

Struggling Against The Tide?

Official Left is bankrupt but no one on their side wants to admit. And pointing the finger at others is the iconic part of it. Also the blaming game is a fine excuse to pursue their grand strategy of inaction. Of late left leaders seem to be realising the bitter truth that their press statements, that keep the notion of 'activities sans action' alive won't find much space in the media unless they prove to be important—especially about the burning question of the moment and their role in the streets. At last they have found an issue worthy enough to start an agitation, hopefully to reactivate their totally demoralised cadres who don't know much about politics but election. They simply don't know how to combat this system that means police terror, incarceration, no jobs, mis-education and all that. They are moulded right from the beginning to be ignorant about the dynamics of society and the concept of rule by law into moral and cultural building. So when civil society under the initiative of some social activists took a bold step to launch a do-or-die campaign against corruption in high places while demanding the immediate framing of a Lokpal Bill in the line of Ombudsman of Scandinavian countries, they just remained passive without bothering to intervene in any positive manner.

As consensus continued to elude the Lokpal Bill joint drafting committee on some major issues, the prospects of getting the Bill passed in the monsoon session of parliament seem not so bright. Amid the stand-off between the Anna Hazare team and the government four left parties—CPM, RSP, CPI and Forward Bloc—decided to picket the central government offices across the country, hold demonstrations, sit-ins and protest rallies between 15-21 July with the avowed objectives of hastening the process of Lokpal legislation. Maybe, to prove their independent identity they have given a new twist to the 'anti-corruption stir' scenario by demanding a National Judicial Commission to curb corruption in higher judiciary. It remains to be seen whether it is a ploy to defeat the very purpose of Lokpal—after all politicians of all hues are involved in corruption.

The bone of contention between the government, more precisely the Congress Party and Anna Hazare-led civil society group is whether prime minister would be brought under the purview of Lokpal or not. Congress party is deadly against it, albeit left parties have nothing to lose in supporting the move when the Bill comes for all-party discussion. Maybe, the Congress party is still scared by the ghost of 'Bofors' that became somewhat synonymous with the late prime minister Rajiv Gandhi.

Left politicians are no angels. Nor would they seriously, pursue the campaign against corruption in the long run in case the Lokpal initiative gets stalled in the middle.

Even if they fail to frame Lokpal Legislation in the current session of parliament the voice of civil society, despite its limited spread, cannot be ignored anymore. True, the original mood and flavour in the Anna-led movement, as claimed by some Congress opponents, is missing today because of diversionary tactics played by vested interests. But the situation cannot be the same again. The real problem lies elsewhere. As most acts lose their edge because of non-implementation, Lokpal legislation too may face a similar problem if RTI act is any guide.

Financial scandals and scams indicate serious moral degradation and a pious act is no answer to the level of corruption that people encounter day in and day out. Without improving ethical standards and power of morality no society, big or small, can move forward and fight against corruption may pave the way for another avenue of corruption. The

Chinese are executing corrupt officials, government functionaries including party bosses without getting much success in mitigating corruption. They are now debating how to avert a moral landslide, particularly in the wake of recent food safety scandals involving melamine-tainted infant milk, illegal feed additive Clenbuterol to produce lean meat, poor-quality recycled cooking oil, known as 'gutter oil' and all that. Unless there is an all-encompassing cultural movement for a just society, corruption will continue to breed, Lokpal or no Lokpal. The left tradition in India has long deviated from the path of morality and sideshows against corruption and that too just to register their presence in the on-going Lokpal controversy, cannot make any headway. After some time it will be business as usual.

The very emergence of civil society in a crucial area of policy formulation suggests among other things that political parties, left and right alike, are increasingly losing their relevance and clout as well. No it is no party-less democracy yet but the idea that once dogged Jay Prakash and some Gandhians is not dead either. If civil society can transform the political terrain, even marginally, it is certainly going to strengthen the political consciousness of masses towards what they call utopia—'partyless democracy'.

At the time of writing the Lokpal Bill panel failed to reach a consensus. It is now back to square one—Anna Hazare's fast unto death movement from August 16. □□□ *22-06-2011*