

NOTE

Another Gandhi?

Asghar Ali Engineer writes :

Anna Hazare is emerging as another Gandhi and he is not only in every newspaper but also on almost every page of every newspaper for making UPA Government to accept his demand to draft Lok Pal Bill with real teeth. The UPA Government had no other course but to accept Hazare's demand after having been exposed in several scams.

Hazare is being praised by entire nation today and has become role model for thousands of activists and civil society also feels proud of him. This fight against corruption is also being described by some as 2nd fight for independence. These are all short time reactions in emotional moment. However, one should not go by such emotional assessments. One has to not only examine its long term implications but also whether it is really such a dazzling moral victory as it is being made out to be.

Hazare is being described as Gandhian and his struggle as Gandhian. To begin with there are three essential elements of Gandhian struggle which cannot be compromised: truth, non-violence and utterly simple life-style. Of all the three one element was surely present in Hazare's struggle i.e. non-violence.

Corruption itself is based on high life-style, falsehood, greed and lies. Who gave response to Anna's struggle? There are three distinct elements: the middle classes whose life-style is far from simple. Also, it is mainly middle class, which apart from big business, easily resorts to corruption for its own work done. It readily shells out money to get a birth in train, it bribes municipal offices for certain extensions and unauthorized structures and also readily accepts bribe as petty government officials to allow illegal work and so on.

These middle classes also pay heavy capitation fees for admission of their children in good schools and professional colleges. In fact there is hardly any form of corrupt practice which these middle classes do not resort to. These classes have hardly any moral right to fight against corruption.

The second element which was responding to Hazare's call was a political class (though to some extent it remained invisible for strategic reasons) which also invisibly mobilized through its cadre a section of civil society to weaken the ruling UPA which again is not a pure motive. The third element was of course of those who really wants to fight against corruption on principle and this section can be described as much closer to Gandhian philosophy and values. This section was the smallest in the whole mobilization.

It is also necessary to understand the difference between Anna Hazare and Gandhi. Anna, at best, is Gandhian, not Gandhi. He has adopted Gandhian approach, nothing more, nothing less.

Anna is not on record to having ever denounced communal violence. He kept quiet during Gujarat riots throughout. Gujarat genocide was a matter of great shame for India. Had Gandhi been alive, he would have undertaken fast unto death immediately, whether there was response from civil society or not. Non-violence was matter of principle for Gandhi, not mere strategy.

Not only this, Hazare praised Mody for his 'development model'. Can development model be isolated from violence it causes in the society? Is development something absolute? If it does not help weaker sections of society what the use of that model. Gandhi wanted weakest of all to benefit from development and Modi's development is benefiting only the powerful and the elite, Reliance, Tatas and others. That is why the big industrialists find prime ministerial stuff in him.

What is worse when he was asked about communal carnage in Gujarat, he offered no comment and only spoke at the prodding of his colleague and said he stands for communal harmony and all, including Muslims, are part of his campaign. This was all after-thought and on suggestions from his colleagues who are much more secular than Anna Hazare.

Also, the overwhelming mobilization from civil society is part of the game by RSS, BJP and rightwing religious leadership like Baba Ramdev who felt aggrieved for not being included in the drafting committee. Such mobilization with rightwing political view is not good for secular health of the country. It can be greatly harmful. Everybody knows the result of Jaiprakash Narain's movement of which Narendra Modi is the product although Jaiprakash Narain was towering above Anna Hazare. □