

Corruption, an integral part of democracy?

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Democracy is the greatest blessing for mankind. It has freed people from the bonds of authority and has enabled them to assert themselves. It has introduced a system of elections whereby the people manage their own affairs through their own chosen representatives. It has brought into being the concept of free market economy which has enabled individuals to touch the highest horizon if they possess the requisite qualities of leadership.

Yet with all these advantages, what is sapping the vitals of democracy is the basic requirement of elections which are becoming increasingly expensive day by day, and the unlimited freedom breeding lack of discipline and irresponsibility. The result is such election requirements which are forcing the prospective candidates to indulge in malpractices and, as such, large scale and organised misconduct is now becoming a part of democratic systems. The concept of freedom has been stretched to such preposterous limits that even cities like London, Washington and New York which are bastions of democracy, are no longer safe places to live.

John Stuart Mill was convinced that visions of freedom and happiness must be constantly discussed, altered and changed as societies change, lest nations fall into the deep slumber of decided opinions. Unfortunately, democratic societies have grown used to the idea that the bare mechanism of choosing leaders is sufficient to preserve democracy. This is highly fallacious because if society is unable to maintain its moral and spiritual base, qualities of leadership will continue to deteriorate. Democratic societies are confronted with this phenomenon the world over.

One example of unbridled democratic freedom is the working of the Britain's Trade Unions who try to enforce their rules upon their members. In doing so they often come in conflict with the law of the land as even though these rules may be beneficial to the labour or even the Trade Unions but their exercise often interferes with the right of individual liberty. This leads to corruption and misuse of authority too.

of immorality and worthy to be condemned by all good and law abiding citizens has long since been rejected.

In America the rising election expenses have created a strange situation. The Jewish community have turned into kingmakers because of their money, and the entire American nation is being held hostage to their ability to provide enormous amounts of money for the election of key contenders. The corruption of the system has been widely exposed in the Watergate scandal case.

Sweden has always been considered an ideal welfare state. Its citizens pay the highest taxes in the world while its workers put in fewer hours of work each year than their counterparts in even the industrialised world. The result is that the country is passing through one of the deepest and longest recessions among the developed nations.

The position in the East is worse because the democratic system has not been institutionalised and so the level of corruption is much higher while the level of discipline much lower. India, the self-proclaimed largest democracy, has been shaken by a corruption scandal in which the Indian Prime Minister is reported to have taken ten million rupees from Harshad Mehta, a stock broker, as election expenses. The previous Prime Minister namely Rajiv Gandhi was also involved in the Bofors arms scandal and the Nehru family had to face serious criticism on Maruti Motors business.

Japan, the most prosperous Asian country, is also beset with the problems of corruption. The key issue in the July 18 national elections was political corruption. The Liberal Democratic Party, which ruled for 37 years, was charged with corruption and the people believed that it was incapable of cleaning the mess. The Japanese people were the most disciplined people of the world but today they are losing their habits because of electoral corruption and unchecked freedom which are eating into their traditional habits of honesty, hard work and discipline. The problems of Japan are growing in volume and complexity and democracy is unable to solve them despite the fact that the Japanese are freer, happier and more relaxed today because of democracy than they have been ever before. If

proportion as democracy. Deng Zhigang and Wu Jian Chang, the son and son-in-law of the senior leader Deng Xiaoping (who is one of the surviving leaders of the Long March and enjoys very high prestige) are involved in partnerships with some of Hong Kong's biggest investment names. The same is with the sons and daughters of some of the other top ranking mainland officers. The indiscipline is also following in the footsteps of corruption and several uprisings point out towards it.

Ever since Gorbachev's reforms, the surge of democracy has begun to relax Russia also and with it corruption and indiscipline are also making inroads. Though hardly a new phenomenon, bribery and graft have grown very fast. "Corruption is like the air we breath," says Russia's eminent investigative journalist Rutskoi. An avowed opponent of the President says "I want only one thing i.e., to stop this corrupt and criminal practice called reforms." This shows that corruption has now touched such levels that it is not tractable to reforms. The law and order situation is also deteriorating very fast internally and warring between the erstwhile states of the USSR is also on the increase.

The state of affairs in other countries like Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Korea (both North and South), Bangladesh, Thailand, Philippines and other countries trying democracy is also the same.

In addition, another phenomenon is also visible. As democracy is spreading, the leadership in these countries is getting confined to a few ruling families. For example in India it is the Nehru family, in Korea it is Kim Il Sung's son. In Pakistan the contest is still on and whosoever comes to power prefers his near relatives and friends to work in important posts. The result is that the claim to future leadership is now confined mainly to the sons and daughters of those who have held the reins of power. The other class which is rising is the moneyed class and between themselves they have all the plums. Morality, good conduct, sobriety and balance are the casualties in this entire exercise.

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use of authority too.

Apart from the Trade Unions, the tendency to use lawless methods for the attainment of social and political ends has grown in importance in recent years in England. Such law breakers, who are popularly known as passive resisters or conscientious objectors, justify their actions by the nobleness of the aim they strive to achieve. The net result is that the idea that a breach of law is per se an act

excused away because of democracy than they have been ever before. If they do not introduce structural changes in this system, they may find themselves in serious trouble.

China is still passing through a transitory phase. Democracy has not yet taken roots but the wind of democratic change is blowing. People are becoming freer and the market economy is gaining momentum. Corruption and indiscipline are seeping in the life of the Chinese in the same

way as in a normal government. Democracy is the basis. Hence we should be prepared to see corruption and deterioration in the law and order situation as these are necessary concomitants of democracy. However, the elections, will probably throw up mostly those who are demagogues, as the people of Pakistan find themselves with little choice in their selection of competent candidates. It will be a miracle if our democratic system throws up serious people with a high level of integrity and intellect.