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BOOK REVIEW

Review: Great Soul: Mahatma Gandhi and his Struggle with India

Great Soul: Mahatma Gandhi and his Struggle with India

Joseph Lelyveld

knopf (e-book)

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‘Though I love and almost adore Andrews so, I would not change you for him. You still remain the dearest and nearest to me and so far as my non-selfish nature is concerned I know that in my lonely journey through the world you will be the last (if even that) to say goodbye to me... What right had I to expect so much from you.’

This letter, dated February 27, 1914, written by a 44-year-old Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi in Cape Town, South Africa, appears on page 165 of *The Oxford India Gandhi: Essential Writings*. The first time I had read the lines, I automatically thought that Gandhi’s intimate letter referring to the English cleric CF Andrews was to his wife Kasturba. Much later, I looked up the endnotes provided by editor and compiler Gopalkrishna Gandhi and found it to be a “Letter to Hermann Kallenbach”.

This week, thanks to an all-too-predictable ruckus created by those scrambling over each other in yet another bid to ‘defend’ Mahatma Gandhi against perceived or real ‘slanderers’, I came across the name Hermann Kallenbach again, this time courtesy Joseph Lelyveld’s fascinating biography of Gandhi, *Great Soul*.

Lelyveld’s book is yet to be published in India, and going by the noises being made, may not be available at all. But the e-book version on my Kindle has managed to bypass the baying mobs and frightened

booksellers. In any case, it would be very tricky to ban the words of Gandhi himself.

The ‘problem’, as we all know by now, is Lelyveld’s use of documentary evidence and informed opinion to point to the relationship that Gandhi had developed with a Prussian architect whom the Indian playfully boasted as “having received physical training at the hands of [Eugen] Sandow [the father of modern bodybuilding]”. Lelyveld’s inquiry includes quotes from a letter sent by Gandhi to Kallenbach from London in 1909: “Your portrait (the only one) stands on my mantelpiece in the bedroom. The mantelpiece is opposite to the bed... [The purpose of which] is to show to you and me how completely you have taken possession of my body. This is slavery with a vengeance.”

He also quotes cultural historian Tridip Suhrud who says Gandhi and Kallenbach “were a couple”. The author pursues the matter: “...but what kind of couple were they?” adding that “one respected Gandhi scholar characterised the relationship as ‘clearly homoerotic’ rather than homosexual, intending through that choice of words to describe a strong mutual attraction, nothing more.”

Lest we think that Lelyveld’s sole purpose is to provide lipsmacking iconoclastic titillation, it would be wise to read Rajmohan Gandhi’s *Gandhi: The Man, His People, and the Empire* where he writes: “Why a Kathiawari Bania and a German Jew should find each other in Johannesburg, and receive from the other what each needed, is one of the marvels of our story.” Lelyveld has pursued this ‘marvel’ of the Gandhi story. He takes a few wrong turns here and there. For instance when, carried away by his unstated thesis, he theorises that the cotton wool and vaseline that serves Gandhi as “a constant reminder” (Gandhi’s words) of Kallenbach in his London hotel, “may have to do with enemas” or may “foreshadow the geriatric Gandhi’s enthusiasm for massage” (Lelyveld’s words). But as a Gandhi scholar tells me, the

cotton and vaseline referred to were for Kallenbach's daily shaves, about which he was very fussy before he met Gandhi.

But interesting as the Kallenbach story is to the pursuit of understanding Gandhi — inarguably the most powerful embodiment of 'politics is personal' in modern history — there are far more fascinating, intriguing and important matters that Lelyveld explores in his quest to find out what led to the making of a future Mahatma. In 'Among Zulus', the author effectively points out the contradictions in the young Gandhi's mind of being shocked by the word 'coolie' being used as a synonym for 'Indian' and his own use of the racially charged term '*kaffir*' for South African Blacks. "It is indubitably right that Indians should have separate cells [from Blacks]. *Kaffirs* are as a rule uncivilised — the convicts even more so. They are troublesome, very dirty and live almost like animals," writes Gandhi in a 1908 report from prison. Whether Gandhi was a man of his age and culture in his racial stereotyping of South African Blacks or whether he was playing out a political strategy in his campaign to free Indian indentured labourers by separating the issue from anti-Black racist policies is a question that Lelyveld asks us to ponder over.

In a similar manner, the author reminds us of the buried question about Gandhi's sincerity to removing untouchability. Lelyveld cites Swami Shraddhanand, whose views were "more uncompromising in his abhorrence of untouchability" and who challenged Gandhi's commitment to the movement. "It's not part of the received narrative," writes Lelyveld.

Great Soul weaves the unreceived narratives with the received one, and in the process presents to the reader a more complete picture of a complex, undoubtedly great man. The book reads like a bildungsroman, charting the psychological, moral and political growth of an extraordinary young man who would become an extraordinary great one. For that alone, Lelyveld's finely written book deserves to be read.

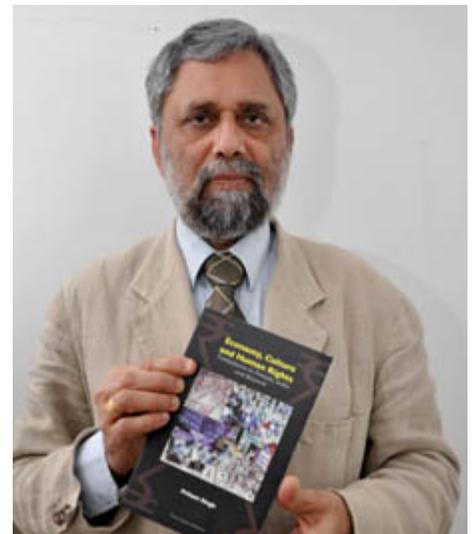
Talking of turbulence

Nonika Singh

HUMAN rights issues in India might be perceived as "ivory tower intellectualism." However, that didn't deter India-born Oxford Brooks University reader Pritam Singh from exploring the same in his latest book, *Economy, Culture and Human Rights: Turbulence in Punjab, India and Beyond*.

The trigger for the book, he recalls, lay in a personal experience. Sympathetic to the Naxal cause, he remembered the days when he was picked up by the police and tortured. The book, however, only takes off from that personal suffering and soon spawns into a deeper analysis of the significance of human rights in today's economic order.

First and foremost, he describes two kinds of approach to human rights, the intrinsic worth and the instrumentalist. While the first one focusses on human rights as an end in itself the other approach he asserts uses human rights as a means, as an instrument towards another end. The ends could vary from secession to national causes to military conflict or suppression of an armed struggle. Predictably, he favours the first approach but adds that sadly, there are a few human rights groups, which have no other axe to grind and have only one mission: to ensure human rights for people.



Pritam Singh

Often, he feels, that the human rights groups create a divide of "who is human and who is not", tend to be sectarian and follow the principle of "defending the right of the people they think are their own," thus challenging the very notion of human rights itself.

But talking of turbulence in Punjab at a point when the dark chapter of terror is over`85. doesn't that sound dated, if not absurd? But then, he weighs, disturbance not only in terms of bloodshed but also the economic, social and cultural cost. "Punjab", he observes, "which witnessed a fast rate of economic growth that led to automisation and paid a huge price in social cultural terms is yet to emerge out of the cultural crisis." Being an economist he realises how economic, human and social development are intertwined. Mercifully, he feels that the world, including the MNCs, is realising it and the concept of corporate social responsibility has sunk in. On the negative imaging of human right groups, particularly in India, he says, "It's because the manner in which human rights have been presented has made it a suspect subject, often viewed as anti- national, harming the nation's interest and India's image abroad." But this notion, he feels, is changing.

"The idea of human rights", he avers "is central to human existence. Unless we respect minority and pluralism there will be no room for creativity. Creativity doesn't come from conformity but by cherishing the differences." That's why in his previous book, *Federalism, Nationalism and Development: Indian and the Punjab Economy*, he had spoken against the growing power of the Centre in India, which, he feels, doesn't go well with pluralism.

Based in the UK, why the persistent need to talk and write only about India and Punjab? Way back, he had edited a book on Punjabi identity in the global context. Well, first things first, far away from home in a developed nation, he feels that one is forced to introspect about the injustices in one's homeland, the overwhelming presence of bureaucracy in normal walks of life and much more. But, of course, he has no intention of being India-centric. Living in a place that opens out a world view`85 his next book will take a broader look. Politics and economy of human rights in a globalised world, which will dwell on experiences in Africa, is what he is mulling over . On the need and readership of academic books, he feels, "It's a

misconception to believe that academic books are not read or don't find publishers. Between fiction and serious non-fiction, same rules apply. If it's a good book, say by an established name like Amartya Sen, it will certainly sell."

As his latest book has evoked a keen response, he is eager to keep the discourse on, which is why he picked up the pen in the first place: "to involve people in the debate."

CORRUPTION

TRIBUNE 12.4.11 CORRUPTION

**No policy on Lokayuktas
Law needed to ensure uniformity in states**

CLOSE on the heels of the Centre's decision to heed social activist Anna Hazare's demand for a bipartisan consensus on drafting a comprehensive Lokpal Bill at the Centre for checking corruption, the spotlight is now on the Lokayuktas in various states. The Gujarat Government's honest admission of failure in appointing a Lokayukta since 2004 sums up the dismal state of affairs in various states. Either there is no Lokayukta in the states or if it exists, it lacks teeth to check corruption firmly and decisively. On Sunday, Gujarat Health Minister Jaynarayan Vyas accused the state Congress of creating hurdles in setting up a Lokayukta. The Congress has, in turn, blamed the BJP for the impasse. Whatever the arguments and counter-arguments between the state government and the Opposition on the issue, the responsibility squarely lies on the government for its failure to set up the institution of Lokayukta.

Unfortunately, the scenario in all other states is equally bleak. In Orissa, for example, the Lokpal has no investigation wing and the State Vigilance Department does not report to him. Moreover, he cannot act against anyone on his own. And if his recommendation for action against any corrupt person is not carried out, all he can do is to bring the matter to the Governor's notice. How can corruption be checked if he is not given suo motu powers?

In Punjab, the situation is by and large the same. The Vigilance Bureau does not report to the Lokpal and it works independently under the Chief Secretary. Worse, he doesn't have adequate staff and resources to process the complaints. And even if he forwards the complaints to the Governor for onward transmission to the government, the latter keeps mum and doesn't take any action. In Haryana, too, it is a toothless body and it is left to the whims and fancies of the state government to implement the recommendations of the Lokayukta. In Karnataka, Lokayukta Santosh Hegde, who has now been made a Member of the Drafting Committee for the Lokpal Bill at the Centre, has been playing a proactive role in checking corruption in the state. Sadly, however, the Yeddyurappa government is not helping him in his endeavours. The institution of Lokayukta in all states can be effectively strengthened if the Centre accepts the recommendation of the Association of Lokayuktas for a Central law to ensure uniformity in the functioning of the office.

HINDU 15.4.11 CORRUPTION

Jan Lokpal bill: addressing concerns

Prashant Bhushan

The draft bill seeks to create an institution that will be independent of those it seeks to police, and will have powers to investigate and prosecute all public servants, and others found guilty of corrupting them.

A number of commentators have raised issues about the provisions in the draft of the Jan Lokpal Bill. They have asked whether it would be an effective instrument to check corruption. They have pointed to the manner in which Anna Hazare's fast put pressure on the government. It is therefore important to understand the provisions of the bill and how it seeks to set up an effective institution to deal with corruption.

Corruption in India has grown to alarming proportions because of policies that have created enormous incentives for its proliferation, coupled with the lack of an effective institution that can investigate and prosecute the corrupt. Under the garb of liberalisation and privatisation, India has adopted policies by which natural resources and public assets (mineral resources, oil and gas, land, spectrum, and so on) have been allowed to be privatised without transparency or a process of public auctioning. Almost overnight, hundreds of memorandums of understanding (MoUs) have been signed by governments with private corporations, leasing out large tracts of land rich in mineral resources, forests and water. These allow the corporations to take away and sell the resources by paying the government a royalty, which is usually less than 1 per cent of the value of the resources.

The Karnataka Lokayukta, Justice Santosh Hegde, has pointed out in a report on mining in Karnataka that the profit margins in such ventures are often more than 90 per cent. This leaves huge scope for bribe-giving and creates incentives for corruption. The same thing happened when A. Raja gave away spectrum without a public auction to companies at less than 10 per cent of its market price. Private monopolies in water and electricity distribution, airport development and so on have been allowed to be created, where huge and unconscionable levels of profit can be made by corrupting the regulator and allowing private monopolies to charge predatory prices. Tens of thousands of hectares have been given away to corporations for commercialisation in the guise of airport development, construction of highways, creation of Special Economic Zones and so on, at prices that are less than 10 per cent of the value of those tracts of land.

Apart from creating huge incentives for corruption, such policies have resulted in the involuntary displacement of lakhs of the poorest people, leaving them on the brink of starvation and forcing many of them to join the Maoists. The beneficiaries have stripped the land of natural resources (a good deal of which is exported) and destroyed the environment. Most ominously, such deals have resulted in the creation of monster corporations that are so powerful and influential that they have come to influence and virtually control all institutions of power — as we see from the Radia tapes.

While adopting policies that thus create huge incentives for corruption, we have not set up effective institutions to check corruption, investigate and prosecute the corrupt and bring them to justice. The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) continues to be under the administrative control of the government, which is seen as the fountainhead of corruption. Thus, no action is usually taken by the CBI to effectively investigate high-level corruption — except once in a while when the court forces its hand. Often we see the CBI itself behaving in a corrupt manner, with no other institution to investigate that. The Central Vigilance Commission

(CVC), which is supposed to supervise the CBI, has failed to act, since its own appointment process is riddled with conflicts of interest. The Prime Minister, the Home Minister and the Leader of the Opposition (who has been a Minister and hopes to become Prime Minister one day) want to avoid their own accountability and are thus interested in having weak and pliable persons to man the institution that is expected to supervise the CBI. Moreover, the CVC and the CBI have to seek the government's sanction to investigate and prosecute wrongdoers; such sanction is usually not given when it comes to high-level corruption. The CVC depends on vigilance officers in various government departments. They are often middle-level officers from the same departments and cannot be expected to exercise vigilance over their bosses who write their confidential reports. The judiciary, which must try and convict the offenders, has become dysfunctional and is afflicted with corruption due to lack of accountability of the higher judiciary.

The draft Jan Lokpal bill seeks to create an institution that will be largely independent of those it seeks to police, and which will have effective powers to investigate and prosecute all public servants (including Ministers, MPs, bureaucrats, judges and so on) and others found guilty of corrupting them. Since corruption involves misconduct and gives rise to grievances, the draft proposes that the Lokpal will supervise the machinery to pursue disciplinary proceedings against government servants (the Vigilance Department) as well as the machinery to redress grievances. Thus, misconduct by government servants, and grievances, will come under the ambit of an independent authority rather than the government — where the machinery has become ineffective due to conflicts of interest. It is proposed that if the Lokpal finds that a contract is being given for corrupt considerations, it can stop the contract. It cannot otherwise interfere with government decisions or policy.

It has been said that this would create a super-cop with enormous powers and no accountability. There is a misconception that the

proposed Lokpal will have judicial powers; there is no such provision in the bill. The need of the hour is to have an effective cop who can investigate and prosecute the high and mighty without interdiction from the very people who need to be prosecuted.

The bill seeks to make the Lokpal accountable. First, it is mandated to function transparently so that everything related to its functioning is known to the people (without compromising the investigation itself). Exemptions from disclosure provided in the Right to Information Act could be included. Secondly, the Lokpal's orders will be subject to review in the High Courts and the Supreme Court. Lastly, the members of the Lokpal could be removed for misconduct, by a five-member bench of the Supreme Court.

There has been some criticism of the Lokpal selection committee and the selection process. Given the erosion in the integrity of most of our state institutions, it was thought that the best bet would be to have a broad-based selection committee and build transparency and public participation into the selection process, while trying to keep out those who are most likely to be within the ambit of the Lokpal's investigations. That is why in the draft bill Ministers were sought to be kept out.

One criticism has been that this shows contempt for democracy. We have seen how the “democratically elected” Prime Minister, Home Minister and leaders of the opposition have normally selected weak and pliable CVCs. So the draft bill proposes a selection committee comprising the Lok Sabha Speaker, the Rajya Sabha Chairman, the Comptroller and Auditor General, the Chief Election Commissioner, the two seniormost judges of the Supreme Court, two seniormost Chief Justices of High Courts, the Chairman of the National Human Rights Commission and the outgoing members of the Lokpal. This proposed composition of the committee will certainly be discussed, and perhaps improved upon, during public consultations and discussions within the drafting committee that will now take place.

It has been said that putting the function of redress of grievances on the plate of the Lokpal would make its work unmanageable. Though the Lokpal will only reorganise and supervise the grievance redress machinery (rather than dealing with each grievance itself), this is an issue that will be discussed openly by the committee. By next week, a website that will formally take in all the opinions and suggestions on the Jan Lokpal bill will be launched and announced. People are welcome to read, understand and send their comments on it, to be taken note of.

One must not, however, be under any illusion that the Lokpal law by itself would solve the problem of corruption. Unless we tackle and change the policies that create enormous incentives for corruption and monster corporations that become too powerful for any institution to control, the fight will be incomplete. The judiciary too is in need of comprehensive reforms.

But an independent, credible and empowered Lokpal is a necessary, though not a sufficient, condition to effectively control corruption. Let us work at least to put that in place.

(Prashant Bhushan is a senior Supreme Court lawyer and member of the joint committee to draft the Lokpal bill.)

HINDU 8.4.11 CORRUPTION

The Anna Hazare phenomenon

R.K. Raghavan

The right step would be for Manmohan Singh to visit Jantar Mantar without further loss of time to persuade the Gandhian to call off his fast, and also explore a compromise.

Jantar Mantar in New Delhi is a hot favourite of the average tourist in the summer season. As the temperatures soar this year, the monument is drawing even greater crowds, mainly to savour the electric atmosphere generated by a 72-year-old school drop-out from an indigent labour family of Maharashtra's Ahmednagar district. To say that Anna Hazare is a phenomenon is to state the obvious. The spot he has chosen in the heart of the national capital for his fast-unto-death action is not far from Parliament, which in his eyes stands wholly discredited. The numbers he has drawn till now have astonished the whole nation.

Despite glib words of praise for the principle that motivates Anna, there is unmistakable chagrin among those in the corridors of power — whom he is challenging. They claim that they alone are vested with the authority to decide what kind of legislation should be drafted to tackle corruption in high places, and not the likes of Anna Hazare. They look upon him as an usurper who has to be put in his place somehow.

There is a growing feeling that those in South Block and North Block are reading the situation wrongly. They seem to assume that if they hold on for just a few more days, the gutsy man would wilt and the common person would forget that such a protest ever happened. Interesting days are therefore ahead in the battle against the kind of corruption that has come to envelop the country.

During a television debate in which I took part this week, one person in the clued-up audience said it would be better to go to jail rather than live in a 'free' India that has been soiled by the ugly contours of dishonesty in public life. Such is the desperation in the mind of the citizen who has now to pay for every service to which he or she is entitled free of cost as a law abiding and taxpaying citizen. Many of my friends abroad ask why the harassed Indian has not yet risen in revolt, but is taking the situation lying down. It is difficult to respond to the question meaningfully.

Things seem to be changing, however, with Anna's arrival on the scene. While I would not like to exaggerate his impact, I will not underrate him either — as many in authority in Delhi would seem to be doing. Anna could prove to be the Pied Piper who will be remembered for many years, and the undoing of many who currently enjoy power despite their dubious reputation. Anna has already claimed one scalp in the form of the Agriculture Minister, who chose to exit from the Group of Ministers charged with the task of drafting the Lokpal bill. Others may follow. The point is that Anna is no longer inconsequential as many had thought before he launched his satyagraha on April 5.

Some people are critical of the way Anna has given no options to the powers-that-be. He is described as obstinate and impractical. In particular, many legal pundits, of the likes of Harish Salve, are apprehensive that he is derailing and hijacking the democratic process while trying to do good for the nation. The suggestion is that no one, however mighty he or she may be, can be allowed to subvert or bypass the democratic institutions in which law-making authority is vested by the Constitution. This stand is, however, blind to the very rationale for Anna taking to the streets with his case. In his view, the track record of all legislators is poor and they have betrayed the trust reposed in them by the electorate. He is convinced that left to themselves the law-makers will continue to hoodwink the public through their tokenism in the struggle against corruption — a criticism that is based on the weak Lokpal bill that the government has framed.

Anna and those around him, such as Arvind Kejriwal and Kiran Bedi, point out how the Jan Lokpal bill has vastly improved upon the official Lokpal bill, offering hope for drastic action being taken against bribe-takers. To be specific, the civil society bill will cover bureaucrats and judges also, in addition to the Prime Minister, Ministers and Members of Parliament. It will not be a hollow, toothless recommendatory body as the one that is envisaged by the official bill. It will go far beyond that and function as a prosecuting agency, with the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) being a part of it.

Despite Union Human Resource Development Minister Kapil Sibal's appeal that the situation should not degenerate into a 'they' vs. 'us' confrontation, the fact remains that it has become one. There are certainly two parties to the issue, and neither is relenting. Anna Hazare says he had written several times on the subject to the Prime Minister, without any response. This is why he had no alternative but to go on a fast, just as the Mahatma did while fighting the alien ruler. The government, mainly in the form of Mr. Sibal, believes it cannot abdicate its absolute authority, and cannot cave in to the pressure that strikes at the roots of the Constitution.

Amid this wrangling, there is a definite danger to Anna's life. You are not dealing here with a young person, and a 72-year-old individual has limited physical reserves. There does not seem to be a full appreciation of the risks involved. If it is the government's assessment that even in the worst case scenario there is no possibility of a popular uprising because Anna is a political lightweight, my feeling is that the government is being unethical and is playing with fire. If the government believes that Anna is being unreasonable in seeking to pressure constitutional authority, in a way that will also be tantamount to disrespecting the Father of the Nation. It will, in the process, discountenance whatever the Mahatma stood for.

It will therefore be advisable for the Prime Minister to bundle up enough courage and handle the situation himself, instead of depending on those around him. The right step would be for Dr. Manmohan Singh to visit Jantar Mantar without further loss of time in order to persuade Anna to call off his fast, and also explore a compromise. The two men have many things in common, including a belief in the fundamental values of probity and civility in interpersonal relationships. If they cannot do the trick, nothing else will.

Finally, Anna's demand for a robustly independent investigating agency strikes a chord in many of us who have been demanding autonomy for the CBI, which remains an appendage of the executive to be manipulated at will by it. If the CBI has done reasonably well in investigating the 2G spectrum scam, it is because of the power derived from the court monitoring the process. How many cases can the courts thus keep track of and give genuine apolitical supervision?

India undoubtedly needs an Ombudsman of the kind Anna is demanding. This has worked very well in many parts of the globe, especially in Europe. Call it by any name, including the Independent Commission against Corruption of Hong Kong, a truly strong Ombudsman is badly needed in India at the present juncture, when the country's image has received an unparalleled beating. India is now a laughing stock in the comity of nations. Right-thinking people, drawing inspiration from Anna Hazare, can definitely bring about a turnaround. We owe this to this country's future generations.

(Dr. R.K. Raghavan is a former Director of the Central Bureau of Investigation.)

For the (re)public

Sagarika Ghose

The Anna Hazare movement crept up unnoticed, pounced suddenly and unexpectedly seized a country by the throat. Within hours of Hazare announcing his fast, the news, disseminated by 24-hour media, had spread to every city, small town and village. A media event rapidly became a public one. Hundreds heard, pushed back their chairs and charpoyas and walked. They walked with candles, they marched to streetside venues. Forty thousand 'liked' Hazare's 'India Against Corruption' page on Facebook. There were protests in 400 locations across the world. Seven lakh people expressed solidarity with Hazare by giving a missed call.

The crowds were peaceful, well-behaved and not a single violent incident was reported. At Jantar Mantar in Delhi, the atmosphere was low key and respectable. No goons. Instead, the new knowledge economy middle class turned up: geeks, students, doctors, litigants who had battled an uncaring state for decades. They came to sit with an elderly man from Maharashtra whose name they may never have heard before but who, they had heard, was willing to die for them.

The movement for the Jan Lok Pal Bill has been criticised. A fast unto death in many ways is undemocratic and sets a precedent of blackmail. There is an authoritarian undertone to a group of unelected civil society members seeking to make law. The movement betrayed glimpses of a disrespect to all democratic institutions like Parliament and seemed to place its hopes on a dictatorial super hero like the Lok Pal with absolute powers. When powers of judge, jury and executioner are all vested in a single entity, its possible that entity could become an instrument of evil.

All these reservations must be taken on board by the committee which will draft the Jan Lok Pal Bill. Our elected representatives are the heartbeat of our republic and if we place them in jeopardy, we will become yet another high-growth authoritarian country like our neighbours in south east Asia. The 'sab neta chor hai' mentality is dangerous. A country that hates its elected politicians soon begins to hate democracy itself.

But those who criticise the Anna Hazare movement as being anti-politician and thus anti-democratic must also answer the question: is Indian democratic politics still democratic? Or is democratic politics now a gigantic multi-crore syndicate in which hereditary bosses control paid vote-banks to repeatedly return to power? According to a study, the total amount spent in 2009 elections was R10,000 crore. The Hazare movement did not become a wildfire phenomenon because of the media. It became a phenomenon precisely because of the helplessness that people feel about politics becoming impervious to public concerns. Democratic politics is in danger of becoming a closed upper class of well-connected super-rich folk for whom India is a playground. Politics is perceived as business-driven, family-driven and cut off from the aam aadmi.

Almost every political party today is dynastic. When a political party represents an idea or vision, voters feel they can vote, donate and support that party. But when a political party represents only a particular family and family enrichment, then how can voters either support, donate or vote for it? No wonder parties can't rely on public donations and must seek nefarious funds to win elections.

All corruption today has its roots in the funding of elections. The DMK is a good example of how hereditary politics is intimately connected with big money. When a candidate campaigns on the strength of his vision and charisma, he can raise money on his agenda for change; when he campaigns for a family name, he relies inevitably on the business

connections of his family. When asked why he didn't contest elections, Hazare candidly admitted that since he did not have money and liquor power, he would lose his deposit. In today's democracy, perhaps even Gandhi would lose his deposit.

In his recent book *India: A Portrait*, Patrick French points out that all MPs under the age of 30 are hereditary. More than two thirds of 66 MPs under the age of 40 are hereditary. Of women MPs, 69.5% are hereditary. If the present trend continues, the Indian parliament will soon be made up of only hereditary MPs and India will be back to the era of the princelings and their kingdoms.

The Hazare movement is then a wake-up call for Indian politicians. Yes, there is a citizenry out there which is severely unhappy with being saddled with a Parliament that has become a closed shop of tycoons and family scions. Yes, there is a citizenry out there that feels helpless and anguished that big money and big power are charting the nation's destiny according to their needs. Yes, there is a citizenry out there that feels betrayed that politicians are handing over their legacies not to the country but to their sons and daughters. Yes, there is a citizenry out there that feels agitated when an aloof and elitist government does not talk to them as equal stakeholders.

Hazare's movement must not be seen as just a movement against corruption; its also a movement against the kind of 'democracy' we are becoming. A fast unto death has gatecrashed the political cocktail party. In a patchy subliminal way, the word 'public' has been re-inserted into the Republic.

(Sagarika Ghose is deputy editor, CNN-IBN. The views expressed by the author are personal)

GOOD GOVERNANCE

Correcting distortions in governance

The ultimate aim is to ensure that it is the citizens who shall govern and not the administration, with due focus on accountability

Pramod Kumar

GOVERNANCE : For whom and for what? This question normally gets lost in the processes, procedures and application of technology. To illustrate, the application of unique ID numbers, no doubt, shall provide efficiency, but only to the existing process of undignified and exploitative exchange between the citizens and the government. These rules of exchange in many spheres do not protect the rights and the entitlements of the people on the margins besides treating a fairly large section of the citizenry in an undignified manner.



Rules of governance have become so overtly violative that the system has been rendered non-functional. Earlier, an easy explanation used to be the prevalence of corruption, high transaction costs and lack of transparency. Interestingly, even corruption has ceased to perform one of its foremost functions, i.e. facilitation and efficiency. This has been exemplified in the preparation for the Commonwealth Games, wherein even large-scale corruption could not induce efficiency. A clear message emerges that the system has ceased to be functional. Consequently, the Army was reportedly assigned the task of killing mosquitoes to facilitate a Dengue-free hosting of the Commonwealth Games.

The first initiative is to be taken to restore the identity of the citizens. Even after 63 years of Independence, citizens have to prove their identity. This mistrust has been institutionalised to the extent that even to prove their name, they have to seek affirmation from a gazetted officer of the government. For declarations relating to their profession, income, caste, residence proof, etc., affidavits are to be given on legal papers sworn before a Magistrate or public notary. Even to procure ration cards, electricity, sewerage and water connection, birth and death certificates, applications for admission to the educational institutions, affidavits attested by the gazetted officer or third party or public notary, or Magistrate have to be produced. The govern-mentality continues to treat citizens as colonial subjects. However, most of these affidavits are local inventions and are not required by law.

However, the ‘govern-mentality’ of mistrust has resisted any attempt to repose trust in its own citizens by accepting self-declarations as reliable and authentic. The Punjab Government by its order discontinued the practice of submission of affidavits unless required by law.

Further, the services are rendered to the citizens not as a matter of right but as a dole. To reverse this, a legislation has been proposed by the Governance Commission to make it mandatory for administration to serve the people. The purpose is not merely to provide corruption -free and harassment-free services but to send the signal that it is citizens who shall govern and not the administration. In other words, the main focus is on accountability rather than efficiency.

The government accepted the Commission’s recommendation to legislate an act to ensure delivery of services as a right to the citizen. It includes around 48 services from the Departments of Revenue, Local Self-Government, Electricity, Police, Food and Civil Supplies, Health, Transport, etc. This will transform the terms of interaction between the citizens and the administration.

Further, the administrative division of population on the basis of caste and religion has multiplied social cleavages and led to the denial of full citizenship. The decision to conduct caste-based census is a sign of diversity insensitivity that shall only produce fractured identity as a citizen.

Recently, another initiative to protect the girl child, pregnant women was tracked to prohibit them from seeking sex selection tests to abort a female foetus. As this is violative of the citizen's privacy, it has the potential to provide license to those who treat women as commodities. The Commission has suggested that the government should enforce law on private and public sector medical practitioners and at the same time attempt to enhance the value of the girl child by ensuring tracking of the girl child through her life cycle from birth to death and interweave incentive-oriented schemes to check both female foeticide and cultural neglect.

The pervasiveness of cultural neglect of the girl child has been proved beyond doubt by the provisional census data 2011. The provisional census data have shown how sex ratio at birth has shown some improvement, but child sex ratio (0-6 years) has shown a major decline.

Along with loss of identity, lack of respect and dignity is reflected in everyday interactions of the people with the government. The spatial disconnect experienced by the citizens in the police stations in particular and the District Collectorates in general, is more pronounced. The visit to these spaces gives a feeling of alien space and a sense of loss of dignity and identity. And, interactions with the police and consequent loss of dignity has been described succinctly in the Fifth Report of the National Police Commission (November 1980). The Commission expressed anguish that the 1902 Fraser Commission's observation that 'people' now may not dread the police, but they certainly dread getting involved with it in any capacity, continues to be valid.

This political interference which has become an accepted part of the political culture (not only in Punjab but in many other states) has produced glaring distortions in the practice of governance leading to dilution of hierarchy, dysfunctional internal accountability mechanisms and patronage-centric governance. To illustrate, the average tenure in 2009 of a Station House Officer is around six months, which was about seven months in 2004. In the case of a Deputy Superintendent of Police, the same is ten months and one year for the District Superintendent of Police.

Therefore, it is suggested that the tenure of the police personnel may be fixed in consonance with the Police Act and a performance audit report may be considered as the basis for transfers and postings. The language of power is different from the language of justice. The institutions of justice delivery understand with clarity the language of power and material rather than listening to the feeble voices of the dispossessed.

A third set of prerequisites relates to productivity, i.e. to engage people with the system in a productive manner and provide conducive conditions to nurture people's capacity to be productive and their ability to exercise some degree of control over their lives.

To illustrate, in the section on Social Security and Welfare Programmes, it has been brought out how the social security programmes like Pensions and Shagun are given as doles to a large section of the ineligible population. This has become a practice with successive governments. Consequently, it leads to wastage to the tune of about Rs 220 crore and Rs 40 crore in the case of old-age pension and Shagun schemes respectively. The need is to identify the deserving beneficiaries as also to ensure that its reach is periodically evaluated.

Instead of productive engagement of the citizen, a culture of sharing of the spoils is reinforced. Subsidies directed at the poor are given as doles and subsidies directed to protect the profits are described as 'rescue' packages.

A fourth set of prerequisites relates to the allocation of roles to various institutions. Since administration is compartmentalised in the departments and each department has its own priorities, if a particular department's priorities take precedence over the other, that is likely to lead to dissonance within the system. There is no dearth of examples to demonstrate this point.

In 2004-05, the Department of Finance of Punjab, in its overactive commitment to impose fiscal management, came out with a scheme to contract untrained 'teachers' from the same village to cut government expenditure. As a result, the quality of teaching further deteriorated and, later, all the contractual 'teachers' launched protest and demanded that they should be trained as teachers and that their services be regularised. This scheme was spearheaded by fiscal management framework rather than access to equity concern in quality education.

As a result, the inability to maintain delicate functional balance between the institutions produced a major crisis in governance. The tendency to empower institutions with ad hoc license has a clear message, i.e. to kill poison with poison and letting the patient die. This has made governance less a matter of politics, more of an administrative policy and the discretionary political interference.

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SOCIAL JUSTICE

What civil society?

Decline in child sex ratio shows we are an uncivilised society

Anuradha Dutt

The spring Navratra currently being underway, devout Hindus throughout North India are flocking to goddess shrines in a bid to secure Mahadevi's grace. This ostentatious show of devotion is at variance with the wretched position accorded to females in an aggressively materialistic and patriarchal milieu, where land, property and family honour have more value than the life of a baby girl. Among well-off farming and land-owning communities in Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan and western Uttar Pradesh, females are reported to be routinely killed by family members either for the sake of family honour or for bringing insufficient dowry. The amendments in Hindu inheritance laws, securing their share in ancestral and father's self-acquired assets, seem to have failed to give women their due.

Confirming the bias against the girl child, provisional figures for the 2011 nationwide census indicate that though overall sex ratio has risen to 940/1000, against 933/1000 in 2001, the child sex ratio — in the 0-6 age group — has declined from 927 females for every 1000 males in 2001 to 914 females against 1,000 males. Census Commissioner of India C Chandramauli describes the trend as a “matter of grave concern”, with the CSR, vis-à-vis the number of girls, being the lowest since independence. The much touted economic reforms and ensuing prosperity, most evident in the northern states mentioned above and in the national capital, have failed to ensure females' right to life and dignity. Rather, the high incidence of honour killings, dowry deaths and sexual crimes in these regions suggest that high income is not

commensurate with high morality.

Delhi Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit apparently expressed dismay that the latest CSR of 866/1000 shows a decline in the number of female children in the capital, down from 868/1000 in 2001. This occurred despite the financial incentives offered by her Government to have girls. Clearly, changing the feudal mindset, heavily biased against females, is easier said than done in a city that boasts of world class amenities and high standard of living. CSR in Haryana has risen from 819/1000 in 2001 to 830/1000 in 2011 but, along with Punjab — 846/1000 — the State has the dubious distinction of still having among the most skewed sex ratios. Two other prosperous States, Gujarat and Maharashtra, also fare poorly on the gender ratio graph at 886 and 883/1000 in terms of CSR. Among districts, Haryana's Jhajjar (774 females) and Mahendragarh (778 females) are the worst. Uttar Pradesh (899, down from 916), otherwise on the economic upswing, with glitzy new townships and expressways mushrooming via conversion of farmland to commercial use, and headed by a woman, continues to dislike female progeny.

It is significant that southern States all have a female sex ratio above 900, unlike the richer northern States. Tribal Mizoram (971 females) and Meghalaya (970 females) in the North-East have the highest CSR. Interestingly, high rate of literacy does not necessarily lead to a healthy gender balance. Maharashtra, with a literacy rate of almost 83 per cent, has a skewed CSR. Again, tribal Chhattisgarh, with just 71 per cent literacy, has 964 females per 1000 males.

Given here is a relevant excerpt from an article, 'Skewed sex ratio in Punjab a demographic catastrophe', by Mr D Singh, Mr A Kumar and Mr K Vij, Department of Forensic Medicine, in Chandigarh's Government Medical College. The 2001 Census provided data — "The inhabitants of Punjab, who pioneered the green revolution in the last century, are now heading for a devastating economic and social fallout

in the near future due to sharply declining (882 in 1991; 874 in 2001) sex ratio. The reasons of 'son-mania' are socio-cultural, economic and political ones. Among others, the predominant cause is the agrarian set-up associated with the ownership of land and the social infrastructure sustained by Punjabis that accords a low status to women. Chandigarh, the city beautiful has the dubious distinction of having the lowest sex ratio (773) in whole of the country despite its high literacy rate of 81.76 per cent. The worst affected districts of Punjab are Ludhiana (824), Fatehgarh Sahib (851) and Patiala (864)). With 11.4 per cent increase in literacy rate during the last decade (58.5 per cent in 1991; 69.95 per cent in 2001), the juvenile sex ratio of 793, compared to overall sex ratio of 874 is a cause of concern in one of the most prosperous States of India. Among the Sikhs in Punjab, a further fall in juvenile sex ratio (only 780), clearly indicates that social practices among Sikh masses have grossly diverged from the egalitarian principles, emphasising gender equality, set forth by the Sikh Gurus...

“In the wake of these developments, Akal Takht, the highest seat of political and spiritual power of Sikhs, has raised an alarm. A ‘*hukumnama*’ or edict has been issued on 18th April 2001, that any Sikh indulging in female foeticide could be excommunicated as the practice was forbidden under ‘Rehat Maryada’ (The Sikh code of religious conduct), issued by Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee(10)...”

Existing penal laws against sex selection and female foeticide have failed to deter offenders. People need to remember that even the orthodox *Manusmriti* warned that homes cursed by their females would be wiped out, as if by witchcraft.

Can India prevent 200 children dying every hour?

Poonam Khetrapal-Singh

It is estimated that India lost 1.8 million children under five in 2008. That is more than 200 child deaths every hour, each day, or more than three deaths every minute. Out of about 25 million babies born every year in India, one million die. Most who survive do not get to grow up and develop well. About 48 per cent are stunted (sub-normal height) and 43 per cent are under-weight. Additionally, about one-third of babies are born with a low birth weight of less than 2,500 grams.

MDG target

In South-East Asia, the Maldives, Sri Lanka and Thailand have reduced newborn and childhood mortality significantly. India has also demonstrated steady progress. Under-five mortality decreased from about 150 per 1,000 live births in 1990 to 74 per 1,000 live births in 2005-06. But at this rate of decline, India will not be able to achieve the Millennium Development Goal 4 (MDG) target of 50 under-five deaths per 1,000 live births by 2015. Moreover, progress has been uneven in various States in the country.

Causes

The causes of death among children are well understood in India. Newborn mortality (death within the first 28 days of life) contributes to more than half of under-five mortality. In newborns they are asphyxia (inability to breathe at the time of delivery), infections and prematurity. After 28 days of life, they are the result of acute respiratory infections (pneumonia) and diarrhoea. Undernutrition contributes to 35 per cent of deaths. In addition to these, immediate

causes of childhood deaths, there are several socio-cultural factors including poverty, poor water and sanitation facilities, illiteracy (especially among women), the inferior status of women in society, and pregnancy during adolescence (that can be attributed to early marriage). Child mortality rates are also higher among rural populations when compared to their urban counterparts.

We know what needs to be done to save these precious lives. Newborn deaths can be prevented by ensuring nutrition of adolescent girls; delaying pregnancy beyond 20 years of age and ensuring a gap of three-five years between pregnancies; skilled care during pregnancy, childbirth and post-natal care; and improved newborn care practices that include early (within first hour of birth) and exclusive breastfeeding; preventing low body temperature and infections; and early detection of sickness and prompt treatment. Childhood deaths can be prevented by exclusive breastfeeding for six months and complementary feeding from six months of age with continued breastfeeding for two years; immunisation; and early treatment of pneumonia, diarrhoea and malaria. In addition, it is important for the mother and other caretakers at home to invest in appropriate child caring practices, right from birth to support early childhood development and lay a foundation to maximise human potential.

India needs to provide these life-saving interventions to most, if not all, newborn and children who need them. However, their (interventions) coverage has been quite low. For example, in 2005-06 (the National Family Health Survey – NFHS 3 report), the rate of initiation of breastfeeding within an hour of birth was only 26 per cent and exclusive breastfeeding at six months was just 46 per cent. Yet these two interventions have the potential to prevent 19 per cent of deaths. The use of oral rehydration salts in cases of diarrhoea, the most recommended treatment, was just 43 per cent and only 13 per cent cases of suspected pneumonia received antibiotics.

Immunisation coverage has been relatively better, suggesting that high coverage is achievable.

Intervention

The main causes of poor coverage of interventions include ineffective planning and implementation, mainly due to weaknesses in the health system. To address the systemic challenges, India launched a flagship programme, the National Rural Health Mission in 2005-06, to strengthen the health system in rural areas.

Commendable initiatives have been put in place such as training about 8,00,000 village level health volunteers (Accredited Social Health Activist, or ASHA), hiring additional staff, strengthening the infrastructure of health facilities, augmenting programme management capacity at State and district levels, and enhancing community participation. However, much more needs to be done to minimise health inequities that exist among different subpopulations in the country.

Public health expenditure in India has remained at a low — about one per cent of GDP — for quite some time. This needs to be scaled up. Considering that about 70 per cent of health care is accessed from the private sector in the country, better regulation and participation of private health service providers must be ensured. Synergy between the health and nutrition sectors must be fostered through better coordination between the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Women and Child Development, which are responsible for the ICDS (Integrated Child Development Services) programme.

To reach unreached newborns and children, there is a strong case for providing home-based newborn care as well as community-based management of non-severe pneumonia and diarrhoea in children by trained ASHAs and other community health workers. This initiative needs to be supported by provision of incentives, necessary drug

supplies, close supervision and appropriate referral linkages. At the same time, the quality of health services at first-level health facilities and referral hospitals must continue to be strengthened.

Fortunately, there is renewed commitment at the global and national levels towards achievement of MDG 4. To save newborns and children, national governments, development agencies, civil society and other stakeholders must work in close collaboration.

(Dr. Poonam Khetrpal-Singh is WHO Deputy Regional Director for South-East Asia Region.)

URBAN DEVELOPMENT

The future of Asian cities

After two decades of rapid urbanisation, many Asian cities have become economically productive and prosperous. But have they become desirable places to live in? A report on the “State of Asian Cities 2010/11,” published by the U.N. Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), says ‘No’ on the strength of an empirical study. This insightful report cautions urban planners that unless they are made more liveable and environmental damage is reduced, Asian cities will not be able to harness the urban dividend any longer. Over the past two decades, 45 million people have been added every year to the Asian city population, which in 2010 touched a staggering 1.76 billion. This transformation has created vibrant economies and reduced poverty levels. However, the benefits have been unevenly spread and a spatial divide has emerged at the regional as well as intra-city level. In India, for instance, while mega cities receive a good deal of investment, many smaller towns have suffered neglect through short-sighted state policies. Within cities, access to water supply and sanitation has improved, but affordable land and health facilities have become less accessible.

Urbanisation in Asia is set to accelerate. Based on current trends, this means the conversion of more than 10 square kilometres of fertile land to non-agricultural use every day. City planners, as the U.N. report points out with concern, have to build a minimum of 20,000 houses and mobilise an additional six million litres of potable water every year to meet basic needs. Such demands on resources may appear daunting, but restraining urban growth is neither a workable nor a wise option. A business-as-usual approach

will not be sustainable. Neither a vastly expanded low-density city nor a linear urban-corridor pattern that depends on private motorised transport, a model that is popular in India, can be the answer. Instead, a network of dense nodes, linked by efficient and affordable public transport and served by an intra-nodal non-motorised transport grid, is an alternative to explore. When 215 cities across the world were surveyed using a 'liveability index' — an evaluation of 39 aspects of a city including environment and safety — none of Asia's cities made it to the top 30. Only Singapore and four Japanese cities managed to get into the top 50. This does not augur well for Asia's urban future. If cities in the world's most populous continent by far want to sustain their economic competitiveness and secure their future, they must invest substantially in environmental and housing programmes.

