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Corruption And The AAP: A Case of Treating Cancer with Paracetamol?

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The Aam Admi Party may not be totally correct to place the common man outside the domain of corruption.

The public gaze on the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has intensified after it formed the State government in New Delhi. In a critical and contrarian look at the emergence of India's latest political party, Prof. A. Raghuramaraju points out that the haste with which the Congress and the BJP seek to incorporate the AAP's anti-corruption agenda reveals the depth and extent of the success of the party led by Arvind Kejriwal.

It is perhaps not an exaggeration to term the entry of Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) into the complex layered arena of Indian politics as a development comparable to the formation of Indian National Congress by A.O. Hume. The justification for this comparison lies in the success of bringing to fore for the pre-modern Indian voters a modern phenomenon called corruption as an election issue.

This is no mean achievement. It is substantially radical, given the nature of the Indian voters and the society for which corruption was not an important electoral issue. This has been the case despite the fact that this pervasive and rampant phenomenon has continuously been staring them in the eye.

The reasons for this are many. To begin with they may not have had clear categories to comprehend this modern phenomenon. Or, they might have set it aside believing that they would not have the capacity to deal with it, echoing Karl Marx's assertion that mankind takes only those problems that it can solve. Or, as Great Britain, which, though it embraced a human-centered modernity, conceded the voting right to women only in a delayed second instalment. Returning to the main argument, though, corruption stared the Indian voters in the eye it escaped a serious consideration. Just as Hume brought to light the injustice of colonialism, AAP has awakened the Indian public eye to acknowledge what is in front of them. The underlying sub-text of this gaze is that they can handle this social evil, and even acknowledge the capacity to remove it. Thus, the capability, particularly, the ability for action has contributed substantially to this new sight. With this axiom in place, it is time to move on to more nuance internal details.

There is a fracture between the claimed quantum of corruption by AAP and the symbol they project as an instrument to clean it. The solution is shorter than the extent of the problem. If corruption as claimed is as rampant, then the broom stick is a weak dusting instrument to completely rid the nation of it. It is as futile as treating cancer with a paracetamol.

There is need to pay little more attention to this fracture and to look for more creative ways of bridging it so that the message in the metaphor is not compromised. One could use acid as an effective symbol, but I would personally not endorse it, given the liquid's use in perpetrating violence against women. Symbols like Dettol or Phenyl would be more appropriate choices. This kind of an exercise is necessary as there is a significant difference in the reception and function of symbols and metaphors in religion and literature on the one hand and their reception in ground level politics on the other.

Yet another aspect of the unease is the mismatch between the main focused agenda of ridding the society of corruption with the broom that makes the system lighter and just, morally and legally correct, along with the promise of populism in the form of waving charges like electricity. Unless clarified, or consciously negotiated, this can overlap with the agendas of those parties that AAP is vehemently opposing. This in turn might send misleading messages across to the people. They need to be enveloped properly so that they do not appear inconsistent or ambivalent.

In addition to awakening people to the reality in front of them, there is an additional aspect to be considered; it is the extent of their impact on other political parties. The traditional rival parties like Congress and BJP have quickly and desperately sought to incorporate the anti-corruption agenda of AAP into their respective party's agenda. This reveals the depth and extent of the success of this new party. Thereby making what was elusive, obvious. This in a way is a political miracle. The enduring nature of this miracle needs careful attention from the intellectual and academic community of India. If the intellectuals remain inattentive to these novel developments, the active and sometimes over active pre-modern society in India will begin to convert these miracles into traditional icons and eventually they are rendered frozen or worse become evanescent.

Corruption and the Indian society

In a diverse and large sub-continent like India, new things emerge in a small span of time having skipped many steps along the line. A theoretician is in a better position to identify these and provide missing links so that one builds a transparent and a systematic academic bulwark. When a political party like AAP succeeds in bringing to the centre stage the issue of corruption, there is a need to step aside and unravel the relation between corruption and the Indian society. In this regard one could make use of available scholarship. For instance, well known Sociologist Shiv Vishvanathan maintains that corruption is the lubricant that makes the Indian society run. Two

things occur simultaneously here. One is the fact that there is rampant corruption in India. While the other is that the society is functioning alongside.

One can theoretically, through thought experiment, explore whether the removal of corruption will interfere with the functioning of this society. In other words, is corruption the pace maker to the Indian society. This exercise can be carried out without necessarily endorsing the practice of corruption. In other words, there is a need to elucidate and lay bare various forms of the intricate relations between the functioning of a society and the phenomenon of corruption. Is the relation recent, if so, how recent, what is its origin? Is the relation one of parts and whole, necessary and sufficient, necessary or contingent, or even notional and substantial.

Or more importantly, while critically scrutinizing the evil practice of corruption, those holding positions either political or otherwise, are inadvertently and safely but unceremoniously locating the common people outside the domain of corruption. Is this correct? Why is it, that corruption continues, surviving even though representatives are changed sometimes drastically? At times one is forced to admit that the anti-corruption cry becomes the exclusive preoccupation or obsession of those in the opposition. A conceptual clarity of concepts, the relation between or amongst them enables a better understanding both to those who belong to the party and those outside it.

During my research at IIT-Kanpur, two of my engineering friends got into incessant debates with each other. Both were seriously committed and passionately dedicated to social change. One of them was preparing for civil service examinations, to fulfill this task, maintained the need to correct the system from within. The other friend on the other hand argued that one should remain outside the system to be able to change it. I would then hum the famous Hindi film song - *sansarse bhagey phirte ho bhagvan ko tum kya paogey. Iss lok kobhi apana na sake us lok me bhi pachhtaogey* - obviously associating myself with the position of the first one.

Despite this bias, there is an imbricated involvement of both in this process to the point of indistinguishability of their different positions. One who wanted to work from inside the system made it to the IAS and chose a posting in the tribal region of Madhya Pradesh. The other one predictably took to activism. I still find them several years later, each one more informed about the other with whom they disagreed. I can only understand the relation or the lack of one between Anna Hazare and Arvind Kejriwal through this paradigmatic relation of my friends. Their differences are like differences between two teams, but what is important is that both of them are in the same arena to play. Thus, theatre is an imperative need to theoretically enlarge the domain of this new phenomenon to arrive at a better understanding, thereby thickening the plot.

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