressed this opinion in a letter to Bishop Mandell Creighton in 1887. Before this William Pitt the Elder, Earl of Chatham and British Prime Minister from 1766 to 1778, also said something similar in a speech to the UK House of

¹ The Indian Express, updated June 9, 2017, <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/rajiv-gandhis-popular-15paise-remark>

Lords in 1770: "Unlimited power is apt to corrupt the minds of those who possess it."² That is what the event at the national political scene seems to suggest, at least during the last couple of years in India. Practice of corruption at lower levels by some clerical staff, sub staff and attendants for some petty amount, is understandable and may be tolerable. They may practice it due to their tough financial conditions, excessive demands from family, friends or society, health problems, or any other kinds of pressures.

Corruption is recognized by many with the slow poison, cancer and serious ill that can make the health of any country very weak. According to World Bank study 5% of global GDP is paid as bribe. "Corruption is present in all the countries, rich and poor, the North and the South, developed and developing. Numbers show the startling scope of the challenge," UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said, citing the World Economic Forum estimates that corruption costs at least \$2.6 trillion – or five per cent of the global Gross Domestic Product (GDP)."³ The poor people pay the highest share of their income as bribes, not only the country's economic growth suffers from this but also of every penny that is being stolen from the poor is further depriving them of basic services (health, education etc) and also from equality of opportunities further. "The poor and vulnerable suffer disproportionately and impunity compounds the problem," Guterres said.⁴

India had the highest bribery rate among the 16 Asia Pacific countries surveyed by Transparency International. Nearly seven in 10 Indians who had accessed public services had paid a bribe. Contrast this with the least corrupt country - Japan, where only 0.2% of the respondents reported paying a bribe. The only silver lining is that over a half of the respondents from India were positive about the government's efforts to combat bribery. Even as the government's efforts to tackle bribery were appreciated, slightly more than 40% of the respondents viewed that corruption had increased over the past twelve months. 63% of the respondents in India also felt that they in India also felt that they as individuals had the power to fight corruption. Across the Asia Pacific region, just 22% of the respondents thought that corruption had decreased while 40% of the respondents (41% in India) were of the option

² Available at <https://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/absolute-power-corrupts-absolutely.html>

³ @Moneycontrolcom, Last updated Nov 9, 2018, <https://www.moneycontrol.com/news/world/corruption-costs-2-6-trillion-or-5-of-global-gdp-says-un-chief-2939991.html>

⁴ *Ibid.*

that it was on the rise. In mainland China, 73% of the respondents felt that the level of corruption had worsened. This was the highest of any country surveyed.⁵

For the purpose of the survey, TI concentrated on bribes paid for procuring six key public services viz Public schools, public hospitals, official documents (such as identification card, voters card), public utility services, the police and courts. In total, 38% of the poorest people surveyed said they paid a bribe either for access to a service or for quicker delivery. In some countries like India, Pakistan and Thailand, it was the poorer section who had to bear the brunt of corruption and pay a bribe. Nearly 73% of those who paid a bribe in India were from the poorer section of society, in Pakistan and Thailand this percentage was 64% and 46% respectively. Governments must do more to deliver on their anti-corruption commitments. It's time to stop talking and act. Millions of people are forced to pay bribes for public services and it is the poor, who are most vulnerable", said José Ugaz, Chair of Transparency International.⁶

DEFINITION OF CORRUPTION

The meaning and definition of a term is important to limit the boundaries of our field of enquiry. It helps in making a coherent estimation and understanding of the specific topic or phenomenon. Moreover, it is helpful for deriving at a pragmatic conclusion. The definition is more important to avoid vague generalizations.

Corruption is a value loaded term and in a general sense may include a wide range of activities within its ambit. However, for various reasons, all such activities and behaviours of the individuals may not be included within the boundaries of the definition of 'corruption'. It is suffice to mention here that from moral, ethical or religious standards, a particular act may be a 'corrupt act' but it may not be so from sociological, criminological or legal standards. Moreover, a particular behaviour may be an act of corruption in a specified time frame or in particular circumstances whereas the same behaviour might not be an act of corruption in another specified time frame.

⁵ The Times of India, Updated March 7, 2017, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/india-has-highest-bribery-rate-among-16-asia-pacific-countries-says-transparency-international-report/articleshow/57508800.cms>

⁶ *Ibid.*

Webster's⁷ Dictionary (1934) provides the meaning of the word 'corrupt' as (1) to make or become evil or morally bad, (2) to take or become impure. The word 'corruption' means, according to Webster's as the act of corrupting or state of being corrupt. Such meanings of the word 'corruption' as given in Webster's Dictionary have religious-historic reasons. Webster's Third New International Dictionary (1961) defines 'corruption' in an entirely different context. It defines 'corruption' as 'inducement by means of improper considerations to commit a violation of duty'⁸ interlinked and are inseparable. However, 'corruption is a wider term and has wider connotations than the term 'bribery'.

Bhargava says that "act of commission or omission by a public servant for securing pecuniary or other material advantage or indirectly for himself, his family or friends, is corruption."⁹

C.B. Mamoria writes: We may define corruption as an improper or selfish exercise of power and influence attached to a public office or to a special position in public life.¹⁰

Corruption has not only widespread everywhere, it has innumerable forms and dimensions. With the passage of time, corruption in India has become a 'convention', a 'tradition', 'psychological need' and 'necessity'. It has become pervasive. It is a regular practice, in business transaction or deal. It manifests itself in variety of shapes varying in heinousness."

Corruption is there at the very root of our social life. There is not a single individual who has not been lured into corruption. If corruption is accepted in a wider perspective, exploitation of any kind is corruption; shirking work is corruption, waste of time, energy and money is corruption; deceiving or betraying is corruption; mismanaging of public or private fund is corruption; undue use of authority, force or power is corruption, smuggling is corruptionsex has become one of the biggest area of corruption.....Corruption is the driving force and part of national character.¹¹

Most of the people are guilty of corruption in one way or another; at one time or another, for one purpose or another; at one time or another. "Again the milk vendor, who adulterates milk; the sanitary inspector who connives at it; the grocer who uses false weights; the contractor

⁷ Webster's Second New, International Dictionary of English Language (Unabridged) U.S.A., Second Edition (1934)

⁸ Webster's Third New International Dictionary of English Language (Unabridged), U.S.A. (1961)

⁹ Bhargava G.S., "India's Watergate: A Study in Political Corruption" –Arnold Hienemann Publishers (India) Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi (1974) Page 10.

¹⁰ Mamoria, C.B., "Social Problems and social Disorganisation in India, 2nd revised edition, Oct. 1981, Page 839

¹¹ Kohli, Suresh, "Corruption in India", Chetan Publications, New Delhi, 1975, pp.32-33

who does a shady job of road building; the engineer who puts the seal of approval on it and the city father who has a 'cut' in the contractor's ill-gotten wealth, all these are corrupt. But there is an even more banal form of corruption when men who wear the purple of commerce control party machines and political power and those with political power trade it for money. This type of dishonesty is more dangerous because it sets in motion the machinery of corruption, eating into the very vitals of the society."¹²

Corruption has been with the Indians since the mythological times and is found in every walk of life. "The Far Eastern Economic Review" has called corruption "The Asian Lubricant". It says: Like the gods and goddesses who abound in Asia (of course in Indian subcontinent too), each with many faces, many hands, and many names, corruption has diverse aspects and numerous ingenious ways of extorting an illegal "luck" Corruption in Indian public life is all pervasive...."¹³ Although, no statistical data can possibly be compiled to assess the extent of corruption amongst our political leaders yet in view of the experience many of us have heard from those who had with the working of our bureaucracy, it is hardly necessary to convince ourselves of the pervasiveness of this phenomenon.

CAUSES OF CORRUPTION

Corruption is like blood cancer. It has taken deep-roots in the country. Corruption in Indian public life is "all pervasive" and that businessmen, bureaucrats, contractors, industrialists, entrepreneurs, journalists, vice-chancellors, teachers, doctors, nurses and the politicians all come under suspicion. As the time moves more and more people are being swept by the move of corruption. Corruption is an offence like that of many other offences punishable under the criminal law of our country. Basically, therefore, it is the sociologists and the criminologists who can delve deep into causes of corruption. For that matter, the causes of crime, in general, equally applied to the offence of corruption. However, it can perhaps be suggested that certain special socio-economic and political factors do accentuate the tendency to commit these offences.

¹²Bhargava, G.S. *India's Watergate: A Study of Political Corruption in India*, Arnold-Heinemann Publishers, 1974, page 10.

¹³Quoted by Mamoria, C.B. in *Social Problems and Social Disorganisation*, op.cit. Page 842.

Corruption is a complex phenomenon and various factors and forces have conspired to cause it and spread it everywhere. The causes responsible for corruption are enlisted as follows:¹⁴

1. **Economic Insecurity:** This is regarded as the most important cause of corruption. The poor people become corrupt in the hope of becoming rich. The rich indulge in it for fear of losing what they have. The rich have craving for luxurious goods and imported commodities, such as –dresses, new android cell phones, computers, tablets, big screen TVs, air conditioners, home theatre, costly wrist watches, new cars, well furnished big houses etc. This encourages smuggling on a massive scale.
2. **High Rate of Income Tax:** Since tax rates are comparatively high in India even the honest people are often tempted to escape from it by making false returns of their property and income. Many of the officers in Income Tax Department are also equally tend to corrupt practices and they thrive on bribery. Income Tax Officers, policemen, goods and service tax officers, custom inspectors and others started minting money not only from the black marketers and tax evaders, but also from innocent people who gave bribes in order to avoid suffering and humiliation at the hands of these officials.
3. **Meagre Salary being paid to the Government Servants:** Employees in some of the government departments are paid comparatively very less salary. This situation is said to be the cause of corruption in administration. Clerks in the court, peons and attendants in all government departments, police constables and all such employees draw poor salary. They expects tips and bribes even for doing their regular or routine duties. It has been estimated that more than 50% of the officers are corrupt in one form or the other.¹⁵
4. **Emergence of New Sources of Wealth and Power:** The modern political economic set up provides a change for the politicians in power to make money through illegal means. Lincoln Steffens once said, “...the politicians took bribes because businessmen gave them and businessmen gave them because they had to.” This unholy understanding between the businessmen and the politicians always encourage corruption.

¹⁴ Mamoria, C.B., “Social Problems and social Disorganisation in India, op.cit. pp. 844-847

¹⁵ Mamoria, C.B.: *ibid*, page 845.

5. **The System of Democracy:** The present style functioning of democracy in India, also contributes to corruption. All political parties, especially the ruling party spends crores of rupees on each election. This money comes from the big businessmen, industrialists and such other rich men who have their own vested interests in financing the elections. They supply money to the party elections in the form of “black money.” This in turn, gives them licence, a ‘moral’ justification for accumulating “number – two” money (un-accounted money) in different forms.
6. **The Very Presence of Black Money:** Existence of large amounts of unaccounted black money is one of the main sources of corruption. “This money is obtained by various ways, namely, tax evasions, smuggling, and speculation in immovable property and shares and stocks, receiving fees and remuneration partly or wholly in cash without showing them in the account, trading in licences and permitsetc.”¹⁶
7. **Social and Economic Modernization:** It is said that modernization breeds corruption in industrial society and technological advancement, which “offers prizes for doing evil; money, position, power”, besides bringing about attitudinal changes in the system. New loyalties and new identifications emerge among individuals and groups. This contributes to an increase in the incidence of corruption. As Huntington said, “... corruption in a modernizing society is in part not so much the result of deviance of behaviour from the accepted norms as it is the deviance of norms from the established patterns of behavior.”¹⁷ More than any other thing “the get rich quick” motivation inspires a large number of people both at the top and bottom of the society to become corrupt. The main factors mentioned above have generated a favourable atmosphere for corruption.

STRATEGIES TO ERADICATE CORRUPTION

Corruption prevention and eradication on a national scale in India is the commitment of the government in the framework of running a clean, corruption free and efficient governance in the country to become a New India of the dream of our Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi; in

¹⁶ Mamoria, C.B.: *ibid*, page 847.

¹⁷ S P Huntington – *Modernization & Corruption*, Uploaded by Rahman Mizan:
https://www.academia.edu/19540909/S_P_Huntington_Modernization_and_Corruption?auto=download

his own words “We are breaking chains, we are changing pictures; this is a new era, new India, we will write our own destiny”¹⁸. The Government of India has been taking several steps to eradicate corruption. It is not that no steps have been taken in India against the malaise of corruption. Over the years, there have been many systemic reforms in governance. To mention some, these are E-governance measures, Right to Public Services Act in many states, Citizens' Charter, Social audit, Right to Information Act, 2005. These seek to change the relation and nature of interaction between Government and the citizenry. Accountability, transparency, citizen-centricity are sought to be brought into governance.

While systemic reforms are alone not sufficient to annihilate corruption, governance in India leaves a lot to be desired even in such reforms. Many laws and rules continue to be ambiguous which translates to discretion by civil servants. Also in some spheres rules are missing. Amartya Sen rightly remarked, “Often bureaucrats exercise discretionary powers, in the absence of rules, due to an incomplete contract situation, which often leads to corruption.”

Subsequent to the ratification of the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC), 2005, India has amended its 30-year old key anti-corruption law, the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988, to bring it in line with global standards. Accordingly, the Prevention of Corruption (Amendment) Act, 2018, has been introduced with a focus on increasing transparency and accountability among government officials and commercial organizations.

In fact, corruption can only be reduced or minimized, and can hardly be stopped altogether. No nation has become successful so far in this regard. Even for minimizing this problem both preventive and punitive measures will have to be taken. The Santharam Committee⁴ on the Prevention of Corruption instituted by the Central Government, observes, “Corruption cannot be eliminated or even satisfactorily reduced unless preventive measures are planned and implemented in a sustainable and effective manner. Preventive action must include administrative, legal, social, economic and educative measures.”¹⁹

The Committee recommended the following measures:

¹⁸ Excerpts from the Independence Day Speech, On Aug 15, 2018, by Prime Minister Narendra Modi described India's progress under him and his vision for the country through poetry, saying, "We have made a commitment, we have dedicated our body and soul, we are determined that a new Sun must rise and we must soar above sky, we have to make a new India,"

¹⁹ Mamoria, C.B.: Op.cit, page 865.

1. A thorough study of the extend possible, scope and modes of corruption, should be undertaken regarding each department, undertaking or ministry. The study must also suggest preventive remedial measures for the same.
2. Administrative delays should be reduced to the minimum to avoid corrupt practices. For this purpose :
 - (a) Existing procedures and practices should be reviewed to avoid delays;
 - (b) Time-limits should be prescribed for dealing with receipts and should be strictly enforced; and
 - (c) All notings at lower level than that of under secretary should be avoided.
3. Attempts should be made to educate citizens in regard to their rights, responsibilities and the procedures of the government.
4. Improvement must be made to increase the salary of the employees besides making necessary provisions for housing, medical facilities for the government employees etc.
5. Informal code of conduct for different categories of employees particularly belonging to the department and other facilities provided to them by those with whom they have official dealings.
6. Officials should not have any dealings with a person claiming to act on behalf of an industrial house unless he is properly authorised to do so.
7. Companies and businessmen should be obliged to keep detailed accounts of expenditure.
8. Officers for the administrative posts should be selected with great care. Only those whose integrity is tested to the fullest satisfaction must be appointed for the key posts.
9. There should be a complete ban against government servants accepting private commercial or industrial employment for two years after retirement.

CONCLUSION

Former President of India Bharat Ratna Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam once said, “Corruption is one of the biggest challenges that India faces. The country’s political-bureaucratic-judicial system requires an urgent “chemotherapy” to deal with a “cancer-like situation” engulfing the

country.”²⁰ “Establishing a corruption-free India is a major challenge. I propose a youth brigade as the solution. ‘I can do it. We can do it. India will do it’, should be the spirit. The leadership across the country irrespective of their profession or political affiliation will have to put the country, its development and its pride above their individualism.”²¹

It is a matter of grave concern for us that the police department, municipal corporations, land records, income tax, customs and even goods and service tax are known to be corrupt and people can hardly get their work done without greasing the employee’s palm. There is lack of accountability on the part of public servants. The conduct and disciplinary rules are so porous that public servant involved in act of corruption rarely receives punishment for a dereliction of duty and harassment to people.

Recently, we have witnessed spurt in anti-corruption campaign which has resulted in a positive perception about our country. The momentum against corruption needs to be sustained and for long lasting results, it is important to develop a system of governance which leaves no scope for corruption. Our experiences and thoughts must be shared to achieve this goal.²²

Before concluding this paper, in addition to the above recommendations made by the Santharam Committee, the following suggestions are enlisted which may be considered with a view to eradicate problem of corruption:

- (a) The taxation laws must be modified, licenses and permit system must be thoroughly reviewed.
- (b) The law enforcing authorities must see that the laws are rigorously enforced without any fear or favour.
- (c) Mass communication media/social media must play a more positive role in encouraging honesty and discouraging and condemning dishonesty and corruption.
- (d) The salaries of government officials and the ministers and legislators must be reviewed in tune with the price index.

²⁰ APJ ABDUL KALAM = dubai Feb. 4, 2011 The Hindu, Business Line

Retrieved:<https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/economy/corruption-engulfing-india-like-cancer-kalam/article20090696.ece1>

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² - Editorial VIGEYEVANI, Quarterly Newsletter Central Vigilance Commission DECEMBER 2014.

- (e) Bureaucratic corruption must be reduced by stringent enforcement of punitive measures against bribe taking.
- (f) Corruption trials should be given the widest possible publicity.

To make India clean and corruption free and to give real service to the nation we must commit something which cannot be bought or measured in terms of money, and that is sincerity and integrity. For this purpose the Pledge taken by the people during “Vigilance Awareness Week” celebration under the guidance of CVC is reproduced below:

“We, the public servants of India, do hereby solemnly pledge that we shall continuously strive to bring about integrity and transparency in all spheres of our activities. We also pledge that We shall work unstintingly for eradication of corruption in all spheres of life. We shall remain vigilant and work towards the growth and reputation of our organisation. Through our collective efforts, we shall bring pride to our organisations and provide value based service to our countrymen. We shall do our duty conscientiously and act without fear or favour.”