

## The Problem of Corruption

By Justice Markandey Katju

“Hum agar rishwat nahin lenge to khayenge kya”

Josh Malihabadi

Now that the Anna Hazare agitation has subsided the time has come for some rational, scientific analysis about the problem of corruption.

There is no doubt that there is rampant corruption in Indian society at almost every level.

In Western society, too, there is some corruption, but it is only at a very high level, and it ordinarily does not affect the common man. Corruption there takes such forms as multinational corporations giving bribes to top politicians, generals or bureaucrats of underdeveloped countries to get contracts, etc. But in North America you cannot offer a bribe to a policeman if he catches you violating some traffic rule. If you attempt to do that it will be a second, and even more serious, offence. Similarly, you cannot bribe an income tax, official or other officials there. But in India the corruption is at every level e.g. for registering a sale deed, getting mutation in the revenue records, getting an FIR registered, getting permission from a Municipality for building a house, tax matters, etc. The ‘hafta’ and ‘wasooli’ is well known here.

Everyone is harassed by corruption in India, but what is to be done about it?

Anna Hazare's movement, in my opinion, was only an emotional outburst, but serious problems cannot be addressed in that manner. A scientific analysis of the problem is required.

I submit the following:

1. Corruption is the normal feature of the transitional period when society (like India) is passing from a feudal, agricultural stage to a modern, industrial stage.
2. It is only when the transition is over and the country becomes a fully industrial society, like that in North America or Europe, that things will get relatively stabilized, and corruption will be considerably reduced. This in my opinion will take about 15 to 20 years more in India.

This needs to be explained.

Feudal, agricultural society is a relatively stable society, with everyone knowing his place, with stable social and ethical values.

In contrast, when the process of industrialization begins things become topsy turvy, and in a flux. In this transitional period, and before the process of industrialization is complete, two things happen (1) old (feudal) moral values disintegrate, but a new moral code has not come into existence (2) prices start shooting up, while incomes are broadly stagnant (or rise much slower than the price rise). For both these reasons corruption becomes rampant. To maintain one's like style to which he is habituated and to keep up with the joneses' (by buying a motor car, TV etc.) one must supplement one's regular

income, and this is only possible by corruption. Since the old moral code has largely disintegrated there is little check on one's conscience to prohibit taking bribes

I am not trying to justify corruption. I am only presenting a scientific analysis to show that corruption is inevitable in a transitional society like India in which industrialization has commenced but is incomplete. Historical facts also support this conclusion. For example, there was rampant corruption in England in the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries when industrialization was going on but was not complete. Sir Robert Walpole, who was the first Prime Minister of England (from 1721 to 1742), openly used to say that he can purchase any person, including Members of Parliament. John Wilkes and Junius attacked the corruption of the government of the Duke of Grafton (1768-1772) and his successor Lord Bute. The officials who came to India, like Lord Clive, were gangsters who looted India. Similarly, in America also there was a lot of corruption in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the process of industrialization was going on (and even in early 20<sup>th</sup> century, e.g. Tammany Hall politics). The administrations of Presidents Grant, Harding, etc were notoriously corrupt.

It is only when the process of industrialization is broadly completed that society once again becomes relatively stable and corruption subsides. For instance, in North America, prices are relatively stable for long periods. A new ethical code has emerged, and people in the West are relatively much more honest in their dealings than people in underdeveloped countries. Anyone who has been to the West and has interacted with people there can bear this out.

In view of this analysis I submit that corruption will continue in India for another 15-20 years, but will considerably disappear when the process of industrialization is complete after this period. I wish corruption would disappear immediately, but that is not history functions.