

COMMENT

Bombarding the Headquarters

AS ANNA HAZARE, VETERAN Gandhian ended his fast-unto-death after 98 hours, being successful in spreading his message against corruption and government's inaction in introducing a comprehensive Jan Lokpal Bill, in place of the officially proposed Lokpal Bill, otherwise toothless and ineffective, Congress Party and Opposition as well heaved an audible sigh of relief. Corruption is so endemic in this system that all political parties feel shy of genuinely exposing it, not to speak of eradicating it. Even the political left remains passive and evades the issue when it is the question of fighting corruption. The much talked about Nehruvian era was not free from corruption.

The Manmohan Singh-Sonia Gandhi dispensation at the centre had to retreat in the face of massive support Anna and his co-crusaders got across the country just immediately after the announcement of fast-unto-death as a part of 'India against Corruption' campaign and the ministry of law and justice had no option but to issue a notification to form a joint committee comprising five members from the government and five members from civil society as per Anna's demand, for re-drafting the Anti-graft Bill in its entirety by taking all aspects into consideration and plugging the loopholes.

In truth Anna's movement was so spontaneous and so widespread, particularly in influencing the most vocal and articulate section of middle class people, irrespective of their political inclinations, that the persons in authority got panicky. Panic in paradise was for more than one reason. Massive support to Anna's crusade generated shock waves among the political stakeholders and Arabian nightmare began to haunt the ruling elites all over the country.

That civil society can no longer be ignored in governance is a fact of life. The facade of Indian democracy is crumbling after each scam while political managers find it increasingly difficult to whip a dying horse. No doubt civil society has its role but it has been a localised affair in recent years. It is at best a desperate attempt by a few concerned citizens, to stand up against injustice, gross violation of rights by government functionaries and corrupt politicians. For the first time civil society action got nationwide response, thanks to Anna Hazare.

Not that indefinite hunger-strike, the old Gandhian weapon, evokes similar response all the time. Irom Sharmila's indefinite hunger-strike is now history but it is yet to create nationwide mobilisation against army brutalities and the army's special powers to mock at what is called the biggest democracy of the world. But Anna's struggle has the potential to develop into a mass upsurge and the authorities have every reason to avoid a catastrophe at this juncture as the situation might go out of their control.

But corruption is synonymous with Congress. The party of Gandhi cannot survive without power and corruption. Then power corrupts them absolutely. Corruption under the present Congress government seems to have grown to phenomenal levels while all political parties cutting across ideological barriers look reluctant to fight corruption in high places. Politicians of all shades, left and right alike, are shrewd enough not to disturb the status quo while living in the glass house.

No doubt Anna has won the first round. But drafting a bill and converting it into a law is not enough to clear the rot as implementation of any Act is the crucial point that remains

unaddressed in most cases. Continual campaign and mass mobilisation against corruption is all that is required at the moment to reflect people's aspirations in the Bill.

Bombarding the headquarters is not that easy. Then there is no short-cut way to arrest corruption other than bombarding the citadels of corruption. It remains to be seen whether civil society activism initiated by Anna could create an atmosphere conducive to a sustained movement against corruption. The Opposition is critical of the committee because they were not invited. But they could flex their muscle when the Bill would be placed in parliament, possibly in the monsoon session. □□□