

COMMENT

Of Politics and Corruption

The list of corrupt politicians keeps on increasing. Bofors of Rajiv Gandhi, Harshad Mehta episode of Narsimha Rao, fodder scam of Laloo, Spectrum allocation by Raja, repeated change of tax rates by Mayawati, kidnappings by left and ethnic extremists and ULFA for ransom and most recently allocation of land by Yedurappa are the prominent entries. This is not a new disease, however. Gandhiji was much disturbed about this and had suggested that the Congress Party dissolve itself and Congressmen become members of a non-political Lok Sewa Sangh. Congressmen did not like the proposal for obvious reasons. The problem is equally pervasive in foreign countries. President Sukarno of Indonesia provided many concessions to his sons and helped them build a vast business empire. All major businesses of Tunisia are controlled by President Ben Ali's family. African leaders are known to routinely siphon off 50 to 80 percent of aid into their personal Swiss accounts. Prime Ministers of Japan and Italy have had to resign amidst allegations of corruption.

The democratic system thankfully allows every person to contest elections and become a politician, rather a corrupt politician in the long run. Even communists who are supposed to serve the people, are today joyfully serving the moneybags and indulging in scandals, including land scandals wherever they are in power. Nepotism and favourism to family members of politicians with all hues, is part of the game called the biggest show-biz of democracy. Indian Constitution has dismantled the birth-based caste system that straight-jacketed persons into the traditional vocation of their family. Son of a Brahmin today is free to serve another and become a Sudra; and daughter of a Sudra is free to become a politician.

There is difference, however, in adopting vocation of one's choice and adopting two mutually contradictory vocations. The politician cultivates goodwill of the voters whereas the businessman exploits them. Profits of the businessman are inversely proportional to the wages of the workers. The businessman is not afraid by the public outcry against his obtaining prime land by twisting the rules. His eyes are fixed on the income from the land. Public acceptance or rejection is meaningless for him. Moneylenders mercilessly grab the pawned jewellery of a person who has landed in difficult circumstances. It matters little to him that people call him a butcher. He is happy holding the wealth in his safe. It will be difficult for such a moneylender to become a politician. He will suffer loss in his business if he adopts a soft stance towards the borrowers. On the other hand, people will not give him votes if he adopts a hard stance. Then the politician has no sanctity for the words spoken from the mouth. The combination of roles of politician and businessman is a sure prescription for collapse. Sanjay Gandhi tried to enter the business of making cars. The result was not good. When a politician, directly or through his family, enters business, there is a spontaneous tendency to twist rules in one's favour. This leads to one's political demise. Yedurappa listening?

India is a strange land where one finds sadhus contesting elections and setting up factories to make soft drinks, arms and soap. Politicians are setting power plants and making real estate ventures. Businessmen are giving lectures in Sanskrit and becoming Rajya Sabha MPs. Result is that all these 'noble men' are getting trapped in scandals.

The way to control corruption is to provide that the politician and his family will limit themselves to politics and not engage in business of any type whatsoever. They will then have lesser tendency to bend the rules and avoid getting into unsavoury scandals. □□□

[contributed]