

Lasting Legacy

THE ANNA FACTOR IS NOT JUST A MATTER OF CHANCE. NO DOUBT it is a serious and complex issue involving many different people coming together to unite on a common agenda, identifying and working to make the society a better place for ordinary people to live in. In a sense it is the reflection of deep-rooted social conflicts. That ruling elites in India in the past 60 years have perfected the art of corruption is a fact of life which politicians of all hues hotly deny. Those who hold power promote corruption, working in every way they can to oppose and derail any movements that target the status quo. These days political parties, not excluding left parties, care less about the people, and are determined not to benefit the people.

Finally the parliamentary opposition otherwise jobless in a situation of political paralysis has something to talk about in unison—Anna's 'Lokpal' initiative. They are in a hurry to get the 'Lokpal Bill' passed as desired by the Anna team in the current session of parliament as consensus eluded the all-party meeting called by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on December 14. With the cabinet clearing the amended version of this bill it is now parliament to say the final word. At the press time they were debating the draft which will be taken up for consideration and passage in both houses of parliament during the extended period of the winter session between 27 and 29 December. The debate is over whether they need a weak Lokpal or a strong Lokpal. All are in favour of a strong Lokpal and yet they do everything possible to see a weak Lokpal Bill gets through. The spiritual forces that once drove the Gandhians no longer propel them to continue to build a healthy and powerful nation. The Congress Party, the major 'victim' of Anna crusade is not against a strong 'Lokpal'. But they differ in their perceptions about the strength of Lokpal and its ambit while talking in multiple voices only to divert public attention from the immediate burning question of how to fight corruption in high places and in 'low' places as well, legally.

As the British model of parliamentary democracy is itself undergoing a radical change by way of granting right to recall Manmohan Singh and his no-changer brigade cannot resist the Anna fall-out for long. The proposed draft Bill of the David Cameron Government in London is aimed at introducing a power of recall, allowing voters to force a by-election where an MP is found to have engaged in serious wrong-doing. And just 10 percent of voters of a constituency will be able to enforce a by-election by signing a petition. It's as simple as that. But Indian parliamentarians continue to prolong the discourse whether or not an MP should be brought under the ombudsman's jurisdiction.

For one thing both the left opposition and the right opposition now see eye to eye with regard to inclusion of Prime Minister under the Lokpal. But the left itself is divided over the inclusion of group C and D employees. CPI thinks it is impractical to bring in Group C and D employees under the purview of Lokpal. But their big brother CPM begs to differ. While almost all opposition parties who are at worst a motley crowd without any clear-cut vision to offer, somehow find themselves on the same page on most contentious issues relating to Lokpal

mechanism, CPI doesn't think the entire wisdom of 'the world is with 9-10 people', implying Anna and his team. True, there is no dearth of scholars in a country of 1.2 billion people. But the Bardhans and Dasguptas didn't come forward with their 'brilliant ideas' to take to the streets to voice the simmering anger of millions. And their conventional wisdom doesn't see anything beyond the status quo. Communists have all along been reposing faith in the wisemen of Congress since the days of Nehru and the lasting legacy continues. Tailism is the hallmark of Indian left movement. Someone sets the agenda and they just react. And CPM's belated enthusiasm to have even big corporate houses under the proposed Lokpal, sounds a bit too hawkish and infantile, aimed in the main at playing with the gallery. After all how their leftism was tailored to suit the interests of big corporates, both domestic and foreign, for decades in Bengal and Kerala is not yet a dead chapter.

The point at issue is initial momentum generated by the Anna movement is slowly but steadily losing its steam because of diversionary tactics played by the persons in power. With the Lokpal debate going in full swing, they are now talking about, somewhat vaguely though, a white paper on Indians' black money stashed away in foreign banks. But Union Finance Minister at the same time made no mistake in assuring the concerned people that they won't disclose the names of the culprits because of international legal compulsions. They always play it safe when it is the question of fighting corruption in high places, Lokpal or no Lokpal. They played it safe yesterday. They play it safe today. It doesn't require much political wisdom to understand only after corrupt political power is toppled could the majority of the population be adequately fed and clad. □□□

22-12-2011