

Corruption in Politics: Role of Media

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Abstract

It is often said that India is a rich country with poor people. Reasons are not very complex. It is estimated that more than trillion dollars are stashed away in foreign havens, while 80% of Indians earn less than 2\$ per day and every second child is malnourished. Transparency International's Corruption Index ranks India 95'th in least corrupted countries.

In the early years of independent India, corruption did not draw much attention from ordinary people, although from time to time mainstream newspaper came up with informed coverage of such issues. Unfortunately, the political establishment tended to rationalize the role of corruption in society, with even the leaders like K. Kamraj the personally incorruptible trying to convince the people that corruption and bribing the officials were as old as the scriptures and there could be no solutions for such problems.

The interconnection between democracy and corruption is well known and it has historical roots when a few persons tried quite successfully to control and swindle the national economy by raising the slogan of democracy.

Corruption in Indian politics is widespread; despite this successive governments have not lifted a finger to bring about even minimum reforms to the country's political system.

The decline in moral and values has been noticed long time ago. All values, probity and accountability have been abandoned in the name of development. The cancer of corruption has infected the whole nation. Three public institutions the police, the judiciary and the electorate system need radical surgery from top bottom .If corruption is allowed to sustain itself in the system of governance, indian democracy is in a serious danger of collapsing.

CORRUPTION: A PERSPECTIVE

The roots of corruption are grounded in a country's social and cultural history, political and economic development, bureaucratic traditions and policies. To generalize, it tends to flourish when institutions are weak and economic policies distort the marketplace.

1. Corruption distorts economic and social development, by engendering wrong choices and by encouraging competition in bribery rather than in the quality and price of goods and services and, all too often, it means that the world's poorest must pay for the corruption of their own officials and of multinationals' agents.
2. Moreover, available evidence shows that if corruption is not contained, it will grow. Once a

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pattern of successful bribes is institutionalized, corrupt officials have an incentive to demand larger bribes, engendering a “culture” of illegality that in turn breeds market inefficiency.

3. In its simplest terms, corruption can be defined as the abuse of public power for personal gain or for the benefit of a group to which one owes allegiance. It occurs at the intersection of public and private sectors, when public office is abused by an official accepting, soliciting, or extorting a bribe. As a single transaction, corruption takes place where there is a meeting of opportunity and inclination.

Klitgaard has developed a simple model to explain the dynamics of corruption:

C (Corruption) = M (Monopoly Power) + D (Discretion) – A (Accountability)

In other words, the extent of corruption depends on the amount of monopoly power and discretionary power that an official exercises. Monopoly power is large in highly regulated economies, whereas discretionary power is often large in developing countries and transition economies where administrative rules and regulations are often poorly defined and which are plagued by a weak rule.

Successful strategies to curb corruption will have to simultaneously seek to reduce an official's monopoly power (e.g. by market-oriented reforms), his/her discretionary power (e.g. by administrative reforms) and enhance his/her accountability (e.g., through watchdog agencies). Such strategies comprise a system of checks and balances, designed to manage conflicts of interest in the public sector and limit situations in which conflicts of interest arise or have a negative impact on the common good. They embody a comprehensive view of reform, addressing corruption in the public sector through government processes (leadership codes, organizational change) and through civil society participation (the democratic process, private sector, media).

A complementary schema, focusing on knowledge and data as a prerequisite for anti-corruption strategies, has been proposed by Kaufmann, who states that:

AC (Anti-corruption Efforts) = KI (Knowledge and Information) + LE (Leadership) + CA (Collective Action)

In other words, successful anti-corruption programs (AC) are dependent on knowledge and information (KI) plus leadership (LE) plus collective action (CA).

abilityC (Corruption) = M (Monopoly Power) + D (Discretion) – A (Accountability)

Reform is initiated and supported not only by politicians and policymakers, but also by members of civil society and by the media, generally playing a role in sustaining “most serious cases of entrenched political and bureaucratic corruption.”

ROLE OF MEDIA

Gandhiji said, “My newspapers became for me a training ground in self-restraint and a means for studying human nature in all its shades and variation. Without newspapers, a movement like Satyagraha could not have been possible.

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“A free Press is not a luxury. A free Press is at the absolute core of equitable development because if you cannot enfranchise poor people, if they do not have a right to expression, if there is no searchlight on corruption and inequitable practices, you cannot build the public consensus needed to bring about change.”

— James D. Wolfensohn, President of the World Bank

There is recognition that the media plays two crucial roles in combating corruption. One is in exposing corruption and fraudulent practices in government, private sector and even among civil society organisations. The other is its central role as part of civil society, an important institution in promoting good governance and human rights.

MEDIA AS WATCHDOG

“The notion of the press as watchdog is more than 200 years old. Yet the idea of vigilant media monitoring government and exposing its excesses has gained new traction in many parts of the world. Globalization, the fall of authoritarian and socialist regimes, and the deregulation of the media worldwide have fuelled a renewed interest in, as well as a surge in efforts by various groups to support watchdogging by media.” Sheila Coronel

In new and old democracies, the idea of the media as the public’s eyes and ears, and not merely a passive recorder of events, is today widely accepted. Indeed, the myth of the intrepid journalist doggedly pursuing the trail of wrongdoing remains very much alive, both in the media as well as popular lore. Governments, it is argued, cannot be held accountable if citizens are ill informed about the actions of officials and institutions. Watchdog reporting covers a wide range of different types of journalism. On a routine basis, the watchdog press monitors the day-to-day working of government, thereby helping citizens assess the efficacy of its performance. Reporting that goes beyond what officials or their spokespersons say, to examine government performance, is also a form of watchdogging.

Watchdog journalism is exposure journalism. The ethical standards of the journalist or the quality of the reporting may be high or low. What distinguishes watchdogging is the exposure of wrongdoing in the public interest. Whatever motivates the journalist or the news organization that publishes a muckraking report is not the issue; what matters is that the reporting warns citizens about those that are doing them harm and empowers them with the information they need to know. Watchdogging can be both episodic—as in one-off exposés that may or may not have impact—or sustained, especially where a community of journalists devotes its energies to exposing malfeasance and produces a continuous stream of reports on wrongdoing.

There are cases when reporting on corrupt or ethically questionable behavior does not result in immediate investigations, prosecutions or resignations, but does arouse the ire of the public, which exercises another form of sanction: electoral defeat at the ballot box for a single elected office holder or an entire government. Hard-hitting journalism can also expose flaws in policy, laws or regulation that foster a climate ripe for corruption, thus creating pressure for reform. And even before anything has been published, mere inquiries by reporters about apparent wrongdoing can elicit preemptive

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responses by authorities eager to protect the public image of their institution before any allegations have been aired. Weak political competition generally plays a role in sustaining “most serious cases of entrenched political and bureaucratic corruption. Two other factors closely correlated with high levels of corruption are “low levels of mass participation in politics and weak protection of civil liberties.” Here, a free media, along with an effective parliament and an independent judiciary, is one of the prerequisites for good governance. With regard to curbing corruption, the media has a dual role: to raise public awareness about corruption and to investigate and report incidences of corruption in a professional and ethical manner.

In the present decade, satellites have made it possible for the media to go global, with their broadcasts no longer bound to national borders or decisions.

Information networks allow private individuals to get information and to communicate directly with one another. It is obvious that in the next century transnational media will be a major factor connecting people — but not one we can necessarily see on the town plan.

When the media are working well to prevent corruption, they employ investigative journalism to reveal inequities, and violations and, in an educational sense, reinforce social values that reduce the incidence of corruption in government and business. Relying on freedom of speech, the media perform their watchdog function in society as they curb and expose social injustice.

In an open, pluralistic, democratic and technologically developed society, the media are a particularly effective weapon for exposing and preventing corruption. When the media are working well to prevent corruption, they employ investigative journalism to reveal inequities, and violations and, in an educational sense, reinforce social values that reduce the incidence of corruption in government and business. Relying on freedom of speech, the media perform their watchdog function in society as they curb and expose social injustice.

In investigating one case of corruption, the media uncover other abuses. A corruption charge can also be brought by accident as the by-product of a different case.

“The rise in corruption is a challenge we face. How big the challenge is will depend on how soon and how strongly we decide to oppose it. There is no room for corruption it is as simple as that, not now and not in future”

Corruption impacts everyone; Let us resist, refrain and report corruption.

MEDIA IN INDIA: COVERING OR UNCOVERING CORRUPTION

Press Council of India Chairman Justice Markandeya Katju in his critical appraisal of role of Indian media in addressing real issues before the nation makes rather grim observations. He points out that in a country plagued with poverty, unemployment, malnourishment, illiteracy, severely overburdened. Judiciary, media is not playing its role effectively. Media devotes 90% of its attention to entertainment, cricket, cinema, and only 10% to real issues and larger role of educating masses.

Clearly the debate is commercial interests versus socio-political obligations. Media in order to survive and be independent of state, must work on a sustainable revenue generating model. The thin line

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between journalism as mission and profiteering gets overstepped frequently.

Information allows people to scrutinise activity and is the basis for proper, informed debate on that activity. In this context, the contribution made by journalists is clear: by providing the public with timely and accurate information on the affairs of government, business and special interests, the media can shape the climate of democratic debate and help the establishment and maintenance of good governance. That the media must be able to access public information in order to play this role is today widely appreciated. Freedom of the press, including free access to information, is fundamental to open, democratic society. This view has found its way into international legal norms and, in numerous countries; the media's rights are upheld and guaranteed in freedom of information legislation.

In spite of the international recognition of press freedom, journalists and media organisations throughout the world continue to face obstacles in reporting. Obstruction is reflected in the presence of active censorship or restrictive regulations on journalistic work, limited or blocked access to official information, a legal landscape that inhibits the ability of journalists to inquire and report freely, such as the application of draconian defamation and sedition laws – and a censorious abuse of essential media services, such as broadcasting, printing facilities and distribution systems. In addition, the lack of training, poor professional standards and a dearth of investment into investigative reporting make it difficult and sometimes impossible for journalists to access, impart or disseminate accurate information.

A difficult relationship between journalism and political power is a hallmark of democratic society. To that extent, a tendency to manipulate news and the agenda of public debate exists in all societies. In countries where democratic culture is not well established, restrictions on media tend to be more explicit and profoundly damaging to debate or public engagement. Where the affairs of government or powerful interest groups are protected by secrecy, journalists face considerable obstacles — and physical risk — if they embark upon investigations that could lead to exposing corruption. Yet the media also face challenges within their own ranks. Civil society has been monitoring developments in ownership concentration, the role of advertising and corrupt journalistic practices that undermine the media's ability to adhere to internationally accepted standards. In a drive to gauge the development of sustainable independent media, the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX) evaluates characteristics of the media as well as the political and legal environment in which they operate. IREX applied its first annual Media Sustainability Index (MSI) to 20 : "countries in, Southeast. Europe and Eurasia in. May 2001. Given that the index may be applied to any country or region of the world, IREX 'may expand its application to other regions in the future. = The MSI asked local media professionals and international media development experts to evaluate five key aspects of media systems: the quality of journalism; the legal and regulatory environment; the plurality of news sources; the media's financial sustainability; and the environment of media-related associations, NGOs and unions.

All five aspects of a media system contribute to the media's ability to play its role in combating corruption. Financially stable media are in a position to maintain editorial independence and can afford investigative reporting; free-speech NGOs can support courageous media and journalists who

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take on corruption; and a plurality of news sources means that citizens have access to multiple points of view and that no one source can dominate. Two categories of the index are particularly indicative of how prepared the media are to combat corruption. One measures how well legal and social norms protect and promote.”

CONCLUSION

On these parameters Indian media meets the criterion of playing an active role of watchdog against corruption and grievances of maladministration. Media has largely played the role in exposing scams. Since Jeep Scandal in 1948, to Mundhra scandal 1958 to Bofors, sharemarket scams, NRHM fund scam, 2G spectrum allocation scam in recent times role of media has evolved from reporting to playing an activist role. However, this success is not unqualified. Growing role of political establishment in form of ownership of mediahouses and corporatisation pose threat to independence of content editors. This accounts for selective coverage or blacking out of events, instances of which are abundant. Like in every sphere of life, opposing tendencies co-exist in media, too. By and large Indian media has stood up to the challenges presented before it from time to time. This is borne out also by efforts of successive governments to impose sanctions and curb media freedom.

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