

Make Public Servants account for every paisa that they possess today

- Vijay Shanker Pandey

The fact that the system is ridden with corruption, corruption is increasing with alarming speed, corruption travels from top to bottom, it pays to remain corrupt in the short, as well as in the long run, people are fed up with corruption and want to get rid of it and in no period of our independent existence has any sincere effort to curb corruption been made, are difficult to contradict. Our past experience shows that all the 'systems' set up to check the malaise viz., CVC, Lok Ayuktas, CBI, Vigilance machinery of States, Ombudsmen, etc have failed miserably. This is evident from the fact that the malaise that they were supposed to check has increased manifold since their birth. Even a major initiative like **Right to Information Act**, it seems, may not be able to check the break neck speed with which corruption is spreading its tentacles.

As per the law of the land, it is the duty of every public servant, whether political executive or bureaucrat, to not only remain honest but has to ensure that every one working under him works with utmost integrity (section 3(1)(i) and 3(2)(i) of the Civil Services Conduct Rules). If the above rule is seen in totality, then only those occupying the highest positions in the system are clearly and solely responsible for the present sad state of affairs, and unless they are made to pay for their corrupt practices or non performance, situation cannot be improved for the better.

The basic greed to accumulate more and more wealth, is the key motive behind corruption. Any wrong done or unjust decision taken, leads to addition to the wealth of the person doing the wrong or taking an unjust course. It will be impossible to find a person who keeps taking illegal decisions or does wrong for the heck of it without earning illegal money. He can only be termed a mad person, and our system does not allow mad persons to occupy any public office. Hence, if any such a person is detected, he has to be thrown out. Without motive a person cannot be convicted under our laws. There may be persons who, by their inaction cause loss of public money. They may not be having the motive to accumulate illegal wealth, but the motive to occupy the position of choice for longer duration - becomes the key for their inaction and non-performance. They are also culprits but to a lesser degree as compared to those who plunder public money which they were supposed to use properly, with full integrity and trust.

Now the question is why does the problem of corruption seem so difficult to tackle and what is the solution. The majority of the top positions, barring few exceptions, are presently occupied either by the corrupt or by those who want to occupy the positions at any cost come what may and are willing to do any thing towards that end. They commit all kinds of irregularities, for they are in love with the power to do any thing wrong, because power to do right is not the power of the person but the power of law. Because of the above mentioned reasons, corruption becomes a non issue for them; hence they make no effort to check the malaise, as taking action against the corrupt is like digging their own grave. The other types, which one can call the selfish types, know very well that not doing any thing, can ensure their cozy existence, doing some thing will annoy the corrupt, so the loss of position. It has never occurred to them as to why they are there in the first place and what was their primary duty, which they have long forgotten. Since the farce of accountability has to be maintained, sometimes enquiries are ordered and announcements made that no body is above law and the guilty will not be spared. In most cases the culprit is told quietly not to worry as public memory is short and after some time "the law be allowed to take its course" slogan will be raised. It is also ensured by the powers that be that the enquiries take years to complete which should have been completed in weeks.

Those who are in the know of things understand that truth speaks and speaks loudly. Every piece of paper tells the truth but those who are at the helm of affairs, in most cases, have no intention of knowing the truth. It is their selfish interest which determines what kind of “truth” the public is entitled to know. The ultimate truth is not, who has done what kind of wrong or which decision in which file caused how much loss to the public exchequer or which policy, though promulgated in the name of public, caused how much loss to public interest, but that many of those who have been or at present are at the helm of affairs have hundreds and thousands of crore of rupees of unaccounted wealth, some times even stashed away in foreign banks.

The simple question is that why should any time be wasted in going through the piles of papers and debating over the points whether the decision had the concurrence of ‘x’ authority or ‘y’ authority, or who wrote what in the file or whether norms were followed or not. Why not just ask a simple question from all those who are occupying or had occupied in the past those top or prominent positions, to account for every penny that they possess today. Wealth speaks; no one can silence it. It shows every moment, it talks, it walks. One can hide files or misplace them or burn them but the property created or the wealth accumulated can not be hidden, *nami* or *benami*. Every one in the town, state and the country, except those who ought to know about it, knows who owns what legally or illegally and how much and where. So the simplest way to attack and eliminate corruption is to attack the ill-gotten wealth of all those who were at the helm of affairs. Compulsory verification of the assets of the top functionaries of past and present is the key to solving the problem, a very simple one indeed.

Who will do it? This is the 'million dollar' question. Of course, it is the job of the Government of the day. Logically speaking, if people at the top are honest they will welcome it for such a great cause of getting rid of the problem of corruption. But the reality is different. So it is unlikely to happen easily. Public opinion has to be built for this demand. Public opinion can be built by articulating the demand first and then propagating the idea through holding a series of workshops and conferences across the country, particularly in educational institutions to explain the rationale behind the demand. Those getting associated with the campaign can be requested to articulate the demand at their levels. A series of activities can be generated around this demand. Looking at the prevailing public mood, it can become a mass movement against corruption which will pave the way for compulsory verification of the assets of all those who are occupying or had occupied the top position. To begin with, assets/properties of select few have to be taken up for investigation. Question may be posed to the public to name those whose assets should be taken up for 'public investigation' in the first round or second round and so on, each list to contain not more than 25 to 30 names.

Once possessing wealth disproportionate to the known sources of income is made a liability, majority will start toeing the line. The question whether the system allows any one to do any thing and get away with it or makes him pay for every penny that he earned illegally, that will determine whether corruption can be checked or not.

Many countries on this earth have solved this problem, why can't we?
