

## **Exploring Hidden Crevices of Integrity**

(An offbeat elucidation- Beyond Vigilance Awareness Week)

rajiv saxena

Superficial awareness (without conviction), like close proximity, has tendency to degenerate into contemptuousness.

The 20<sup>th</sup> Vigilance Awareness Week got just concluded upon, on more gigantic dimensions, with increased media impressions, acquiring concrete structural shape, though on stereotyped patterns and same ritualistic scope. The hitherto adopted routes of vigilance, for tackling corruption, through increasing transparency, doing away discretionary powers, RTI, leveraging technology, etc have yet to yield the desired results; the corresponding dividends are yet to be publicly accepted.

It's time now to review the effectiveness and utility of any such awareness drives, including the paths travelled in the past or the tools adopted to deal corruption, and there very premises for being as effective, need to be introspected now.

The base, all along, for starting & continuing the vigilance awareness, has remained with the 2018 Corruption Perception Index (CPI), published by Transparency International, which placed India at 78th rank, out of a total of 180 countries, and with a score of 41 out of 100, in 2018. No country has been awarded a score above 90, nor has any been rated below 10, with more than 2/3rd countries scoring below 50, the average score being 43. This pattern is more or less true for the last two decades with India's score hovering in the below-average band since the inception of this so-termed, poll of polls.

These communiqués, which are widely accepted as truth, besides being depressing, demoralising, exasperating, have far-reaching ramifications on corruption, providing it unintended conspicuousness over integrity. This begs the key question whether we deserve to be rated so low.

### **The Key Question and Two Real Incidences**

Four years back, during Vigilance Awareness Week-2015, in a seminar on the theme of 'Preventive Vigilance as a Tool of Good Governance', about 20 senior students (PU level), from a prestigious English medium school at Bikaner, spoke for about 2 hours. None of the students, uttered any time the words viz *honesty*, *integrity* or *ethics*- not even on a single occasion. All the speeches and all the communications, during the entire session, were full of perceived instances of bribes, frauds, wrongs, and other ills. Though it was obvious that none of these students had any first-hand experience of corruption, their speeches insinuated that it was omnipresent as air. Their perception about corruption, along with the word itself, was deep-seated and etched upon their hippocampus.

**Perceptions could be treacherous. Perceptions are treacherous here.**

Negative perceptions have the tendencies of proving themselves to be self-fulfilling, doomed prophecies.

In an another incidence, during a social gathering last year, while interacting with a senior RBI official from Mumbai, discussions veered around honesty & corruption in his organisation. His confident response was that his organisation was free of this ill. Even in during deep cross examinations he stood his ground, with his whole body language echoing his conviction.

Whatever is, or be the reality, deep down, a soothing caress of happiness spread, pervaded and surrounded and was perceptible all around. At least, there is one man, residing on this land of 3,287,263 square kilometres, who perceives his organisation as honest and spoke out the same confidently.

Irrespective of the role we take, either of a Doubting Thomas or of an Altruistic Trusty, such testimonies, even from a single person, are one the best tools of anti -corruption drives and they would go a long way in fostering integrity.

**"Truth draws strength from itself,  
and not from the number of votes in its favour."**

**The Veiled Realities**

All surveys, polls, statistics and even apparent facts, could hide as much truth as they reveal. Every day, every hour, every moment, one could see large number of instances of integrity, all around us- be it a vegetable market, a crowded train or in a hospital. This requires shifting the focus of our

eyes to be able to see and tuning of our heart beats to feel the same. We have tutored ourselves and allowed to be tutored long, to become oblivious of these integrities, the scattered honesties and avoiding reality.

This is not just a matter of outlook, but realisation of blind folds and a doctored mindset. India does not need to be so self incriminating and deprecating towards itself.

The existence of high levels of honesty and trust, among mafias, gangsters, thieves, (though for all misplaced goals) can and should never be overlooked. Collusive corruption (the hard nut), surely reflects a pattern of integrity and trust within the corrupts, though the motives are illegal and unacceptable. The fact remains that honesty, integrity, ethics and trust reside in all of us, as otherwise we would not remain human. Maybe honesty is shrouded by the dark smokes created by biased perceptions, incomplete data and even inappropriate approaches adopted in anti-corruption drives. But all this cannot detract from the facts that humans do have the inherent traits of honesty, integrity and trust, many practices them and these values are not to be buried as dead. Attach disproportionately high importance to things such as the CPI, ignore integrity and honesty, and then they wither. Focus on these qualities and encourage people to practise them and they grow. Entire anti-corruption drives and campaigns should be guided by these facts and principles, lest they end up being counter-productive.

The analysis of relevant data of South Western Railway (SWR) for the past two years, leads to interesting findings. More than 3000 vigilance Investigations, have led to disciplinary action only in 500 cases, reflecting that in 16% of the total number of investigations misconduct/corruption was found. Randomness, wide & varied sample basis, and the fact that the cases were dealt by differing investigators, at different periods of time, substantiate the inference on low prevalence of misconduct/corruption among the employees.

The analysis also found that 80% of the complaints were motivated ones, vague or merely an expression or outburst of anger against perceived injustice, with the number of complaints intended to grind one's own axe being more than 50%. The data also pointed out as few as 300 Vigilance complaints are received in a year, in an organisation with an employee strength of 38K . This points out to the contradiction between the reality and the perception. The number of identified employees, in the unpalatable and detested watch lists called Secret List, Agreed List or Suspect lists, also points towards gaps in reality and perceptions. We might be, unknowingly

demonising corruption, generalising & categorising all employees to monstrous levels thereby blinding the reality.

### **The Insights**

The real dreary aspect of this self deprecation is the creation of a cynical mindset among the people that unless one pays a bribe, his work would not get done. This causes increase in corruption. The investigations in the past three years into various recruitment frauds have proved the clear existence of such a negative mindset, thereby gullible people across the length and breadth of the country falling prey to fraudsters, whose modus-operandi includes propagation of 'corruption prevalence theory', exploiting such a mindset.

As per the thumb rule of '20:60:20', the integrity of 20% of employees would remain impeccable while another 20% (or 16%) at the other end of the spectrum, rightly be concentrated upon. However, generalising blindly the remaining 60% on the fence is disastrous from policy, strategic & tactical point of view. Such bracketing leads to "chalet hai" as becoming popular phrase, thereby, officially, misdirecting people move from honesty to dishonesty and leaves us with a rank as low as 78 and a score as poor as 41. These further cause misconceptions and wrong decisions, like encouraging complaint culture, with or without basis. Researches show that a complaining culture reduces overall ethic. Without getting bogged down by misperceptions, we need to move ahead with a paradigm shift in our drives and campaigns against corruption, giving due place and importance for positivity and addressing the basic born traits of human beings. At the same time, it would be naive to infer that all is well on integrity front on SWR or IR or in the country. One bad fish spoils the whole lot. Even, 0.0001 % of corruption, is a stigma and dangerous, as corruption is never benign, but a 100% malignant cancer.

The aim of the above insight is, neither to reduce the efforts against corruption nor to deny the reality. The need to curb, decimate, and eliminate corruption is non-negotiable, now, as well as in future. A continuous, ever-present vigil, round the clock and 24/7/366, against this monster of corruption is essential; but with the right approach, the right focus and appropriate tools.

A few of the areas, needing revisit, are:

### **Transparency - No panacea for countering corruption**

It's easy and fashionable to say that transparency is a solution for corruption. However, transparency, per se, cannot combat corruption. It is

often part of the problem rather than the solution. Neither opaqueness nor nakedness is advisable. A rational level of transparency with right type and quantum of information being given to the persons concerned, depending on the subject matter, is only warranted and permitted by the underlying goals.

### **Technology is not a leveller (from corruption perspective)**

The extreme focus on leveraging technology, as one of the greatest vigilance tools, is dangerous and suicidal. One and all have to realise that, at the core, technology favours the powerful and the wealthy; and it is a handy tool for the corrupt. It is the robustness of the processes (designed from vigilance perspectives) adopted for the technology that would help curb corruption and not the technology per se.

### **Understanding & redefining the boundaries of corruption:**

Corruption (in the context of government or an organisation) is widely defined as misuse/abuse of official powers, for personal gains. The Vigilance operates within the boundaries of so-called 'Presence or absence of Vigilance Angle'. They do not have the same boundaries and bandwidth. The idea remains amorphous. The practical interpretation of 'misuse/abuse' has vast variations. The Prevention of Corruption Act has another trimmed interpretation, to categorise and book a person as corrupt.

On the other hand, the way common public perceives, understands and talks of corruption, is all-encompassing, spanning the entire spectrum of wrongs and ills. Anything not right from one's perspective, gets bracketed as corruption, be it differences in views or grievances (perceived or real), or delays or matters of indiscipline, inefficiencies, incompetence, systems designs/defects, loopholes, injustices (perceived or real), bribes, forgery, frauds, crimes, extortions to cultural variations, loose talks, etc. All become subsets of a single word corruption.

In such a scenario, when a problem is large, common sense tells us to break the monstrous problem in to smaller pieces and resolve them accordingly. Thus realisation, to understand the boundaries, by one and all, is essential.

### **The Law of Attraction & the Law of Concentration:**

The Law of Attraction, whether delusional or not, has great potential to be exploited as an anti-corruption strategy. Simply put, the Law of Attraction

is our ability to attract into our lives whatever we are focusing on. In basic terms, all thoughts turn into reality eventually.

The Law of Concentration has a lot to direct the vigilance awareness events. The Law of Concentration states that whatever you dwell upon grows and expands in your life.

**Trust:**

When a senior tells that (s)he respects the honesty of her/his junior, at least, for the next few hours/ days, that junior, that subordinate would live up to the expectations. If a minister, or the CMD of an organisation, expresses that his organisation is honest, the organisation tends to become more honest. Great organisations, great nations, are built through mutual faith and confidence, not through otherwise.

Obviously, for the effectiveness of the above, it does require that the person speaking such words, must radiate this message with credibility and integrity of Mansa, Vatcha, Karmana (thoughts, words and deeds). Let this awakening be the focus in this 20th year of Vigilance Awareness Week.

While morality is a judgment, it's acceptable when we apply it to actions that are within our control (that is, our behaviour). This area requires character building. Here trust would be the basic ingredient. Wisdom, to differentiate right from wrong, in proper context, would help.

Trust is the biggest killer of corruption.

**That, which you hold, holds you.**

-----