

Indian General Election 2014: Corruption a Key Factor with Reference to Delhi

Dr. Archana Sawshilya*

Associate Professor, Aditi Mahavidyalaya, University of Delhi

Abstract – In 2014 democratic electoral system, citizens voted against government officials believed to be corrupt thus providing politicians with a powerful incentive to match their public pronouncements with concrete demonstrations of personnel and political integrity. However, we must remember that democratic changes are a long term commitment. The fight against corruption cannot be a One-Man show or relegated uniquely to political leadership. Anti-corruption strategies are most effective if they are inclusive, systematic, and structured integrating all institutions and policies - investigation prosecution and prevention. Political corruption is perhaps the fountainhead of most corruption in the system. The high cost of managing elections, mostly funded by black money continues to sustain an underlying rationale supporting corruption among political parties. Corruption is a potential dominating issue but the political voice is not a single issue matter. A vibrant society can play a significant role in the fight against corruption, legitimizing political leadership, and counterbalancing contrast structures to ensure transparency and accountability.

Key Words – Political Integrity, Corruption, Vibrant Democracy, Transparency, Accountability

-----X-----

INTRODUCTION

Democracy and democratic institutions have to be nurtured if they are to evolve and grow. But today our vibrant democracy is heading towards anarchy and fragmentation. India is India's worst enemy. We are a long way from availing overall maturity as a democracy. The pace at which we proceed towards maturity depends on an awareness of the voter, free and fair polls, responsible political parties, honest and capable persons contesting elections & so on.

The public was greatly anguished and disturbed at the debasement of politics before the general election of 2014. Politicians commanded the least respect; they were ridiculed and shunned for their selfish interest and unprincipled favors. They had let down the interests of the general public and the country at large. Several scams had put the country to the greatest shame in the international community. Dedication for service and integrity were missing and bureaucracy was supporting the political heads to serve their interest. Rampant corruption, inefficiency, a lack of sense of responsibility, and tardy delays were routine affairs.

Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index 2013 ranked India 94th out of 175, doing worse than Brazil, China, and South Africa. The costs of corruption in India undermined the potential of 10 years of consistent economic growth. With an estimated \$419 billion being laundered out of the country. Over the past decade, corruption had left an

indelible stain on Indian society hampering both growth and its ability to improve living standards. India has been rocked by repeated scandals from Rolls Royce Defense scam to Common Wealth Games scam, which had undermined faith in politicians and public figures and prompted mass outcry and protests. In the early 2000s, the social activists' Anna Hazare spearheaded a movement demanding that state government should give citizens the right to information which culminated in the Right to Information Act 2005, which promised responsible, transparent and more accountable government.¹

A free and fair poll, the representative character of the legislature is essential for democratic governance. The criminalization of politics is an affected phenomenon. The shifting loyalties for personal gains even and after the electoral verdict creates greater instability. Today government ceases to reflect the people's will.

General election 2014, was not different from any other previously held election, rather it was an important election in more ways than one. As we move into the historic event, issues like secularism, federalism, economic reforms, and corruption are being debated passionately both by the intelligentsia and the wider public. Change in government

¹ What is political voice, why does it matter
<https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/8950.pdf> 2014

appeared inevitable. Though regime change through periodic elections is a routine matter in a democracy. Corruption as an issue remained on the boil, for quite some time leading to the election and it emerged as one of the decisive issues among others like rising inflation, weakening economy, unemployment, and secularism during General Election 2014

The issue of corruption had evolved over the years and the increasing importance attached to it not just as an election issue but as an issue that was likely to affect Indian democracy and its institutional systems and processes in multiple ways. Elections have been used by the persons involved in big scams to whitewash their crimes. A common Indian sees corruption as a widespread problem². They also think no government is doing enough to combat it and this issue had emerged in the elections 2014.

In the early 2000s, the social activist, Anna Hazare, spearheaded a movement demanding that state governments give citizens the right to information within 30 days to show how public servants spent public money, culminating in the Right to Information Act (RTI) 2005, which promised more accountable and transparent government. But there are still concerns that the public is being denied information because of corruption.

Since 2010, social activists have pursued anti-corruption measures, taking to the streets to decry the failure of the Government to respond to scandals and the acceptance of corruption as part of 'doing business'. Up to 20,000 people took to the streets in Delhi and marches took place in more than 52 cities in protest at the Government's handling of this issue.

From informal protests against rampant corruption, the movement evolved into a political narrative targeting both the incumbent Congress party and a wider culture of apathy that pervades all levels of Indian life. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) formed in 2012, tried to translate popular resentment and frustration into political action and electoral success. AAP using the broomstick as its symbol, portrayed itself as the only party to clean up politics. In its first foray into politics in 2013, AAP ousted the Congress party from power in the Delhi state elections, established a minority government in the national capital, and positioned corruption as a big-ticket item on the national agenda.

While Indian electors have always been politically vociferous, stalling economic growth had encouraged people to seek both a change in government and a shift in the standards to which those in public office were accountable. The corruption narrative resonated particularly with middle-class urban voters and was seized by the media to chide politicians and urge change. It was also a political football, kicked around by the AAP, and the saffron flag-waving Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to woo middle-class urban voters.

Corruption had become the spur for middle-class dissent and pragmatic politicians now highlight it in their manifestos.

Contesting political parties promised of tackling the country's graft likely resonated with Indian voters. The estimated 150 million young people who were casting a ballot for the first time. Three fourth of Indian adults aged eighteen to thirty four said that corruption was widespread in their government, nearly just like the chances of equally minded adults aged thirty five to fifty four (76 percent) and fifty five or older (72 percent).. As per the regional comparison analysis, the east gave the Congress party-led government the most credit for fighting corruption (50%) and 26 percent said it is not, but in the north it was reported that the government was not doing enough. Gallup said (older Indians are more likely to say they were confident in the honesty of the election.³ Confidence in the honesty also varied by region, with the north leading the country in terms of electoral pessimism. Less than a fifth of residents in the north said the electoral system was honest while majorities (south -52%, west-64%, east-63%, a central part of India-67%) were more confident.⁴ In general election 2014, corruption and infrastructure were the main agenda. Tens of millions of Indians headed for the voting booths on 7th April 2014. Around 110 million voters were registered to vote in 92 constituencies located in 14 states across the country, this was about a fifth of the total number of seats in the Indian parliament. The polling day with the biggest number of constituencies involved was 17th April when voters decided the outcome of 122 seats. On 24th April, 117 seats were decided and corruption was one of the decisive factors. In Chandani Chowk constituency of Delhi, having 20 percent of Muslims population had a three-way fight between the Congress, the BJP, and the common man party – AAP targeting corruption.

CORRUPTION AS AN ISSUE MEANT SECULARIZATION OF THE AGENDA

Corruption has not become so rampant and perpetuated overnight but in course of time. When we talk of corruption, it covers corruption in politics, state governments, central governments, business, industry everywhere. People have an intense desire for money and they can go to any extent to get it. We often talk of morality and values in our public life but our inner voice is contradictory to it. But there is another positive perspective attached to it, which is raising importance of corruption as an election issue pointed to the gradual secularization of other agenda beyond traditional modes of mobilization based on caste and community. This is my

³ . <https://news.gallup.com/poll/168488/corruption-concerns-generations-indian-voters.aspx>

⁴ Ibid – survey results are based on face to face interviews with 3000 adults aged 15 & older, conducted in September, October 2013 in India.

perception that when we start talking about corruption as an electoral agenda, other issues of caste; class are left behind and electoral behavior was no more guided by any particular religion or caste, rather people from all religion and caste got united to fight against corruption and started supporting the candidate and party which could combat corruption. The sudden emergency of AAP and victory of Arvind Kejriwal was a reflection of peoples' frustration towards corruption. The party felt that common people of India remained unheard and unseen except when it suited the politicians. This was a sign of a maturing democracy. It also meant an enhanced sense of citizens' rights, which was the very essence of democracy. Fragmentation based on religion was taking a back seat and all communities were desperate to fight with corruption. If Congress party and its ministers were charged with corruption, so was the case with BJP governments in all the states⁵. Indians Muslim council, USA had sited long list of scams and scandals of BJP – Kargilwar coffins/arms scam-2001, defense deals scandals- 2001, cash for query scams 2005, development fund (MPLADS scheme) scam- 2005, Chhattisgarh corruption Scandal- 2003, land allotment scam 2002, Ekal Vidyalaya scam 1999-2005 Petrol pump and gas agencies scam 2002, Jain Hawala scandal and India shining⁶. The list of UPA I & II and congress led state governments are equally as lengthy as that of BJP⁷.

The 'Mood of the Nation' poll had an unambiguous message from the voters that the Congress party was corrupt. Stunningly, across all states and in all voter segments there was unanimity that the congress party was more corrupt than BJP. Rarely do national surveys exhibited such a widespread and uniform adverse perception across the nation.

An anti-corruption crusader and senior leader of BJP Subramaniam Swamy while explaining the A to Z of congress scams narrated that corruption begins of the highest level and goes down the line⁸). He further

stated that corruption can be curbed if we remain positive and walk the extra mile and everyone could be booked for corruption if found guilty. He believed that since corruption begins at the highest level and goes down the line, we have to catch big fish to send the right signal down the line to end corruption. He had suggested a few ways to curb corruption–

----- Finishing discretionary powers of officers as much as possible,

----- Abolishing personal income tax at least for 10 years.

----- Catching big fish and punishing them so they also fear from any wrongdoings

----- Getting away from the rising trend of praising people based on their money.

When it came to stability for governance, the congress trailed the BJP nationally but retained its edge over the BJP among the caste and community groups; constituting its traditional base.

ELECTIONS ARE ALL ABOUT EXERCISING CHOICES AND IDEAL ALTERNATIVES DO NOT EXIST IN THE REAL WORLD

If we look back, secularism and stability were the issues before all the parties. In social terms, till 1989 caste played a nominal role in the BJP calculations later it made efforts to grow its clout among backward castes. Dalits caste consideration alone led to M.L. Khurana bring snubbed after his acquittal in the Hawala case. In its search for winnable candidates, both parties gave tickets to many known criminals despite their saying against the criminalization of politics.

AAP WITH A UNI-DIMENSIONAL ANTI-CORRUPTION AGENDA

Common man party abbreviated as AAP (Aam Aadmi Party) came into existence on 26 November 2012. There was a difference of opinion between the activists Arvind Kejriwal and Anna Hazare regarding politicizing popular India against Corruption Movement. This movement had been demanding a Jan Lokpal bill since 2011. Hazare wanted that the movement should remain politically unaligned, neutral, and apolitical while Kejriwal felt the failure of the agitation route needed a direct political involvement.

In the 2013 Delhi Legislative Assembly election, AAP emerged as the second-largest party winning 28 of the 70 seats. AAP could manage to form a minority government with conditional support from the Indian

⁵ . Corruption scams and scandals of the BJP governments April 2006 INC-USA special education digest

⁶ Weblinks: Define scandals. Rediff archive.

a. <http://www.flonnet.com/j/1917/19170230.htm>.

b. <http://in.rediff.com/nw/2003/mar/300 cong. htm>.

c. Coffin scandal unites opposition. 12 Oct. 2011 (<http://www.rediff.com/news/2011/dec./12 coffiee.htm>)

d. Bribes paid during operation west and (Tehelka) <http://www.tehelka.com/home20041009/operation/investigation41.htm>

⁷ The lens on news.com: congress perceived as synonymous with corruption. The mood of the Nation poll (12-16 June 2013).

⁸ The A to Z of congress scams– AC Adarsh Scam. : - A-(Adarsh Scam), B-Bofors Scam, C-CWG Scam, D-Devas-Antrix Scam, E-Employee Guarantee Scheme scam, F-Fodder Scam, Food Security Bill Scam, G-Ghaziabad Provident Fund Scam, H-Harshad Mehta Stock Market Scam, Hasan Ali Hawala Scam, I-IPL Scam, J-Junior Basic Trained Teachers' Recruitment Scam, K-Ketan Parekh Stock market scam, L-LIC Housing Scam, M-Madhu Koda Scam, N-Non-banking financial companies scam, O-oriental bank scam, P-Punjab State council of Education, Research and training scam, Q-Quest for gold scam, R-Ration card scam, Rafale Jet Fighter procurement scam, S-Satyam Scam, Fire-Prone Submarine Scam, T-Telecom 2 G scam, Temple collection scam, Congress president travel budget scam, U-UTI scam, UBS illegal accounts scam, V-Volkswagen

equity scam, viagra DLF scam, W-West Bengal telecom scam, Westland helicopter scam. XYZ- is still cooking at 10, Janpath.

National Congress. In its election manifesto, AAP had declared to pass a bill for a strong Ombudsman position that would investigate charges against political leaders on a priority basis. But the government resigned after 49 days when no major parties came to support the bill.

The AAP believed that through Swaraj the government will be directly accountable to the people instead of higher officials. The Swaraj model aims at attaining self-governance, community building, and decentralization. The AAP focused on the issue that they are aam admins and to change the system. If they found the solution in the left they will borrow from there and if from the right they will be happy to take it from there also. AAP sought to work against nexus between government and private sector and a gender-sensitive government with stronger anti-rape laws. The party conducted public awareness campaigns to educate people about 'Right to Reject'. They mobilized the people against inflated power and electricity bills demanding for auditing of power and electricity supply in Delhi. The AAP government scrapped foreign direct investment in multi-brand retail, thus preventing development by international businesses such as Tesco and Wal-Mart. It also established an anti-graft helpline for the citizens to report corrupt officials. As a chief minister, he had protested on the streets to raise his government demands for a fair inquiry.

AN OVERVIEW

The moot question today is whether such a uni-dimensional agenda will be enough to generate the required political momentum to win elections regularly. I strongly believe this limited agenda has already started to limit AAP's effectiveness as a mainstream political party. Political parties perform have to be assimilative setting forth a composite 'rainbow' agenda including all kinds of issues facing society as a whole. A wider agenda can potentially appeal to a wider section of the population. A political party's ideology needs to mean many things to many people'. Political voice is not a single issue matter. All parties competing must try to attract voters on a huge range of issues.

In this general election 2014, while the nationwide mood on corruption was adverse for the congress party, in states like Punjab and Haryana, the congress was the preferred party for governance at the center and among different voter segments, some segments still supported for the congress rule despite finding the party to be corrupt. These supporters perhaps felt that they were better off and their interests were better protected by the congress rule at the center. People of India besides corruption issue also wanted leadership change: Rahul Gandhi was preferred over Manmohan Singh, but Modi over Rahul Gandhi.

Corruption is a potential dominating issue but the political voice is not a single issue matter. During this election, people realized that successful efforts to reform corrupt public administration and to curb abuse

of power depended on leadership that was attentive to the rule of law and able to counterbalance resistance to reform by mobilizing supportive democratically based constituencies. Political voice is not, therefore, one single thing. It comes from particular communities and is accented by particular constituencies so parties must choose from a menu of issues such as economic stagnation, gender, religious ethnic differences, etc. This is not to say that the anti-corruption movement does not matter but rather to suggest that corruption is not the only issue that will mobilize a diverse Indian electorate.

A vibrant society can play a significant role in the fight against corruption legitimizing political leadership and counterbalancing contrast structures that are established to address the issues of wrongdoing to bring transparency and accountability. They help to ensure that a change in leadership will not change the populace's will to combat corruption. Moreover, the capacity of these structures depends heavily on their independence and readily available resources such as money, power, and competent personnel. Once they function independently, leadership is usually more inclined to commit to the fight against corruption.

REFERENCES

- Election Commission of India, Statistical Report on General Elections: 1996-2004. Election Commission of India eci.gov.in.
- Eigenpeter, 'combating corruption around the world' Journal of Democracy vol 7, No. 1, Jan 1996 PP 158-168.
- Gillespie, K, and Gwenn Okruhlik (1991). "The political dimensions of corruption cleanups: A from work for analysis" corruption politics, pp. 77-95.
- Roy, Meenu (1998). 'Elections 1998. Continuity in Coalition' National publishing
- Sawshilya Archana (2010). 'Ethics and governance person group 2010 ICFAI university.
- <https://www.oneindia.com/india/corruption-issue-to-resonate-among-indians-in-elections-gallup-poll-lse1430561>, April 15, 2014
- Corruption is key issue for Indians in, <https://www.firstpost.com/politics/corruption-is-key-issue-for-indians-in-elections-2014-gallup-poll-1480497.html>

Corresponding Author

Dr. Archana Sawshilya*

Associate Professor, Aditi Mahavidyalaya, University
of Delhi