

The anti corruption movement of anna hazare



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The Oxford English Dictionary defines corruption as the “ perversion or destruction of integrity in the discharge of public duties by bribery or favor” (ADB 2000; Saxonhouse 2000) and the Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines it as “ inducement to wrong by improper or unlawful means” (ADB 2000). This paper focuses on the anti- corruption movement of Anna Hazare. In recent times India has seen a spurt in the corruption scandals ranging in sphere from corporate to government sector. The corruption issues are discussed openly and general level of understanding regarding the corruption has increased in the society. While we all know that we are sinking into the morass of corruption we don't know how to come out of it or tackle it. Some suggest spread of education and tougher enforcement of anti-corruption laws but nobody has a precise solution.

In light of above, the anti - corruption movement initiated by Anna Hazare assumes profound significance. Anna Hazare, a veteran social activist, born on June 15, 1938 has been at the forefront of anti- corruption movement in the country for a long time . He has been recognized for his contribution towards the development of Ralegaon siddhi village in Maharashtra and also has been instrumental in the framing of laws like the RTI Act by relentlessly pursuing the cause with the government.

Background to the Movement

Rising from his humble beginning, Hazare joined the Indian military. After two life changing incidents while serving in the army, Anna decided to spend his life for a worthwhile cause. On returning to his village, Ralegaon Siddhi, he saw widespread alcoholism, economic and social distress in the village. He first tried to improve the condition of the temple in the village by

spending a considerable sum of money, earned during his stint in army, to repair the temple. This had an impact on the people of the village as it was sacred to them and he instantly gained their respect. Next he sought to improve the economic condition of the village by undertaking the watershed development plan in the village in order to improve the output and turn vast stretch of waste land into a productive one.

The above mentioned activities are important in context of his anti - corruption drive as he managed to establish the bond with the people of his village and became a well known person in the state before he became involved in anti-corruption movement. He realized that percolation of corruption through the society has major ill effects. Development and corruption can't go hand in hand.

Anti- corruption drive

Anna Hazare helped turn Ralegaon siddhi into a model village by uprooting alcoholism, promoting watershed for sustainable income, removing untouchability and focusing on education. After turning his village into a model one, he was approached by the government to undertake project to develop model villages across the state which he gladly accepted. It was during this project he became aware of the deep rooted corruption in public sphere. He realized that development is getting hampered due to planned corruption in Government machinery. He was asked for bribes and other favors which he refused and decided to uproot this evil from the society.

He has stressed the need for another ' freedom struggle' against corruption. The usage of words like " freedom struggle" against corruption highlights the

weightage attached by him to this movement. He views government and bureaucrats as public servants and power is vested in them by the public. But without proper check and accountability this power has been transferred to them and common people have to struggle against their own power. His idea is to create public awareness across the nation to put pressure on the government to amend laws to allow agencies like the CBI and the CVC to act against the corrupt freely and with full autonomy and make corruption punishable with life imprisonment. Hazare said existing laws are not serving as a deterrent as they do not result in stringent action against the corrupt.

On the subject of corruption he has locked horns with political bigwigs in the state of Maharashtra. Though his main focus in this movement has been politicians and bureaucrats, he has also targeted the government employees for their inefficiency and role in corruption. He has advocated declaration of assets by government employees to check the prevailing corruption to some extent. He has also criticized the official secrets Act and championed the cause of Right to information, which is now a fundamental right of every citizen, thanks to his effort. He has been emphatic in decentralization of power at the village level basically promoting the panchayati raj so that people have more power at the grass root level as the corridors of power breed corruption.

Methodology adopted by Anna

He has read many books by Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi and Acharya Vinoba Bhave and is inspired by Gandhian thinking . This is reflected in his dressing, which is home spun. Some of the methods used by him in anti-corruption drive reflect the Gandhian style of protest. His whole life and work

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is based on Gandhian philosophy. His innovative way of anti-corruption movement has caught the imagination of people. For example one of the methods employed is to annoy the politicians with devotional songs. He and his group of supporters sit in front of corrupt officer's house and sing devotional song. People in the nearby area come to know about the corrupt person and join them. Eventually the news spreads to the corrupt person's family and he feels ashamed as he gets "branded" in the society and becomes scared. So here they try to subjugate the person by inflicting shame on him for his action. This strategy has proved successful in many cases. Another method of protesting is through agitation and undertaking fast. Since he's a well known social reformer government has to act on it amid mounting public pressure

He himself goes about finding the proof of corruption against the corrupt politicians and hands over to government to act on it. In one case he gave evidence against two ministers who had amassed wealth disproportionate to their income. However since the Government was passive about this he started agitation and undertook fast for 10 days. Chief Minister intervened and he deleted these two ministers from ministry and appointed an Inquiry Commission. The Commission held both the ministers guilty but to save them the Government appointed another commission who discharged them from the allegations. Though the ministers were discharged from the allegations, they had to lose their minister ship, which is a sign of the success of his agitation.

Observations

If this movement was started earlier it may have collapsed since he didn't have mass support in the beginning. Anna Hazare's legitimacy stems from the promotion of public interest. An environment activist-turned-corruption crusader has received considerable media publicity. This publicity combined with saint like status has helped him in gathering support from common people. He was able to highlight the failure of official institutions and power holders to uphold public trust and values. But this has resulted in more talk about the corrupt than corruption. Anna Hazare chose to remain a simple person and resisted the temptation to move into mainstream politics despite his popular image. His leadership which emerged at a local level in Ralegaon siddhi involved all the sections of society especially the weak and vulnerable. The anti-corruption movement couldn't be carried out without the support of his loyalists. He was able to identify the priorities of the people and attacked the most common problems. Through this people were able to identify with his values, which resulted in support for him. He displayed his selfless leadership by contributing to the renovation of temple which got people behind him and practiced what he preached. As a social reformer and a leader he has lead by example by following dominant values and forms for leadership like integrity, personal sacrifice and parsimony. Though his movement was started more than a decade ago it needs a catalytic event to transform itself into a large social movement but it has managed to put the problem on society's agenda as of now.