

Lokpal Movement: Unanswered Questions

Author(s): GAUTAM NAVLAKHA

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even if the market price of the vaccine is a fraction of the AMC price. AMC was first used for pneumococcal vaccine research. The vaccine that resulted from this effort prevents just four cases of cough and cold for every 1,000 babies vaccinated and the vaccine costs Rs 1,200 per child at the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) prices. The cost of vaccinating 1,000 children to prevent four cases of pneumonia is Rs 12 lakh. Instead, on an average, treating the pneumonia in four children with the drugs recommended by the WHO would cost only Rs 40.

The money for the vaccine in the AMC must be deposited with the World Bank even before the delivery of vaccine, so the directors of the pharmaceutical do not have to lose sleep about marketing the drug or about withdrawal of orders on account of the low efficacy of the product. The policy drafters understand the government will not be able to foot the hefty bill. The draft, therefore, helpfully suggests "innovative financing" to be able to make the money available to the World Bank upfront. The term "innovative financing" is

GAVI speak and must be understood as such. The Government of India is being urged to issue sovereign bonds in the capital markets so that investors and speculators can put up the money. This is a win-win situation for the pharmaceutical industry and the bond investors – for all, except perhaps the taxpayer. These innovations need careful consideration before this is accepted as a national policy.

Moving Forward

Vaccines have eradicated small pox and it is one of the greatest successes of modern medicine. Characteristics of vaccines in the past have been their low costs and their remarkable cost-effectiveness. The diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis vaccine (DTP) costs less than Rs 15 for all the doses needed to immunise a child. According to the National Family Health Survey, we are not been able to provide this vaccine to half our population. The production of these essential vaccines, inexpensively in our public sector undertakings, was a source of security for the country, at a time when private manufacturers were dropping out of the market

because of the low profitability of these products. The public sector should be what the national vaccine policy supports.

It is no one's case that more expensive vaccines sold by private manufacturers must not be introduced in the public health system in India. However, there must be a transparent evaluation of the need for the vaccine and it must have demonstrable cost-effectiveness. Vaccine policy must enunciate these guiding principles and describe how the evaluation is to be done. Our vaccine policy must look into the health of the children in the country and it should not be overly concerned solely with the viability of the vaccine industry.

This looks like a policy not to have a policy, but to utilise vaccines indiscriminately. If we are being asked to make long-term advance market commitments before evaluating the utility or even the market value of a vaccine, this policy needs a careful scrutiny.

NOTE

- 1 <http://www.slideshare.net/prabirkc/national-vaccine-policy-2011>

Lokpal Movement: Unanswered Questions

GAUTAM NAVLAKHA

Why is it that the Anna Hazare-led movement against corruption does not seek to have the Lokpal cover NGOs, corporate houses and the corporate media?

It would be churlish to dismiss "Team Anna's" mass mobilisation which is an assertion of our collective right to protest. This is especially so in view of the fact that after having waited for four decades, the chances have significantly brightened of the passage of a Lokpal Act by the 15th Parliament. However, it would be naïve not to recognise that corruption is not a life and death matter for most Indians who are fighting for their right to live in dignity.

We have to ask ourselves if the answers to all our woes are subsumed under corruption. Will ending corruption lift people out of poverty? End oppression? Resolve the struggles against land grab? Help ascertain the will of the people in Jammu and Kashmir? Bring the war in Manipur to an end or halt Operation Greenhunt? Stop the

mining juggernaut? End the persecution of minorities at the hands of Hindutva terror?

Let me confine my argument to the fight against corruption that is being projected as being the key demand of people. Even as a bill to fight corruption, the non-state Jan Lokpal draft is a half-measure which feeds, not unjustifiably, into a disdain for politicians and bureaucrats. It aims at stopping ordinary people from getting harassed and cheated by the lower bureaucracy, politicians, etc. But it neither speaks for those who fight hunger or resist the loot of land, forest and water nor, for that matter, targets those who are the biggest beneficiaries of the privatisation of public assets and those who corner public funds.

True, like the Right to Information (RTI) Act, a Lokpal Act too could go some way in empowering citizens. But just as the campaign for RTI then dismissed the proposal to bring NGOs under the purview of the RTI, even this time all versions of the non-state Lokpal bill/s exclude NGOs from the purview of the Lokpal. This exclusion is not innocent. So too the exclusion of corporates and the media.

Gautam Navlakha (gnavlakha@gmail.com) is a member of the People's Union for Democratic Rights, Delhi.

The argument is that the authorities, through the Foreign Currency Regulation Act and other laws, already have oversight over the NGOs and that bringing them under the Lokpal would add to burdening the latter with additional responsibilities as well as increase the government's harassment of funded NGOs. As for corporate bodies, they have by and large passed the onus for ending corruption on to the politicians or, in some cases, they have said that industry should self-regulate its activities. In other words, corporates too must be exempt from public scrutiny. But corporations are not mere victims of graft, they are active and willing participants, if not the initiators of this loot. What else explains the underpricing of public assets sold to Indian big business houses? And corporate houses do concoct schemes for looting public assets and tempt politicians and bureaucrats with bribes. So they are not just victims but aggressors, so well exemplified by the role of big business houses in the 2G scam. Furthermore, bribe takers float companies with their loot and/or invest in established companies, as Pramod Mahajan did in the early 2000s Reliance Communication scam where as union telecommunications minister Mahajan got a huge number of shares.

As for NGOs, a large number of them are recipients of corrupt money, like the Kanimozhi-run NGO. Thus, the corporations whose nexus with politicians and bureaucrats in the age of neo-liberalism has meant a colossal loot of public funds and assets; the corporate media – especially the electronic version – whose involvement in scams as cyphers for the powerful and the privileged surfaced last year; the NGOs who work in the public domain – they are all reluctant to be accountable to the public in whose name and interest they claim to be engaged.

As for corporate entities, by which logic do we leave them out when public utilities are/and have been privatised? And in the name of public-private partnerships, the biggest transfer of public funds to the private sector is taking place, be it in education, health, surface transport or highway construction. Public funds are used for privately owned/managed public projects or public land is virtually gifted to hospitals and educational institutions or sold at a fraction of its market cost, only to see the institutions deny free medical assistance to the common man and

woman and deny seats to the children of "lesser mortals". Are all these not corrupt practices, among other crimes?

Take the case of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI). All of us know it is a cesspool of corruption. Many of those who speak in the public domain as "neutral" commentators/observers actually enjoy lucrative contracts with the BCCI to act as its public relations personnel. Corporate houses which are involved with the BCCI are also privy to decisions taken by the board, which is a source of great financial benefit to them as owners of the Indian Premier League teams. They too have taken shelter behind the fact that the BCCI does not take money from the government and it therefore owes no explanation to the public. But the BCCI wraps the tricolour around itself to promote itself as a team representing India, and yet the Indian public is denied oversight over the BCCI. Does this not suffice to bring them under RTI and Lokpal Acts?

Take another aspect. All listed companies by the sheer fact of participating in the capital market raise some of their funds from institutions which hold public money. They either raise debt from banks, insurance companies, pension funds, etc, in which public money is deposited or raise money from the so-called capital market where public money in the form of mutual funds is invested in equity. Why should corporations therefore be excluded from the Lokpal?

We have had corporate honchos in Parliament; now we have politicians who have become corporate entities such as YSR's son Jagan Reddy who has amassed wealth to the tune of Rs 43,000 crore, according to the Central Bureau of Investigation, in just seven years, after declaring income of a few lakhs in 2004. Just consider the staggering scale of bribe taking/giving and it becomes abundantly clear that politicians like YSR made thousands of crores and the companies they benefited made 10 times more. Why should an ordinary citizen not have some right to protest against such forms of corporate loot?

What about the corporate media? There are many media houses which have received huge investments from companies which have been implicated in one or the other scams. Could these media houses ever be in a position to bite the hands that feed them and expose their wheeling and dealing? Look at how NDTV buckled and suppressed

news of the attack by the Adani group hoodlums on its own reporters who were investigating the destruction of mangrove forests in Kutch recently? Look at also the timidity displayed by Times Now anchors when faced with corporate honchos or right-wing rabble rousers such as the Shiv Sena or Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) activists and leaders – fawning and deferential in contrast to their aggression against human rights activists and centre-left politicians. Look also at how reporters were editorialising during Anna's fast as though their job description said that they were to help in managing if not manufacturing opinion in favour of Anna rather than report. And through this entire period of a heightened sense of fight against corruption not once did they show concern for the corporate media's own role in the 2G scam and its implications for their role in informing the public. Why does the media cry "public interest" when they are threatened with censorship, but claim privacy and secrecy when it comes to public accountability?

Role of NGOs

Consider this as well: Out of 4.3 lakh registered NGOs more than 70% are religious NGOs: Hindu, Christian and Muslim, in that order. Some of these religious NGOs do not restrict themselves to working in religious affairs but work to poison our body politic. Now for Anna Hazare and his group as well as the National Campaign for People's Right to Information, Loksatta, etc, it is alright if such NGOs continue to receive funds and do divisive work. In order to save their own socially conscious type of NGOs from coming under scrutiny they would prefer that everyone escape scrutiny! For instance, the RSS has floated thousands of NGOs. Surely Indians have a right to know who funds these bigoted organisations and what kind of activities they are engaged in? Let us recall the role that these RSS-floated NGOs played between 1983 and 1993 in nearly wrecking the country and begetting Muslim radicalism. Can we allow the acts of omission and commission of the State or the nexus between RSS fronts and agencies of the State to be left out of public scrutiny? We should not forget that the government of another doyen of anti-corruption, V P Singh, suspended an income tax commissioner who had the effrontery to serve the Vishwa

Hindu Parishad notice for gross and serious violations in tax returns? Thus, this mollycoddling by successive parties and now at the hands of the social movement to continues. So if the objective of fighting corruption is to bring about an end to extortion and harassment in our public life it also means that there must be some accountability of all those who work in the public domain.

What is intriguing is also the silence of acolytes of the Anna Hazare group over the pro-state leanings of "Team Anna" as is clear from Section 29(12) of the Jan Lokpal Bill which says,

The appropriate bench of the Lokpal shall be deemed to be designated authority under Section 5 of the Indian Telegraph Act empowered to approve interception and monitoring of messages or data or voice transmitted

through telephones, internet or any other medium as covered under the Indian Telegraph Act read with Information and Technology Act 2000 and as per rules and regulations made under the Indian Telegraph Act 1885 (*Times of India*, 30 August 2011).

Why do they want to create yet another "big brother" watching and monitoring our activities and invading our privacy? Is it not enough that nine central government departments enjoy this authority along with multiple private agencies operating clandestinely?

Thus, one section of the social movement stream, in the name of strengthening democratic institutions, participates in policymaking closely aligned with the ruling government, frowns on prolonged mass mobilisation and considers it a form of "blackmail". The other uses street power,

which from behind the scene is aligned to the opposition BJP, takes half-measure and elevates them to the level of a panacea. But both show their limitations of being no better than wanting to reform and strengthen the present status quo, while escaping public oversight of their funded activities in the public domain.

The Achilles heel of the social movements against corruption, consequently, is the promotion of a narrow vision for fighting corruption by leaving out NGOs, corporate houses and corporate media and an illiberalism for demanding the right to snoop. So unless the ambit of the debate and thus the understanding of the issue are widened, expectations of accountability and transparency in our public life may remain only partially realised.

Inequality and Exclusion: As If the System Mattered

V ANIL KUMAR

The study of exclusion in social terms by itself is inadequate. Any attempt to understand and explicate exclusion either historically or contemporarily has to pay attention to interdisciplinary approaches. This note emphasises that the approach should be via understanding the operation of economic forces in particular and interdisciplinarity in general.

This was presented at the International Seminar on "Social Exclusion: Meanings and Perspectives" held by the Centre for the Study of Social Exclusion and Inclusive Policy, University of Hyderabad, during 23 to 25 of March 2011. I would like to thank the organisers of the seminar for having given me the opportunity to participate.

V Anil Kumar (anilkumar@isec.ac.in) is with the Centre for Political Institutions, Institute for Social and Economic Change, Bangalore.

The predominantly postmodern enthusiasm to view exclusion in terms of "social" categories is fundamentally mistaken; both historically and contemporarily. I say this partly against my own belief. The study of exclusion in social terms by itself is inadequate and as such the approach should be via understanding the operation of the economic forces in particular and interdisciplinarily in general. The causal factors for exclusion in social terms lay largely in the economic and thereby political realms.

This proposition is not new. The postmodern imagination wants us to believe that inequality, exclusion and exploitation lay basically in non-economic realms. This also requires one to define what "social" itself is. If the term is taken in its broadest sense it includes the economic realm as well; but taken in a restrictive sense, it can mean social categories that insufficiently point to the major fault lines of any society. At the root of this problem is the dispensation that Jean-Francois Lyotard (2001) famously put, "I define postmodern as incredulity towards meta-narratives". The

point is that the meta-narratives of earlier times have become sources of unjust power. But the question is, can we at all do without some or the other meta-narrative in talking about exclusion. This is particularly so in countries that have a vast section of poor and marginalised people. Any attempt at chalking out marginalisation in this context leads to its material causes. But of course – and at this point the postmodern approaches are relevant – that marginalisation does not stop there. Therefore, any approach to understand and explicate exclusion, either historically or contemporarily, has to pay attention to interdisciplinary approaches.

Interdisciplinary Approaches

Here we can take the example of Amartya Sen's work (Sen 2000). Sen has firstly made a useful observation that the concept of social exclusion and the use of it lacks a certain discipline. The plasticity of the concept means that virtually any form of deprivation can be called social exclusion. While he recognises that social exclusion can be caused owing to multiple reasons, he also warns against undisciplined rhetorical use of the phrase; however important the uses of rhetoric may be. While saying the above, he has made four subtle distinctions about the concept: social exclusion as (a) constitutive; (b) instrumental; (c) active; and (d) passive. Sen has appreciated the concept