

Role of Media in Jan Lokpal Movement: In the Perspective of Democracy

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Abstract: Daily experiences with corruption were narrated with a pronounced bias towards the common irritants that the middle and upper strata face. Typically, delays in obtaining passports and business clearances were talked about, not the difficulties with getting names registered on daily muster rolls for the rural employment guarantee programme. The Anna Hazare group's insistence that its conception of a vertically structured, rigidly hierarchical body was the only way to deal with corruption, generally escaped without serious scrutiny. The Indian scenario of the media and civil society seems hardly – by all accounts, in conformity with the broadly accepted and practiced parameters of a civil society of the developed countries, the western bloc particularly. Yet, there are obvious difficulties, both logical and ethical, in putting down the widening public ferment to media manipulation. People today are stirred up like never before over the quality of governance and willing to express themselves forcefully. And the 24-hour news channels that multiplied over the last half decade provide them with a platform.

Keywords: Janlokpal Movement, Media, Indian Democracy, Civil Society.

1. INTRODUCTION

The constitutional history of lokpal was started from Sweden with the term ombudsman. An ombudsman is a state official appointed to provide a check on government activity in the interests of the citizen and to oversee the investigation of complaints of improper government activity against the citizen.

The lokpal bill first introduced in the lok sabha in 1968, was not enacted, lapsing after the fourth lok sabha session dissolved. The lokpal bill was later introduced in 1971, 1977, 1985, 1989, 1996, 1998, 2001, 2008 and finally in 2010. Seven later attempts also lapsed, while one was withdrawn.

Fourty-four years after it was first introduced and at least nine versions of the lokpal bill later, parliament has finally reached a consensus. The bill is an implementation of the prevention of the corruption act 1988. Eleven parliamentary panels have been formed to discuss the lokpal bill.

A bill to provide for the establishment of a body of lokpal for the union and lokayukta for state to inquire into allegations of corruption against certain public functionaries and for matters connected there with or incidental there to.¹

On 5 April 2011, a 73 –year old man in central Delhi stopped eating. The man in question was kisan baburao hazare and he was protesting the congress led central government's lokadaisical attempts to punish those guilty of large – scale corruption. His specific demand was that 'civil society' should have a say in drafting a stringent anti corruption law, the lokpal bill. The government draft was an eyewash he claimed; outside participation was the only way to ensure an anti-corruption law with my teeth. Hazare 'Anna' to his followers, was by no means the only man on a hunger strike there. But he was onto something.

While the government was drowning in a flood of corruption scandals-most prominently, the 2G spectrum allocation controversy and the commonwealth games fiasco- Anna Hazare's perfectly timed protest managed to ride the wave. At

last it is fair to say that the Anna Hazare movement spread beyond Delhi and to the rest of urban India. On 8 April the government agreed that five members, chosen by Anna Hazare, would be part of the Lokpal bill drafting committee.²

Social movements are understood as organized collective efforts working towards achieving change. All social movements have an ideology to identify what is wrong with the present and what needs to be done in the future. An important dimension of contemporary social movements is the close relation they have with consciousness. In other words, contemporary social movements tend to be consciously organized with well-defined strategies and tactics.³

The definition of media in today's world has changed and it has turned into an integrated platform that deals with different modes of communication to make it more effective. In context of Hazare's campaign; Internet & social media sites have been abuzz with articles / messages showing support for Anna Hazare's fight against corruption and his plea to pass Jan Lokpal bill. New media being a most popular media among the youth is giving new dimensions. Finally we can say in brief media's inevitable role in success of a campaign is well established and plays a vital role to make any campaign a success.⁴

2. ROLE OF MEDIA IN JAN LOKPAL MOVEMENT

A generation that has been fed with remembering Gandhi only in official functions marking Bapu's birth anniversaries—“governmental Gandhism” to invoke Rammanohar Lohia – found in Hazare the Gandhi of its own time.

The campaign across the country picked up only a day after Hazare began his fast. It was on 6 April, 1930 that Gandhi broke the salt law at Dandi. The visual media, which has highlighted stories of corruption in the past few months, chose to join the campaign and that made a difference. Unless someone establishes that there was a motive for the media campaign, the adversarial role the media took was justified and such action is integral to democracy.⁵ In its approach to Anna Hazare's 13-day long protest fast, the media again made itself part of the story.

At a discussion in Delhi on the ‘media and the politics of corruption on 31st August – just a few days after a hunger fast by Kisan Baburao Hazare, alias Anna, in the cause of a high-powered anti-corruption body had been called off – two television news anchors, aware that their conduct through the 13-day long event was under scrutiny, chose aggression as the best strategy of self defence.

The coverage of Anna's indefinite hunger fast at the Ramlila Maidan in Delhi, they said, was perfectly in tune with the magnitude of the event and its importance to all Indian citizens. Unsurprisingly, TV news anchors have consistently been in the fore front of the public debate about the media's role.

Available for public scrutiny by this time, were the results of an exhaustive media monitoring exercise – involving two news channels each in English and Hindi – by the Centre for Media Studies (CMS), a research organization with long years of experience in the field. Between 16 and 28 August, the exercise found that the two Hindi channels, Aaj Tak and Star News, devoted 97 percent of total news time during prime viewing hours (7 to 11pm) to the Anna fast. Left out of this exercise was Times Now, which was widely seen to be the most brash, bumptious – indeed, noisy and intolerant – news channel in respect of the Anna Hazare fast.

Taking the pattern of total time utilization on the English channels, the figures were roughly about 65 percent of broadcast time for the Ramlila event, 23 percent for advertisements and the rest for other news. The Hindi channels were not very different in terms of the total time dedicated to the Anna fast, but with advertisements occupying about 30 percent, they had virtually no time for other news. As with much else in the Indian media over the last two decades, the new paradigm was forged by BCCL, which proudly invented a mutually supportive relationship between the news – hole and the surrounding ads. Since the money came from the ads, the burden of adjustment had to be on news content. Within all the limitations of the print medium, BCCL's flag-ship newspaper, the TOI, was a stellar performer in mobilizing crowds for the Anna fast.

Subsequently, a collective appeal by the prime minister, leader of the opposition in the Lok Sabha and indeed, both houses of parliament, failed to deflect Anna from his resolve to go for his maximal agenda. On 26 August, TOI determined that the moral advantage from these. There was, in short, much discussion of the need for a, 'strong Lokpal bill', but no clarity about how this end could be achieved.⁶

3. MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY

Each version of participatory democracy treats somewhat different attributes of the governing process as crucial. The optimal design of institutional structures of governing depends on the functions highlighted by the favored democratic theory.

Liberal pluralist democracy hopes to generate fair bargains as a result of group's pressing their interests. In the process, the media should perform several tasks. Most pluralist interest groups conclude that only their own media effectively identify when their interests are at stake. Often, only their own media will develop and present information relevant to their needs and interests.

Moreover, the media should provide information about views and debates within "outsider" or "subalterian" public spheres. Such information is essential both for the internal purpose of these subgroups and for the thinking and policies of the overriding democratic government.⁷

The contemporary moment of democracy is full of contradictory trends. Therefore, it is imperative that the media in a democracy remains free of commercial interests and autonomous *Vis –a- Vis* the state. Moreover, the corporate media itself was involved in the cover-up which raises serious questions about its credibility.

Media in India is becoming more "hyper-real", in the sense that Jean Baudrillard used it to mean that there is no longer a "reality" that television allows us to see. Television constructs a new reality on the basis of which public opinion is formed. This becomes a direct threat to democracy.⁸

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