

Change the Trend

The word, *corrupt*, comes from the Latin word, *corruptus*, meaning ‘destroyed, broken’. Indeed corruption of various shades has well-nigh destroyed the moral fibre of our country. Since the end of the last World War, countries across the globe have advanced economically and decayed morally. Along with it, extreme wealth accumulation in the hands of a few, especially in the recent decades, has generated social tensions. The so called developing countries like ours are faced with unforeseen inequalities, with no easy solutions in sight. Yet, the erudite planners expect the sea of poverty and ignorance to vanish – nobody knows, how!

Corruption is now *systemic*, an integrated and essential aspect of the economic, social, and political system. In the latest Corruption Perception Index of the Transparency International, India was ranked 95th among 183 countries. A number of scams of astronomical sums are in the glare of media publicity. It is an open secret that a huge portion of the illicit money goes to fund the political process.

Those who adorn the corridors of power in various fields are, with all regards to the exceptions, slaves of greed. They do not care for the toiling millions, the masses of have-nots. The moneyed classes steal their money, running into billions, normally with impunity, while hundreds of ordinary, innocent people linger in jails, thanks to our politicized police forces and lackadaisical judicial system.

Just think of the consequence – the incredibly large population merged in hunger and ignorance! We are a nation of 122 crore, and at least a third of us are terribly poor and devoid of education, health care, electricity, safe drinking water, and sanitation. We may like to be applauded as a rising global power, but, as a matter of fact, we are world famous for high incidence of poverty, child malnutrition, child labour, and child death. The Planning Commission says, 29.8% Indians are under the poverty line. What is their poverty line? If you can spend Rs. 28.35 daily, on an average, living in a city or a town, or Rs. 22.42 in a rural area for everything you need for yourself, you are not poor! So, a village family of four, spending Rs. 2,691 per month, is above the poverty line. Ludicrous on the face of it!

A study says that 40% of the hospitalized people have to borrow money to pay the bills and 23% of the ill never seek medical care. About two-thirds of healthcare expenditures in India are borne by the patients, 70% of which is spent on medicine. Medicines, even life-saving ones, are exorbitantly costly. Now, imagine what happens to a person from a family below the poverty line, if he or she falls seriously ill.

The reader may be reminded of the contrasting fact that 350 of our representatives in the 543-strong Lok Sabha are reportedly *crorepatis*. Their average asset is well above Rs. 5 crore, a fact that led someone to coin a new term for them: *the crorepati club*. A political leader justly asked: how could they be interested in the upliftment of poor people? They have hiked their own salary to Rs. 50,000 per month, apart from allowances worth Rs. 90,000 and facilities like free rail and air travel, free electricity, etc.

The government has several schemes to support the poor, so that they may somehow continue to live, and also to spread a semblance of education. But implementation remains, as usual, shoddy. There is the proverbial inefficiency of the bureaucracy. And every scheme is plagued with malpractices of mind-boggling proportions. The incorrigible CAG has pulled up the government on many counts. But the nexus is too strong. If someone is very honest, efficient, and uncompromising, one must be prepared to face dire consequences.

For the public is not awake of their dignity, nor of their rights and duties as citizens. No lasting solution to the problems of the country will work, until and unless the public are educated in a true sense and become responsible citizens with a public spirit. Since Independence we failed to generate a national will to educate the public.

Swami Vivekananda, and later his follower, Subhas Chandra Bose, foresaw this state of affairs, this chaos, and warned us. Swamiji suggested a master plan to avoid it, and his great followers like Nivedita and Bose repeated the same. That, in short, is *to make a new breed of men and women, truly honest, courageous, intelligent, selfless, and patriotic, who must lead in every aspect of the national life*. We, as a nation, have not heeded and have chosen to follow pseudo-leaders instead, to tread a cozy path.

Now it is late, as the problem has taken gigantic proportions and unbelievable complications. George Washington said, 'It is much easier at all times to prevent an evil than to rectify mistakes.' Yet, rectify we must, for we feel for the nation that lives in the cottages. When the present leadership gives way to newer generations in natural course of time, the same trend must not continue. Let us try hard to cast the new generations in the new mould of the ideas of Swami Vivekananda.