

CORRUPTION IN HIGH PLACES

Synopsis: India is one of the ten top corrupt countries of the world. The contagious disease of corruption in high place is already widespread and deep rooted. Corruption in high places has many faces and forms and admits no limits. The year 1996 would go down in the history as the year of scams, scandals and high corruption. The corruption cases brought to light have shocked the country to its very foundations. Corruption in India being indulged in with impunity. The recent judicial activism and public interest petition being filed arouse the hopes that corrupt leaders and bureaucrats would not go scot free.

India is the largest democracy in the world and has completed 50 years of independence. It is the second largest country, after China, in population; one sixth of population of the world lives here. And India is one of the ten most corrupt countries of the globe. Corruption is here, there and everywhere. In high places it is, bubbling, bursting and overboiling. People in high political and bureaucratic positions have been systematically looting the country and the people are looking helplessly. The punderers like Muhammad Ghori, Muhammad Ghazni, Nadir Shah and Chingez Khan came but had to retrace their steps. The Britishers had to leave ultimately bag and baggage but there seems no end and remedy to these robbers and swindlers in high place and positions. They have been indulging in kickbacks, money laundering, taking huge bribes and gratifications and all other sorts of blatant, dishonest and underhand means. This cancerous growth in our body politic has numerous other symptoms like collection of large funds for parties and elections, collections purses to be given as gifts to the leaders and so on. Obviously, the various methods and means adopted by these people to line their own pockets are really matchless and subtle.

This contagious disease of corruption has been eating into the vitals of nations; the democratic values have been eroded; Progress has been retarded. It has become more or less a way of life. Evil begets evil. It has given birth to so many other evils like dishonesty, characterlessness, violence, greed, murders, loss of faith, hypocrisy and compromise with principles and practices which make life worth-living. Even our defence considerations have not been spared. Such is the lure of lucre. Many of our elected representatives holding high responsible political positions have become millionaires overnight, they are rolling in wealth; they own huge agricultural lands, costly bungalows in prime locations in metros,

have unknown accounts. In foreign banks, their kith and kin, who were paupers till yesterday, are now mill and factory owners; they have floated big companies enterprises.

Corruption in high places is one of the most complex socioeconomic problems. Moreover, it percolates to lower levels. Hence, everybody seems busy in making a quick buck. Of late Indian politics and bureaucracy have become very fertile grounds for Corruption, Nepotism, favouritism, scams, scandals, cheatings, bribery, money and muscle power have become the order of the day. Consequently, honesty, morality, values and ethics have become casualties. Perhaps, there has never been a totally corruption-free society, but the present corruption admits no limits, even the sky is no limit. For example, look at this instant favoritism: Recently the Haryana High court cancelled and quashed about 26,000 allotments of plots made since 1989 to well-connected and influential persons. These allotments were made under the discretionary quota which caused loss of crores and crores of rupees to the public exchequer. Take another example: Jharkand Mukti Morcha bribery case. One of the accused in the case, Shailendra Mahato has confessed before the court that he and three other M.P.s had accepted bribes of Rs. 30 lakh each to vote against the no confidence motion in 1993. Even our investigation agencies are not free from the charges of corruption and favoritism.

Then there are Lakhu Bhai cheating case, Bofors pay offs and kickbacks, Jain Hawala, Fodder Scam, Urea Scandal, Telecom Scandal, Ayurvedic Medicine Scandal and so on. They mirror the corruption of the highest order involving astronomical sums. And representatives of the public holding very high public and government positions. Really a gallery of rogues and super rogues! In Urea Scam the entire amount of Rs. 133 crore was paid in advance and deposited in the bank accounts of the fertilizer company. Soon the entire money had disappeared from the bank accounts before a grain of urea could be imported. The fraud revealed how the concerned minister, his son and other misused their powers and position to obtain kickbacks and bribes.

There has been corruption galore in high places. In the name of liberalization and privatization of the telecom sector the minister concerned made crores of rupees. In raids crores in cash and kind was recovered from his house and that of his assistant bureaucrat. And it is believed that it is just a fraction of what actually was involved in the scandal. The Fodder scam in Bihar in the Animal Husbandry Department to the tune of Rs. 600 crore. Rocked the whole country. Similar was the shock wave felt by the nation when Hawala Scandal surfaced involving Rs. 65 crore and 115 people in top position. These sordid and

shameful acts of the persons in high and very high places and positions have sent the country in disarray. People are shocked and dumbfounded at the revelations. It is no exaggeration when it is said and believed that it is just the tip of the iceberg. What about the many other shady deals, underhand transactions, scandals and scams which have not been made public.

The reports of one scandal after another, and another and still another came like shockwaves and tremors of a powerful earthquake. When the man was in power as a minister, he died out dealerships of petrol pumps, cooking gas agencies and kerosene oil depots to persons well connected with the corridors of power another person, a lady in power and position, allotted 8,700 houses in Delhi out of turn, again using her discretionary powers and got her palm greased from Rs. 20,000 to Rs. 2 lakh per allotment. Besides these quarters, 43 shops were also allotted in prime locations in Delhi to friends and relatives. Thus, the year 1996 would go down in the history as the year of scandals and scams. But the year cannot be seen in isolation. It has its roots deep in past years and affects in coming years. People in the high places think that public memory is short and so they might be lying low and may soon start again indulging in their favorite game of corruption. Old habits die hard. Once corrupt, always corrupt is the truth; change of heart is difficult to come by, and in the case of hardened politicians and bureaucrats it is impossible.

Here is another example of corruption, in high place in another form, often repeated with impunity. On March 18, 1997 Garib Maha Railla was held at Patna, Bihar as a show of strength. The methods and means adopted to collect the crowd and to raise the funds were no less shocking. It is alleged that “organized terrorism” was let loose to make it a success. Money was extorted from the people, buses and trucks hijacked to transport the crowd, petrol-pump=owners forced to supply free petrol and state machinery was misused. It is believed that over 150 crore were spend on the mega show. These cannot be more allegations because there is no smoke without a fire.

There is corruption world-wide. There is difference of degrees only, but this difference is important. The magnitude of corruption in high places in India is immeasurable. In foreign countries corrupt people are brought to justice and when their corruption is proved, they are punished. But in India still there is no system, no tradition to bring the corrupt to trail and then to make him pay for his corruption. There is corruption and crime in high places but no punishment. The recent judicial activism and public interest petitions being filed in the courts arouse the hope that things would soon change and law would be allowed to take its own course in such cases.

Power, politics and corruption have become synonymous on the present day Indian political scene. Power here pollutes whatever it touches. "Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely" observed Lord Act on. This comment can be best are partners in the power so apt to be corrupt unless they zealously guard against this contagion. People in high places are no doubt corrupt. There can be exceptions but exceptions prove the rule. During freedom struggle and about 2 decades after Independence corruption in high places was an aberration, but now the situation has totally reversed. In the word of poet Shalley "Power, like a desolate pestilence, pollutes whatever it touches."