

# My Call

by Biraja Mahapatra

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# PREFACE

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**M**y Call is based on an idea supported by a good number of people for a good period of time that I know. Since I wanted to make it an original writing exercise where I speak from my heart for the common-man, I discussed various issues with a select group of friends time and again and we have named the group as "Build India Group". The inputs from the said meetings, my memory, and random thoughts form the core contents of the present work.

We do not have a national festival except for January 26 and August 15. These two festivals are more in the nature of official festivals. Sixty years have passed since we won our independence but we do not have a National Pledge worthy of the name. A National pledge envisages commitment, love and loyalty of an individual to his country. Can we combine these two: i.e. National Pledge and the National Festival and make it "National Pledge Festival".

It feels great to say that the response has been a resounding "yes" as most people feel that this is going to create a wave of nationalism and love for the country. It is my belief that a strong sense

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of nationalism will help us shape our national character. It will help strengthen the country from within. This will work as a great force against terrorism and corruption.

For the last several years, I have been feeling that India is a country of god-fearing people. It is home to many religions, diverse cultures, languages and habits. But after independence in 1947, hardly we have done anything to unite the whole country emotionally. My 73-year-old mother even today says nothing could be a greater religion than loving your country, soil and the land and that is India. While writing this small book, I have already had encouragement from her. Every time I spoke to her over the telephone, she would ask me how far I had progressed with my work. With the power of her affection and blessings, I gathered courage to talk about my idea with a number of people from various parts of the country. There is not even scope here for me to name all those with whom I talked about it. Some times I had written some inputs on small pieces of papers and newspaper clippings without consciously noting down the datelines or even addresses as it was not a planned attempt to write a book. Such was my single minded devotion to a pledge for India. My group of seven friends and colleagues Sudha Passi, Gautam Basu, Avtar Nehru (all journalists) Shanmugha Patro, Nishant Dutta, Kiran Patra (all lawyers) and Nabajyoti Das (management consultant) never knew that I was to attempt writing this book. They had been frank with me and attended meetings diligently; and actively participated in brain storming sessions. R.C Rajamani, editorial consultant with The Statesman, journalist friend C.S.Rajnarain, friend Surya Prakash Loonkar, publisher S.D.Singh have immensely encouraged me in my efforts. The biggest, although unsung, contributor to this effort was my wife, Kuni, for being steadfastly beside me through this Endeavour from the time I conceived this book to when I gave it tangible form maybe a decade later.

It sounds like a fairy tale for me when we thought of a national festival of people of all faiths on a particular day and all over the country in unison. For me it is like a dream. For my friends like

Nishant Dutta, Prasant Verma, S K Rout, it is a magic. If this is magic and likely to work in the interest of the nation then this is for you.

Hence this work is dedicated to you all Indians who love this country. This is the reason why the book begins with a personal letter to you with an expectation that you will join us start a new movement for the greater glory of this land.

# TO ALL YOU CAMPAIGNERS...

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*T*his is my personal missive to you. I want you all to join me as a 'Campaigner'. Would you like to know who or what a 'Campaigner' is? Let me first tell you about the people who have joined me.

A group of eight persons sharing a common love for their country met on several occasions with an open mind and plenty of zeal to discuss what ails the country today. They tried to understand what exactly were the impediments that came in the way of India realising its destined potential... of India emerging as the leader of the comity of nations in the new millennium. Of becoming the superpower that it holds promise of....

Perhaps the biggest problem, the eight agreed unanimously, in the way of India achieving its potential to the fullest — being one of the oldest and greatest civilizations in the world — is CORRUPTION.

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Corruption breeds corruption. It sustains and feeds on itself. It grows incessantly. It spreads swiftly and unerringly to infect all those who come in contact with it. Corruption has an addictive effect on human beings and turns them greedy, immoral, self-serving and inefficient. Corruption also facilitates terrorism, militancy and all forms of anti-national activity. And terrorism has managed to spread its tentacles as surely and swiftly as it has because of our lacking an individual attachment, as "Indians", to this realm that our Constitution calls "India that is Bharat".

This group of eight — the Founder Campaigners — comprises, besides myself, my friends and colleagues Sudha Passi, Gautam Basu, Avtar Nehru (all journalists) Shanmugha Patro, Nishant Dutta, Kiran Patra (all lawyers) and Nabajyoti Das (a management consultant).

Every time we met over the last several months we brainstormed, evaluated our thoughts and analyzed our views dispassionately to arrive at the consensus that in whatever we do to rid us of this ailment of corruption, the nation's interests must be kept paramount.

We discussed and debated the entire gamut of issues which involve corruption at its core. In the following chapters I have raised many of these problems and issues plaguing India. The eight of us agree that there is a simple solution at hand for all these problems. We agreed, but will you? Through these pages I invite you to ponder the problems and the solution that we have proffered. In the process I hope and believe many of you will agree with us.

In the course of these discussions, the Founder Campaigners have unanimously agreed that a "National Pledge" would serve as an effective instrument to bind the country with the fabric of unity. The pledge programme has to be a national festival to be celebrated simultaneously all over the country. We do not have a national pledge for Indian citizens. The two national days – January 26 and August 15 – are not celebrated as family festivals all over the country. These

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two festivals have been reduced to formal official programme only.

We believe that the National Pledge Festival can succeed where many other such well-meaning initiatives have failed; that these can bind us emotionally and help strengthen our national integration.

We also believe that if even 10 million out of India's one billion people take the Pledge, it would begin a slow but sure and irreversible process towards India's transformation. If members of the Indian Armed Forces, the student and teacher community, lawyers, doctors, engineers and other professionals, and every one else joins the movement for the National Pledge, and if the media performs even a fraction of the role that it had played, say, for the cause of Independence during the Freedom Struggle, I am sure that the Pledge will emerge as a viable and effective solution against the twin evils of corruption and terrorism that our society could do without.

The simple solution lies in all Indians from all corners of the country — Kashmir to Kanyakumari and Kohima to Kutch — taking this National Pledge in unison at an appointed hour to signal their commitment to their country. If such a thing is possible even once, the consequences could go beyond the imagination.

The point I wish to make is, yes, we can! We are convinced. We are convinced about the far-reaching and boundlessly curative effects of the Pledge. We believe that the National Pledge can be the panacea to almost all the problems, that plague our country today. We also believe that the National Pledge can galvanise the people of this nation into not only solving many of these problems but also looking beyond. Looking beyond to a corruption- and terrorism-free India that we can leave as a deserving legacy for our children.

The following pages will also convince you about the viability of our mission. Once you have read this, I invite all my readers to prevail upon their friends, neighbours and relatives to join the

chorus that will one day echo the voice of a New India.

And what do you have to contribute to be a partner in this great cause? You can be a 'Campaigner' by merely willing to spare only a few minutes of your time in joining the rest of us Indians in taking the National Pledge in unison at the appointed moment. But this has to come from within. I shall attempt to explain the modalities the way I perceive them in the pages that follow.

Today we are eight. Tomorrow we will be 80. The day after we could be eight lakh, followed by eight million or even eighty million. Our confidence about this stems from the fact that every Indian is at heart very loyal to his country. Most Indians, in fact, revere the soil of this land as "Bharat Mata". Even if one does not treat this country as a mother or a deity, it does not mean that he does not love this country. If someone does not share the same sentiment, the spirit of Indian-ness can be inculcated even as a matter of duty or patriotic loyalty. Do you agree with this? If yes, you too are a potential Campaigner.

Every Indian, we believe, is a potential Campaigner. **For Campaigners are, if anything at all, exemplary in their love and loyalty to Bharat.**

You do not need certification to be an Indian if you love your country. And if you do, please ask your friends, relatives and acquaintances to spare only a few minutes of their time to join this "BIG" movement for a National Pledge.

# THE “BIG” MOVEMENT

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“*B*IG” stands for “Build India Group”. Today it is a team of eight people. But the idea stems from bigger aspirations about the future of our country. My friends are overwhelmingly in favour of this name, because they feel it aptly describes the purpose of our mission. The BIG Movement for the National Pledge aims at inculcating in Indians a sense of being Indian. It seeks to make the National Pledge a unique instrument safeguarding the nation from within against all anti-national activities, including corruption. It is a ‘big’ movement in the real sense of the term since it aims at taking every Indian citizen along with it. This way, it could one day culminate into the biggest movement India has ever witnessed in its history. Thus BIG is both a mission and a movement.

The BIG Movement envisages that each citizen must discharge the fundamental obligations in his everyday life while ensuring that his love and loyalty to the country is not affected. And that each Indian must pledge this love and loyalty to the nation demonstratively. To do this, Indians must vow to go about their lives and professions

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while keeping the national interest paramount.

The thought is not new. But the way we want it practiced is perhaps unique.

The Build India Group propounds, as an integral part of its philosophy, a National Pledge Day (NPD). This NPD is to be one of the most sacred institutions of the Republic, observed on the lines of Independence Day and Republic Day. The programme has to be a participatory one involving all Indians irrespective of faith, religion, language, ethnicity and culture.

On this National Pledge Day, the whole country shall reverberate with a wave of patriotism and nationalism as Indians in unison will affirm their love and loyalty to the country. The members of BIG are unanimous in their opinion that such a programme will elevate itself into a national festival.

The Build India Group believes that the National Pledge shall be a unique instrument to promote the unity and integrity of the country and build a strong bulwark against the growing tide of corruption, terrorism and other anti-national activities that involves not only international criminals and the mafia but also, unfortunately, fellow Indians. This will not only ostracize anti-Indian elements from society but also create a swelling surge of hatred against corruption from within our society and promote a rejuvenated and healthy work culture.

Millions of us go to temples, mosques and churches every day. Can we not spend just a few minutes in the name of this country for this Pledge? BIG shall endeavour to ensure that we can. That is why it is a mass movement, a reformist campaign and a nation-building force rolled into one.

Just a few minutes can change a nation!! And this change shall begin with all you people who love this country. It is you who will

be our Campaigners. For, if you love your country you are deemed a worthy Campaigner. Read on, and join hands!

With love,

**Biraja Mahapatra**

# IIS INDIA STILL DIVIDED

**Dear campaigners!**

*I*n 1947, India underwent a major political change. King's rule became a thing of the past. British rule went into the annals of history. People's rule was ushered in. We got a country of our own. We got freedom and independence. We got global recognition. We gave ourselves a democracy, a great territory; inherited a vast cultural heritage and a rich tapestry of languages. And three years later we gave ourselves an excellent working constitution.

But, accept it or not, we failed to give ourselves one thing. We failed to give ourselves a national character ... a sense of being Indian.

Every Indian has to have an intoxicating desire of being just that. As long as we do not develop this, we remain divided. Historically this has been the main reason behind our thousand years of enslavement.

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Why could we not become an independent state earlier? Let us look at our history. Questions galore emerge. Why has India remained divided? What is this India? Is it just a geographical entity? Is it a mosaic of small and big kingdoms? What was the common man's equation with the state machinery? What did the transition to independence mean to the common man who lives in the village and may not even know who Mahatma Gandhi or Jawahar Lal Nehru or BR Ambedkar were?

The Ramayana and the Mahabharata are the two epics that gave a contour to our geographical territory. We only learnt from the Puranas that this entire land was named "Bharata" after the great king of Hastinapur. Bharata was a great warrior king born to Raja Dushyanta of Hastinapur and Shakuntala, who was brought up in the ashram of Rishi Kanva. As the story goes, Raja Dushyanta fell in love with Shakuntala during a hunting trip. He married her at the ashram and promised to take her back as his queen to the palace. After Dushyanta left, Rishi Durvasa arrived at Rishi Kanva's ashram. Shakuntala, distracted by her love for Dushyanta, did not give Durvasa the attention that he desired. An infuriated Durvasa cursed her saying "if you could forget to serve me, you will also be forgotten by the one who you love the most". Shakuntala gave birth to a lovely and brave child even as Dushyanta forgot her just as the rishi had said. Shakuntala named the boy "Bharata".

Dushyanta may have forgotten his wife as a result of the curse but he recognized his son a few years later on another hunting trip. The little prince was, to the astonishment of his father, was playing with a lion cub. He was counting the number of the cub's teeth as a doting Shakuntala looked on. A happy family reunion followed. The little prince Bharata grew up to become a great and benevolent king of India.

There are several stories like this about one king uniting many Indians under him. But there is no story about India or Bharata being a single political entity at any point of time in history. Ordinary

individual remained either under the suzerainty of the king, local chieftain or the foreign ruler. Conservatism, religious chauvinism, caste-ism, unequal distribution of wealth, superstitions, poor work culture and the absence of able leadership for management of resources and manpower have been ailing our society right from the period of Aryanisation till today.

My intention is not to narrate history elaborately but take a re-look at history to understand the problems that we Indians are facing today. Over a period of a thousand years we have developed a slavish mindset and independent thinking has been paralyzed with an acquired mindset.

India was a mosaic of over 500 kingdoms with distinct cultures, languages, social rituals, food habits and behaviours before 1947. Small kingdoms used to fight among themselves. Palace conspiracies titillated the common man just like Bollywood does today. Royal murders and conspiracies, royalty's love for lust, the fear of the common man to express his opinion, conservative family systems and lack of mass education have been the basis of our mindset. This mosaic of kingdoms has faced cultural and social onslaughts from the time of the Indus Valley Civilization till the formation of the Independent India. Centuries of turmoil and fraternal conflict among the kings to establish their supremacy provided invaders from abroad a tempting invitation to come to India time and again.

The Aryans arrived 3500 years ago. They came, they fought and they conquered the land. They adopted it as their home. They enriched its culture, and turned into true sons of the soil. This great land also accepted them as its children. Civilization progressed, so did the study of science, ayurveda and mathematics, along with the flowering of indigenous literature.

The Aryans also gave this land a new religion, which had no name in the beginning but centuries later was christened Hindu for purposes of identification. The Aryans introduced the caste system

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on the basis of distribution of work. Over the next 700 years they advanced further south and east. There were hostilities among the Aryans and locals as the former sought out new settlements. The fights continued for centuries till the Aryans established their dominance over all the indigenous people of northern and western India.

More than a thousand years after the Aryans came, India saw another invasion. The Macedonian conqueror Alexander the Great defeated King Puru after marching into the Indus Valley in 326 BC. The northwestern border was opened up for foreigners for all time to come.

The Aryans expanded their territory with the intent of settling down permanently and building their own civilization. India remained divided into hundreds of small principalities till the next imperial dynasty emerged — that of Chandragupta Maurya. After winning over the kingdom of Magadh (present-day Bihar) from the Nandas, Chandragupta Maurya built a large and powerful empire that stretched from Assam to Kandahar (Afghanistan). This was perhaps in its day the largest imperial domain in the world, and one of India's greatest royal dynasties. Under Ashoka the Great (268-231 BC), the Mauryan empire stretched across nearly the entire subcontinent extending as far south as Mysore.

Ashoka conquered Kalinga (present-day Orissa) after an ensanguined battle on the banks of the Daya river in 261 BC. His army shed so much blood — the apocryphal count is 1,00,000 men, women and children in the span of a day — that a repentant emperor gave up the path of violence forever to embrace Buddhism, and by extension, Ahimsa.

In those days Brahmanism, the prevalent social order was replete with social inequities among the castes. This socio-economic discrimination drove non-Brahmins, particularly those perceived to be of the lower order, to the Buddhist fold in large

numbers. Buddhism espoused no caste and preached a simplistic faith in the language of the common man, Pali. And it attracted even more followers after the emperor himself patronized it. Along with Buddhism, Jainism — another contemporary religion — also grew in popularity. These faiths propounded by two of the greatest seers of ancient India, Gautama Buddha and Vardhamana Mahavira, received widespread acceptance. Probably, an excess of ritualism and orthodoxy in the prevailing religious ethos of the Aryan era spurred this egalitarianism. Religious beliefs underwent a great churning with the introduction of two new philosophies. India gave to the world the twin lights of peace and non-violence.

The resurgence in faith and advancement in social institutions continued till it reached a pinnacle under the glorious rule of the Guptas. The Gupta era, known as the “Golden Age of Ancient India”, witnessed holistic progress in every field of human endeavour, including flourishing of the arts and architecture, advancement in science and technology, and the robust growth and development of imperial and democratic institutions. However, after 250 years of nourishing a remarkable renaissance, the wheel came full circle and the Guptas too inevitably declined.

The empire of Harshavardhana, during which time India once again served as a beacon to the Orient (Huiyen Tsang called the land the light of the East), emerged as the imperial successor to the Guptas. Between the 7th and 9th Century the light that emanated from the halo that was India faded somewhat. During these three hundred-odd years, kingdoms came and kingdoms went without leaving much of an imprint beyond their fiefs. Social stagnation, weakening of the once-mighty centralized institutions such as the imperial palace and army, religious orthodoxy and a listless economy marked the history of India during this period when vassals fought against each other at the cost of the common man. This was the time when the Arabs and the Ottomans, rejuvenated by the rapidly expanding reach of Islam, set their eyes on a decadent yet rich India.

A divided India had become a soft target for ambitious raiders who dared. Mohammad bin Qasim was the first Muslim ruler to realize the importance of winning the riches of India. He conquered Sind in 712 AD but failed to move beyond. Mahmud Ghaznavi came to India to loot and despoil more than a dozen times in 25 years since 1000 AD. It is said that every cobblestone and marble slab in his capital Ghazni was paid for from the pillage of Indian cities. In one of the worst sequences of plunder in recorded history, Mahmud depleted town after town in repeated raids that unleashed a reign of terror on every occasion.

Mohammad Ghori looked beyond mere plunder; he envisioned an Islamic empire in this land of flowing milk and honey. Thwarted by Prithviraj Chauhan of Delhi in 1191 AD, it took Ghori barely a year to come back and conquer the very victors who now chose to defeat themselves. Jaichand of Kannauj, smarting over Prithviraj's elopement with his daughter Sanyogta against his will, did not assist the brave Rajput in the Second Battle of Tarain in 1192. When one of your own becomes an enemy, he is to be wary of like no other. The betrayal by Jaichand is a classic example of how Indians have always brought their differences to the fore at crucial moments of history at irreparable cost to themselves.

Mohammad Ghori's pillage and plunder sowed the seeds of a sense of suspicion and hatred that Indians have had against foreign invaders. After Ghori's death in 1206, one of his slaves-turned-generals, Qutubuddin Aibak, founded the Slave Dynasty, the first Muslim imperial power centred in India. And after 300 years of the Delhi Sultanate, came the era of the mighty Mughals.

While northern India was at the mercy of wanton attacks from across the north-west frontier since the turn of the Millennium, the South remained unmolested for large swathes of time. It was not until the third Grand Mughal, Akber the Great (1556-1605), that the Deccan was annexed, and made a part of Delhi's vast imperial hinterland.

In the medieval era, India endured severe socio-political turmoil. In their pursuit to expand Islam while destroying India's traditional religions and faith, most of the first six Grand Mughals earned the unenviable reputation of being thoroughly detested by the majority of their subjects. While on the one hand Akber won the hearts of Indians by reaching out to all faiths and marrying into Hindu royal families, and Shah Jahan gifted the nation a monument of love such as the Taj Mahal, Aurangzeb put many native princes and seers to the sword and even incarcerated his father in his last days.

I do not think Islam or any other religion advocates violence. But medieval Indian history is nevertheless littered with tales of betrayal, greed, murder and mistrust. The enemy from within became the most common conundrum in political and stately matters. This mistrust of one's own perpetrated a cult of corruption and falsehood that has over the centuries pervasively spread its roots into the very body politic of our society.

Islam may not preach violence without cause but many emperors spread violence in its name. Indian monuments were ravaged and thousands were forced to convert. Sycophancy at the cost of communal peace sowed even more seeds of mistrust among the people. The social hiatus between different faiths and classes — which for centuries had lived amicably — widened. Royalty was distanced from the ruled. Those with access to the nobility became the new haves, and they prospered at the cost of the innocent but less privileged.

According to the theory of Social Contract of French philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau, kingship emerged from man's collective desire for security. The king was the one in whom the people reposed their faith. In medieval India, the king became a totem of the opposite; he ruled in spite of the lack of faith in him, by virtue of sheer force and tyranny. The battle for the durbar became, by extension, a battle between Islam and native religions.

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This was the age of the Industrial Revolution in Europe, followed by aggressive mercantilism. Europe emerged from its own Dark Age, priming for global dominance by virtue of its mastery of the seas. Hungry for the riches of the Orient, with a nouveau riche mercantile class craving for the luxuries and spices that India was famed for, a powerful but poor Europe soon turned its eyes on a divided but an affluent sub-continent. The more adventurous of the Atlantic seabed nations, England and Portugal, unleashed a hitherto unknown "financial terrorism" on the subcontinent. Under the guise of commerce, English and Portuguese adventurers conquered large stretches of India over the 16th and 17th centuries and economically impoverished their populations. This was probably the most insidious form of terrorism that India had ever faced.

No period in Indian history was more conducive for a European conquest than the later medieval era. With the once-mighty Mughal firmly on the decline, satraps and vassal states bickered bitterly amongst themselves. Many of them literally invited the Europeans to settle their own scores, little realizing that the British, Portuguese and French were simply marking up their own. While Mir Zafar betrayed Siraj-ud-Daulla to Robert Clive in Bengal, Lord Wellesley throttled Tipu Sultan of Mysore in connivance with the Nizam of Hyderabad and the Peshwa. The story unfolded similarly everywhere. Mir Zafar lasted only a few years as puppet Nawab while the Marhattas were decimated and the Nizam emasculated by the ever-growing Company Bahadur.

But for a few hiccups, the British had it easy. In fact, never did the East India Company have to deploy more than 300,000 white troops in its entire Indian domain at any one point of time. Each time the British went to war, a neighbouring native prince extended active assistance little realizing that he would be the next one for slaughter. And if military exploits were not enough, diplomatic machinations such as Wellesley's Subsidiary Alliance and Dalhousie's Doctrine of Lapse would do in the few native principalities that dreamed of holding their head high. By 1857, exactly a hundred years after John

Company became Company Bahadur on the mangroves of Plassey, the British ruled, directly or indirectly, more than two-thirds of this vast sub-continent from Attock to Arakan and Kashmir to Kandy.

And what was the lot of the common man during the first century of British imperialism in India? Like always, the average Indian had little to be happy about with his master, be it native or alien. Poverty, hunger and taxes were the only certainties of life. As kingdoms changed hands, the common man jumped from the frying pan to the fire. If the arrogant native king considered himself to be the representative of God and left the common man to his lot, the British Regent bled him white to fill the hulls of the Company's England-bound ships. In the native fiefs sloth, greed and ineptitude marked the ruling class and slavery and sycophancy were the cornerstones of anarchical governance. In the Company Bahadur's administration unbridled power without responsibility was marked by an unrelenting drain of resources and Draconian laws.

In 1858 India came under the British Crown. Queen Victoria became Empress. For the next 100 years Muslims, who had been the privileged class for centuries, suddenly found themselves ignored and sidelined. Native Hindu and Muslim princes were reduced to mere agents of the British Empire, assigned the task of collecting taxes in lieu of petty platitudes and facetious citations from the Crown. The Raj also ventured into the domain of religion as Christian missionaries poured into India.

Consider the immensity of India's greatness. Over the ages, we had divisions, conflicts of opinions, wars amongst ourselves, contradictions in our thoughts, style of living, variety of cultures and languages. These are also responsible why we could not be a single united country. But ultimately, this land and people have embraced one and all and accepted all and sundry with open arms. All religions have been treated equally, and given the liberty of expression. All nationalities have been welcomed in equal measure. India accepted and made its own men of every nation and all faiths

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who chose to settle here. The concept of “vasudheiva kutumbakam (the universe is one family)” had always been one of the edifices of Indian culture.

In the great social churning over the centuries, different kings treated different subjects differently. Under a few tyrannical ones Indians lived the life of slaves. There have been instances of kings forcing their subjects to convert. It is also true that the hiatus between the upper and lower castes was allowed to continue by vested interests and the caste divides ran sharp for most of history. But all such differences were overcome with ease when Indians joined hands in the Freedom Struggle.

Independent India made conscious attempts to do away with the barriers of caste and religion. But unfortunately today some politicians continue to try and take advantage of these in the name of social justice so that caste could be converted into vote. Educated Indians should be alert enough to thwart such moves.

As long as caste and religion play a role in elections, democracy is bound to come at a price. Goondas and anti-social elements will continue to take the upper hand in the minefield of caste and religious disharmony.

With Independence power was transferred from the British to a group of educated and enlightened leaders who led the National Movement. Power, however, soon found its way into the hands of criminal elements who exploited caste and muscle power to cling on to it at all cost. While participation in politics does not need any minimum academic qualification, the average educated Indian has been taught to hate politics. The general perception is that a concoction of only sycophancy, lies, muscle-power and corruption leads to success in politics. The general observation is that going by the muck that is associated with politics; any attempt to clean the system would be futile.

Our crop of bureaucrats comprises the cream of society, the best brains that Indian can boast of. Yet, our bureaucrats do little to change the system, and instead become a part of it by willy nilly kowtowing to the whims of their political masters. Seeking petty benefits such as comfortable postings and immunity from frequent transfers, bureaucrats also have become a convenient tool in the politicians' scheme of things. Most of our bureaucrats do not consider themselves public servants in the true spirit of the term but have grown to enjoy the comforts that came with their posts since the Raj — cozy bungalows, comfortable lifestyles and perks aplenty. I do not understand how collectors, SPs or even top bureaucrats consider themselves to be the new maharajas in the pecking order when their salaries are actually provided from taxes paid by the common man.

For centuries the common man learnt to hate the king, who was in most cases tyrannical and self-serving. His loyalty to his master was commanded and not earned. Fear lay at the crux of this loyalty. Then the aam admi learnt to hate him even more than the despotic rulers. Today, the average Indian grows up with an inherent mindset of loathing the politicians who "rule" the republic. Rarely does the average citizen understand the need to participate in political activity and be a party to the nation-building exercise. I shall discuss this mindset elaborately in a subsequent chapter.

We are imbibed into thinking merely about ourselves as we progress through the different stages of our lives. As student, family man and citizen, we have a self-centred focus and we simply forget or ignore this land, this soil. Country and nation are farthest from the mind. All that the average Indian thinks of is securing a decent job that pays enough to run his family. His other aspirations in life are limited to getting married and begetting children. By the time he secures an education for his children he gets old enough to contemplate a peaceful retirement and tranquil death. Is this what we had in mind when we sought our own country? Did we want an India orphaned by her children? What then is the Indian mindset?

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What is more unfortunate is that I call myself first an Oriya, my friend Gautam Basu calls himself first a Bengali, and Sudha Passi first a Punjabi. Why don't I consider myself Indian first and all things later? This is where the problem lies. We need to be Indians first. I need to say "I am an Indian". And mean it. Why don't we have a craze for the country just like we have one for our region, our festivals, and our cricket team? By craze I refer to an intense sense of belonging. I am crazy about my family. I make every effort to keep my family happy. Can I not think the same way in the name of my village, state and country? In spite of our culture of *vasudheiva kutumbakam*, we have been taught to be selfish, fuel caste and religious divides and believe that we are superior to every man and his uncle.

When we were in school we were taught to say a prayer which went like this: "O God! The benevolent Lord of the Universe, accept my prayer; grant me the noble vision that I may serve the poor and the needy, for I seek neither wealth nor power for myself. And grant me the courage to speak the truth, and nothing but the truth, even in the face of death." On the other hand, our families teach us to study hard, aspire to be a *sahib*, get a beautiful wife, and accumulate money and power and *pelf*. Forget the world, think of yourself and let others envy you: this is the driving force of our existence. A Strange contradiction, isn't it?

I am reminded of an episode in my village of nearly two decades back. My native village Sarangadharpur, about 70 kilometers from Orissa's state capital Bhubaneswar, has been an example for its education and life style in the erstwhile Puri district. I have been deeply attached to my village. Some fellow villagers wanted me to edit a souvenir volume that they wished to publish it to commemorate 300 years of our village's existence. I believed that the name of our village had always been wrongly spelt. I consulted some erudite villagers and also some eminent *littérateurs* from our state. All of them agreed that the name was indeed mistakenly spelt. But some elderly, and ostensibly educated, members of the village raised an uproar, saying, "What's in a name? If a wrong name has been the

norm, so be it.”

One day I wrote a letter to one of them, deliberately misspelling his name. He was furious when he next saw me. “You don’t know how to spell my name?” He screamed. I coolly replied: “What’s in a name? Why should you feel offended when you’ve no qualms about people mistaking the name of our village?” The purpose of narrating this episode is to stress the need to be ‘crazy’ about our soil, land, state and country, just as we are passionate about anything to do with ourselves. Not only do we need to create a sense of belonging with regard to our land but also play an active role in the hallowed task of nation-building.

Historically, India was never a united state. Now that the country is a single political entity, we need to retain, and build on, this oneness. For this we need an instrument, a vehicle that will make each and every citizen feel proud to be Indian. What are we doing about it?

# BRIDGING THE DIVIDE BETWEEN BHARAT AND INDIA

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**Dear Campaigners!**

*A*s I have already discussed, India had never been a “united” country or a single political entity till Independence. Moreover, the true meaning of this “Independence” is still not clear to a large number of people of this country. In large parts of Bengal, Orissa and Assam, the people of North India are summarily referred to as “Hindustanis”. The same applies to millions of people from the southern states of Andhra, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala. Many South Indians adamantly believe that Hindustan refers to only the north of India, from the Himalayas to the Vindhya alone. The South, for them, is a psychologically separate entity that they refer to as the Deccan or Dravida.

I remember my early childhood when I used to spend my school vacations with my grandmother at Puri in Orissa. The temple town of Puri is thronged by a multitude of visitors from all over the country during the Car Festival of Lord Jagannatha. Millions from what we call “north” India flocked to Puri by train, which entailed an

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overnight journey in not very comfortable sleeper coaches. Trains were powered by coal or diesel, and it took barely a few hours for even the most spotlessly dressed passenger to get covered in grime and soot. Obviously, by the time these pilgrims reached Puri, there would be layers of dirt on their clothes and tresses and lines of fatigue on their faces. Most of these pilgrims could not afford hotels and lodges, so they piled into the mutts and dharamshalas that lined the road to the temple. Before they entered the temple they used to go for a ritual dip in a small reservoir called "markanda pokhari" in the temple area. Our ancestral house was a stone's throw from the temple and I used to watch the cacophony of ablution every morning. As the yattris strolled down our street for the ritual bath to the beats of the mridangam and the crash of the cymbal, chanting hymns in praise of Radha and Krishna, the locals would smirk and say, "the stinking Hindustanis are off to the markanda (reservoir)". My grandmother would shoo us away from the roadside, saying, "get inside quick, the smelly and dirty Hindustanis are coming...". I later realized that her intentions were not bad; it was hygiene that was her pre-eminent consideration. But, even subconsciously, dirt for her was associated with people from the North who were invariably Hindustani. Most of Puri's residents also call those from the South "Dakhinis". Geography, for my grandmother and many of her time, was simple enough: India was at least two realms — Hindustan and the Deccan — with people of the East thrown in the bargain.

Many years later I had a similar experience in Madras: I was referred to as a Hindustani because I had come from Delhi. In the North-East, this labelling is taken even further. The entire country, save the tribe to which the local belongs, is India. So, but for members of the tribe, all others are "Indians".

It is a fact that the term Hindustan is yet to be accepted to mean the whole of India by Indians themselves. Most South Indians would claim that Hindustan means the Hindi-speaking North. Most North Indians would label people of all four southern states as Madrasis, irrespective of the fact that there are as many as four

southern languages apart from Tamil which find a place in the Indian Constitution. Perhaps aware of this dichotomy, the framers of our Constitution referred to the country in the Preamble as "India that is Bharat" and not "India that is Hindustan". Constitution maker B.R. Ambedkar himself had observed that "Hindu Society is a myth. The name it self is foreign. It was given by Mohemmedans to the natives for the purpose of distinguishing themselves." This was quoted in "The Essential writings of B R Ambedkar" published by Oxford University Press in 2002.

I do not wish to get into this controversy as my primary intent is to find out ways how the whole country can retain its unity and integrity among Indians as Indians. References to Hindustanis keep cropping with a disturbing frequency even today. In Persian Hindostan means "the black place" or "where black people live". Some may argue if we have our own identity, we need not look for one, which was given to us by outsiders with the intent to slight us. My friend Avtar says that in many cases the term Bharat is used to refer to only these inefficient regions, which lag behind in the development indices. "I love my India" is far more popular among our youth than many of our patriotic songs. If India unites more people than Bharat, so be it.

Well, I do not go into the aptness of Hindustani, India or Bharat as an identity. While discussing our identity, a thought comes to my mind that we are yet to have an emotional integration of minds. This is a grave cause for concern. We must be proud of being Indians. This has to be the feeling of every Indian in every corner of this vast country. But it is an irrefutable fact that all Indians do not think of themselves as Indians. I wonder the reason why. But nobody can deny that regional imbalances, a complacent bureaucracy, thriving anti-social elements, unemployment and lack of opportunity fuel the fire of disgruntlement among young Indians. Intelligence reports repeatedly point to the "foreign hand" stoking the fires of insurgency in border states. This may be true, but then why are we Indians supporting and joining hands with outsiders who are

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pouring into Indian Territory to harvest and whip up anti-Indian sentiment? Is it purely because of the colossal sums of money being pumped into anti-national activity in different parts of the country? Nay, it is because those being targeted are those who are yet to feel proud of being Indians.

While a conspicuous lack of Indianness is a disturbing feature in the border areas of India, we see a different kind of phenomenon in Delhi. Pundits of the Hindi language will not hesitate to say that "if one does not know Hindi one does not deserve to live in this country". Even Delhi's educated elite refer to southern Indians as Madrasis (more often than not in sheer contempt), dismiss Orissa as a state of abject poverty, and refer to Jammu and Kashmir as a "state of mistrust". Little do they pause to understand what this India is? I must say that these different perceptions are held primarily because of three reasons:

- Regional imbalance
- Linguistic chauvinism
- Lack of an emotional integration with the country.

India is not Delhi. But for most Delhi'ites, Delhi is India. Going by the amount of infrastructural funds pumped into Delhi, and the accompanying waste and misuse, it may appear to the lay citizen that the government has turned a blind eye to the rest of the country, especially the starving millions. By any estimate, if the same amount of money that is spent on Delhi's roads, flyovers, sidewalks and parks could be spent on the development of the poorer states, a far greater number of people could have been served.

With massive funds to play with, corruption in government organizations is at its highest in Delhi. The gamut of illegal activity — be it unauthorized construction, encroachments, financial frauds and property deals in laundered money — is probably the widest in Delhi. Corrupt businessmen, politicians, bureaucrats and petty officials do not have to work hard here for easy money. Everybody is

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out to get his pound of flesh in whatever capacity he is engaged.

I often have this sneaking suspicion that the Union urban development ministry is concerned with the development of only Delhi and a handful of other metros leaving aside so many other cities that have so much potential for development. One can get the best of facilities in Delhi in the field of education, health, legal aid, technology, employment and trade. My question is why can't we make such facilities and services available to Indians elsewhere in the country? I have no issues about having a clean, green and beautiful Delhi. But what about the rest of India? Delhi and Kalahandi in Orissa appear to me as two extreme examples of regional imbalance. Hundreds of examples could be cited like this. Do we have any comprehensive plans for rural development, healthcare, education, services, and roads and infrastructure that are being successfully implemented in the rest of the country, both urban and rural?

Our politicians have a blinkered view of development. To them, it is linked to votes. Hardly has there ever been any development activity purely on the basis of felt need. Plans are guided by constituencies, voting patterns and the winnability factor in the next poll. Some programmes dealing with as literacy, health, education, women and child development and social forestry have begun to do well because of largescale public participation. But there is a lot to be done about infrastructure, or the lack of it, particularly in rural settings.

There is no specific time-bound agenda for infrastructure development for the nation as a whole. Regional imbalances in terms of education, agriculture, infrastructure and industry, and most importantly, judicious management of resources so as to cater to the maximum good are never accounted for in the planning process.

Political parties do not seem to be interested in grooming competent leadership for the next generation. The government does not prioritize the greatest good in the course of mapping

developmental activity. Every year thousands of crores of rupees earmarked for rural projects in the states remain unspent. This money is budgeted for building schools and hospitals and providing roads and drinking water to the poor. No one is taken to task for these funds remaining unspent or being siphoned off from the intended projects. Whose inefficiency is it? Why should the officials or leaders concerned who fail to deliver not be dismissed from service or held accountable? Sometimes I wonder that inefficiency is also harming us just as much as corruption is.

Regional imbalance will continue till a fair balance is struck between rural and urban India. Regional imbalance will remain as long as the system does not evolve. One way to change and better the system is through what I feel "Unit Area Management". Every panchayat, the smallest administrative unit, has its share of natural resources, business opportunity and cultural potential. This has to be tapped. These should be sufficient to cater to the financial needs of the people of that area.

Whenever I talk of Unit Area Management, I am reminded of former President Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam's idea of "Providing Urban Facilities in Rural Areas," or PURA. The daily Newspaper "The Hindu" in its July 12, 2005 edition carried a report providing an outline of the concept of PURA. Dr. Kalam rightly says, "village knowledge centre is one of the essential components for realising the goals of graduating into a knowledge society and to lead to the transformation of the nation into a developed country before the year 2020. "

Dr Kalam said, "village knowledge centres in these panchayats would empower the villagers with information on agriculture, weather, fishermen, craftsmen, traders, entrepreneurs, unemployed youth and the students."

This is a great idea indeed. It has to be translated into reality. To add to this concept, we need to do sufficient research to find out

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how the rural masses can be meaningfully employed and imparted with the requisite information so that they can earn their bread with dignity and need not leave their homes and villages in search for employment. Village knowledge centres in fact can play a vital role provided we churn the right kind of leadership right from the village level. We cannot stop migration of our youth to cities for career advancement. But we certainly can stop migration of people, who are forced to leave their village due to dearth of work or food. In the light of Dr Kalam's PURA, we can develop this Unit Area Management System. For this, leadership has to come from within, and its qualities have to be imbibed in the local population.

Linguistic chauvinism is another problem area. It hurts me when I hear a Tamil friend say that he hates having to use Hindi. In fact, it is neither Hindi nor any regional language that is growing in scope and importance in India today. The use of English is promoted in every sector everywhere in the country. Due to large-scale migration of the young workforce from one part of India to another, the language of communication in business and industry has become English. It is a clear breadwinner. We are gradually integrating ourselves with the global market and striding ahead in science and technology.

A language has its own life course and takes its time to evolve. The Hindi that we know today did not exist even 500 years ago. Yet it has surged ahead of all other Indian languages because of state patronage and reach, coupled with the media and Bollywood in recent times. Other vernaculars such as Tamil, Oriya, Bengali or Telugu, though having matured much before Hindi, are enduring difficult times. Be that as it may, India is experiencing a linguistic transition from where may emerge a kaleidoscopic potpourri of spoken voices. But chauvinism regarding one's language causes considerable hurt. In many states language has emerged as a most sensitive issue politically and socially. Promoting one language must not be at the cost of another.

This sheer absence of emotional integration of Indians disturbs me. Ask an Indian who has travelled abroad how dear his passport is to him. He will get emotional trying to tell you how it feels holding the Lion Capital-embossed blue document in a foreign country. This is what we call emotional attachment to our soil. Such an attachment is strangely missing among Indians when inside India.

Take the vast multitudes of Indians in our villages. The people of rural India never understood the transition of an enslaved India into a free democratic nation. They have lived for centuries with only their farms and their homesteads to worry about. What they think about every day is their toil and their harvest. They are not bothered about democracy, civil liberties, rights and duties. In large parts of rural India people do not have electricity, safe drinking water and schools and primary health clinics. Sixty years after Independence nearly 300 million Indians do not have access to the most basic amenities!

Today more than 40% of boys and girls drop out of school before they reach the adolescent age. In many rural Indian families there are many who still swear by the past and find everything wrong with everything in the present. They pine for the value system of the past. "King's rule was better," they say. Such opinions represent the mindset of a large section of the middle class which is disgruntled with the present system of governance even as it enjoys the fruits of the nation's progress and development. Such people are not only complacent and idle but are also concerned only with themselves. While they criticize the system, they conveniently overlook what they can do to change things. Every educated person can share his experience with others. If even a handful of such educated Indians share their knowledge and experience with those less educated than themselves, they can do their bit for the country.

We talk ceaselessly of corruption and hold the police and politicians responsible. But bureaucrats and clerks at various levels of the establishment are no less corrupt, and we fan this corruption

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by agreeing to bribe them to get our work done. "A good Rs. 100 as extra income a day will help my child go to a better school," says Bharat (name changed), a clerk at Tis Hazari courts. One day at lunch he launched into a diatribe against corrupt politicians, criticizing a host of them, including some former Prime Ministers, with passionate angst. But when he palmed his "extra earning" he hastened to say that it was only a "tip" for his hard work. "If the government had hiked my salary I would not have to take this while also look after my family better." There are millions of Bharats out there, and they could be babus, teachers, journalists, foresters, supply officers, Customs officials... the list is endless.

People of Bharat's ilk cannot easily accept change, because they would like things to stay as they are. While the tendency to aspire to a higher social and economic standing is understandable, this disdain towards issues beyond personal well-being is lamentable.

Traditionally, the middle and upper-middle class mindset is one of acquisition, preferably of things foreign. This is so deeply ingrained that even today, as always, anything foreign is anything better for millions of Indians. This mindset still continues despite the massive technological and industrial progress that we have made to emerge as one of the world's fastest-growing and most robust economies.

One of the immediate consequences of not being emotionally attached to a sense of nationhood is the absence of pan-Indian movements, or nationwide support for regional initiatives of consequence. And such a mindset is not new. During the Sepoy Mutiny in 1857 the participation of the common man in the hostilities was minimal. The revolt was orchestrated purely by soldiers of the British Indian Army and native princes as a reaction to British rule. Even the so-called mass movements of the 20th Century could not rope in the upper classes, particularly those who were employed in government positions. In fact, many educated Indians were actually supportive of British Rule or felt little sympathy for the Freedom

Fighters. In many uprisings we find there was someone or the other who would tip off the British against their own brethren.

But despite all odds, a wave of hate against British rule was eventually created during the last three decades of the Freedom Movement. The British were ultimately expelled from the country. Most Indians who took part in the Freedom Movement, notwithstanding their ethnic, religious, caste, culture and linguistic divides, nourished the thought of unity of all Indians as a predominant motif.

In the early days of the 20th Century our Nationalist leaders were gearing up to take on the mighty British. While the educated upper and middle classes were conspicuously loyal to the Raj, our Nationalist leaders tried to fathom the mind of the uneducated "aam admi".

This "aam admi" could not afford to participate in any movement involving violence and bloodshed. In most cases he was the sole breadwinner for his family. In fact a violent method to wrest power from the British would have been a very costly affair in terms of the lives that could be lost. Initially therefore, our leaders thought prayer, even supplication, and appeasement could yield some concessions which would gradually pave the way for freedom from British rule. Thus the "Moderates" among the Freedom Fighters chose the "bhadralok" route to expressing dissent. This was considered to be a step forward in the quest for eventual self-determination. But as we all know, this was not enough.

Probably the greatest contribution of that era to the whole world and, of course, to India was an unpretentious lawyer called Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. Gandhi conceived of two hitherto unimagined weapons, each one more powerful than any other. The Mahatma (as he later came to be known) introduced "peace" and "non-violence (satyagraha)" as two of the most powerful weapons known to mankind. A mass movement could be created with people

rallying under his leadership. The movement culminated in Indians winning a nation. The blossoming the flower turned out to be a more deafening than even the explosion of the most thunderous bombs. Peace and non-violence exploded on the face of the earth. The world was stunned.

Indians for the first time in millennia began to look beyond their princely states and kingdoms to profess loyalty to a bigger nationwide political entity. They dreamt of independence for the entire nation. They did it. India achieved political unity, albeit truncated by Partition, in 1947. Emotionally, however, India and Indians continued to remain fragmented.

Sixty years since Independence India has emerged as one of the world's most powerful countries. Now there is also a strong urge from within this emerging superpower to unite. Indians now want to be united more than ever before. India needs integration. And this has to be total!

We all agree with this. And we are capable of forging this unity and integrity. But do we have a workable tool that could unite us emotionally and arouse a sense of oneness in the minds of the countless people of the country? This is possible only by building a new culture ... and a new mindset that of loving our nation.

# HATING POLITICS IS A CRIME AGAINST DEMOCRACY

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**Dear campaigners!**

*I*s politics the last resort of the scoundrels? Our high school teachers and college lecturers have told us so. Our bureaucrats and businessmen agree. In fact, the degree of our hatred for politics is often used as a measure of our honesty. Our parents in general blindly accept this view and repeatedly warn us that we must hate politics.

So, should we hate politics in a democracy like India? If our answer is yes, then probably we are doing the biggest disservice to our civilized society. I would even say that hating politics in a democracy is a crime against the nation.

Let us not forget that we have given ourselves and adopted our Constitution, which reigns supreme. We gave ourselves fundamental rights and fundamental duties as well. Thus each of us is morally bound to participate in the act of governance of this country. Unfortunately, in India teachers hate politics; bureaucrats

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hate politics; the common man hates politics too. They look down upon politics as if it is a "scoundrel's job".

Consequently, any prudent individual with the zeal to serve the nation doesn't come forward to join politics. This suits existing political classes and the criminals who have been clinging on to the politicians' bandwagon. In order to retain their grip on power, even foremost political leaders generally ignore the will of the people. As a result, the people have an uncaring leadership thrust onto them. We don't have much of a choice when we go out to vote. Elections are openly referred to as a choice between evils. Voting has almost become a mechanical task and not a spontaneous one. We do not particularly want to vote for any candidate but do it any way. I do not wish to make a sweeping statement because there are still a few politicians who are great statesmen and actually doing a great job. But the fact remains that we have an inherent hatred against politics and politicians.

We talk of corruption, inefficiency and nepotism. We shout from the rooftops that the system is corrupt, that politicians are corrupt, and that this country cannot do without corruption. A litany of corruption cases and scams come to our minds. Notorious among them are the JMM MPs bribery case, hawala scam, St. Kitts forgery case, Bofors, fodder scam, petrol pump allotment scam, housing scam and a host of cases related to electoral malpractice involving even Prime Ministers, chief ministers, top bureaucrats and prominent industrialists.

A prominent Delhi lawyer tells me that he hates politics and also politicians. Our conversation went like this:

"Is politics the last resort of scoundrels?"

"Of course, yes! What a silly question, yaar."

"Do you hate all politicians all the time?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Do you hate politics?"

"Definitely yes."

"Do you hate Mahatma Gandhi?"

"Hmm ... no."

"Do you hate Subhash Chandra Bose?"

"No."

"Do you hate Sardar Patel?"

"Not at all."

"Was not a Gandhi a politician? Was Netaji not a politician? Was Sardar Patel not a politician?"

"Er ... don't confuse me, yaar..."

"Is it correct to say that politics is participating in the act of governance of a country?"

"Yes," he said, a little hesitatingly. My lawyer friend sought to change the topic from this point, calling these issues irrelevant. No, it's not just him; there are millions who would react like he did.

In fact we have given ourselves a Constitution and a democracy and it is we who decide who should come to power. Popular will is reflected in the vote and governments change accordingly. Therefore, we are associated with the governance of the state in some form or the other. Why then have we inculcated this hatred against politics in our minds? Why then is politics always taken in a pejorative sense?

My journalist friend C.S. Rajnarayan says: "Politics becomes the last resort of scoundrels because it never becomes the first resort of honest and sincere people. If politics was all that bad why did our Freedom Fighters take to it? Why do we have names such as Gandhi, Nehru, Patel, Jinnah and Maulana Azad at the tip of our tongues when we think of the Freedom Movement?"

"Instead of the definitions that are attributed to politics, I'd prefer to remind all of us (including myself) time and again that society is only a reflection of what its individuals are. If politics is to be loathed, so should we as individuals. How many of us value the Freedom that was given to us on a platter? How many of us consider our duties before we seek our rights as citizens? How many of us have the courage that our forefathers had to take up a cause and fight for it? How many of us would want to be the harbinger of the change that we would like to see in society? And how many of us would stop seeing the differences between each other and look at our similarities instead?"

"And finally, what is this India that we call our country? I feel it is a myth that only becomes a reality when we play Pakistan in cricket! Most of the time we are Punjabis, Gujaratis, Sindhis, Oriyas, Tamils, Malayalees, Telugus and others. And if that's not enough we have religion and caste to divide us further".

Rajnarayan goes on to say, "I believe we allow such divisions to perpetrate only because we are already a divided lot. We are a nation of weak people who constantly need to be told that they are good. We lack self esteem and courage of conviction. We can be influenced very easily as we think from the heart and not from the mind. So, I honestly don't believe that politics is to be blamed for this decay. We are ourselves to blame and the sooner we realize that, learn from our past and change our own inner-self the better the chance our nation will have to survive and prosper as a unified entity."

Newspapers are flooded every day with news of corruption and

crime involving politicians. But the duty of correcting the system lies with each individual. This is a burden that every Indian has to share. Instead, all we do is point fingers. If you blame politicians, why don't you get involved and cleanse the system yourself? It is something like not jumping into the water to save a drowning child even when we know how to swim but waiting for someone else to do it.

Another very common occurrence comes to mind. When someone is hit in a road accident in front of us, we are usually reluctant to attend to him. Most of us would say, "the police are going to harass me and if I take the injured person to hospital". Some of us might feel how does it bother us if somebody dies in an accident? "It's the dead man's destiny" is the common refrain. But if our brothers or sisters or parents would lie unattended in a road accident, the same "we" would lament the callousness of the rest of us? "Doesn't anyone care for a human life?" is what we would cry in anguish.

The moot question boils down to the amount of commitment to society and the nation that we have. But sometimes we do come across such commitment in certain people and the results could be exemplary.

I remember an incident of some years ago. It was unique; I wish we could get to see more such things more often. Caught in a traffic signal during Delhi's rush hour, hundreds of vehicles were stalled bumper-to-bumper. Everyone had to reach their destination before everyone else. Tempers were running high and irritation levels soared. Curses flew and those behind the wheels abused the government and the police while shouting at each other about their poor traffic sense. It was perhaps the commonest sight on Delhi's roads every day at rush hour.

That day I was in my lawyer friend T.A. Siddiqui's car. Siddiqui was behind the wheel. Traffic had come to a complete standstill. On our left a khaki-clad cop was trying to squeeze through with his

Hero Honda. Two office-goers in the car on our right noticed the cop. Their conversation then went along predictable lines: The police are outright corrupt. Cops are in collusion with criminals everywhere. Stopping a vehicle abruptly and asking for a bribe from transporters, taxiwallahs and autowallahs comes naturally to the policeman. Traffic cops actually pay to get postings at busy intersections because the pickings are good. And the chain of corruption runs from the humble constable right to the top cop. Though the extent of corruption makes our blood boil, the situation is incorrigible. We are now so used to corruption that sometimes we actually justify a policeman accepting a bribe, unless we ourselves are caught in such a situation.

In the midst of this angst, an elderly couple, probably in their eighties, were trying to wriggle their way through the traffic snarl to cross the road. It was actually frightening to see them take one painful step after another in the midst of the cacophony of honking cars and impatient drivers. I had a feeling that they could also not see very clearly. The old man carried a stick, which had taken refuge under his right arm since there was no space on the road to use it. Some of those inside their cars even used some harsh words about the couple for choosing this stretch to cross the road, and blew their irritating horns even louder. For a moment I felt that but for the law some of them might even run over the couple if the traffic started moving.

Then, to our collective surprise, the policeman got off his bike and helped the couple cross over. For the aged couple, now looking relieved, it was like a godsend. All eyes were transfixed at the scene. The old man and his wife reached the other side of the road and profusely thanked the policeman. What amazed me was the fact that the sight of a policeman lending a helping hand to a citizen, which is his duty, could evoke so much surprise among us. All who witnessed the scene agreed that this is indeed rare, a sad commentary on the way we view our guardians of the law.

It is this sort of commitment that we must have in every field of endeavour. And actually there is no dearth of such people in many walks of life. Even in politics we need not go too far to find good, efficient and honest people. Political parties have simply got to have a vision, and transform themselves into a pool of trained manpower with all kinds of specializations. Our politicians need to be trained in several arts, including statecraft, management, economics and others.

Far from being the refuge of scoundrels, I believe politics is the finest form of management. Politics involves the management of resources and people. It is also a study of human behaviour. But one of the reasons why ordinary people do not take the plunge into politics is its glorious uncertainty.

In the Preamble to the Constitution it is explicitly stated that it is "we the people of India" who have given to ourselves this supreme document. The Constitution represents the paramount will of the people. But sadly enough, many of our lawmakers are by popular perception mere criminals, touts, manipulators and semi-literate opportunists. Very few top lawyers, professors, doctors, engineers, opinion-leaders or scions of educated families take to politics as a career of choice these days. An ordinary individual with the required education and leadership skills will either be nipped in the bud or hounded out from politics for fear of competition by those who have entrenched themselves.

Politicians explain that winnability is the most important criterion when it comes to backing a candidate. Everything else, including honesty and incorruptibility, education and ability, are cast aside. We have spawned a culture of cronyism and nepotism in the guise of winnability. The favoured class favours its own. This means in reality we have a functioning oligarchy under the garb of democracy. Such an oligarchy has been in place in all parties, notwithstanding their ideology, since the time of Independence.

Those who do not belong to influential families or have other such advantages turn to sycophancy to survive in politics. If this state of affairs continues, what would happen to the quality of our lawmakers and laws? Can we blame politicians alone for this situation? Unfortunately most people would say yes. But the fact remains that our politicians are drawn from among ourselves.

During my interactions with many prominent politicians I have come to feel that most of them are extremely insecure. They are afraid of losing elections, portfolios, vote banks and public support. Even if a politician wishes to do something good for the people he is thwarted by the system and frustrated by compulsions. And compulsions there are many: Lack of education and legislative competence to participate in parliamentary proceedings and pitch for their constituencies; the need to keep everyone from the contractor to the party boss happy; and electoral dividend rather than common good come in the way of the best intentions. It is perhaps these compulsions that make politicians vulnerable to corruption. And no wonder politicians are on the top of the media's hit-list for sting operations.

A politician's biggest nightmare is whether he figures on the CBI's list of corrupt public servants. He is also under constant scrutiny from his adversaries. Thus all politicians bear the risk of being called corrupt.

During discussions, I have heard bureaucrats and judges say corruption always flows from the top to the bottom. They also blame politicians and the system for corruption. A former Sessions judge of Delhi, Mr. Perm Kumar, once told me that politicians are responsible for our decayed system. Our hatred for politicians is no more or less than our loathing of politics. My Campaigner friend Shanmugha Patro says politics boils down to an excess of interference. When we say there is "too much politics" in an institution we are usually referring to something about it that we do not like or that it is decaying.

But hardly is there any debate on how money and muscle power can be divorced from politics or how we can cleanse the system so that the good and honest get involved in politics. Instead, we parrot our favourite line: "Let politics be, it is the last resort of the scoundrel". I do not think we have a system in place to keep track of how much a political party earns and how much it spends. Its sources of income and heads of expenditure are never opened up for public scrutiny. Laws have failed to prevent the marriage of money and muscle power to political activity. This needs to be debated, and debated earnestly.

If a citizen of a democracy says he hates politics I believe he does not have the slightest respect for the democratic institution. One has to accept that. In a democracy you have no right to say that politics is dirty and leave it at that. If you realize that politics is dirty, why don't you do something to cleanse it? If a pond is full of mud, it will remain so till all the mud is taken out. And to take out the mud you have to wade into it. Will someone dare? Instead of calling politicians scoundrels why don't all good men get involved and do the job in place of the "scoundrels" doing that. In fact, I think there are few professions nobler than politics because it involves the very fate of the nation.

Now, in order to have a situation conducive for the common man and those who love the country to get into politics, we need to evolve a political system that does not make money and muscle power the bottom-line. This needs to be debated exhaustively.

For such a system to be in place, we need an entirely different set of politicians. A politician has to be a good economist. He will not make a good leader unless he understands the economy of the country. This is a tall task. Babus may come and go but a politician has to struggle in his turf for his entire career, and even when he is not in power. Since honest and educated people keep themselves aloof from politics, political parties are left with intellectual bankruptcy. Professionals such as doctors, lawyers, engineers,

professors and scientists make a bigger asset for political parties than the moneybags who dominate them today. For these are the people who can guide the country with insight.

To be a successful public representative, one has to nourish his constituency and maintain a constant rapport with its people. He must be familiar with the resources, culture, social parameters such as education, health, employment and the environment, and the problems that the people of his constituency face. In a way a successful public representative oversees the work of a bureaucrat and provides useful insights for development. At the district level, if an MP has to meet the expectations of his electorate he has to be more informed and efficient than his collector or district magistrate. Apart from serving the interests of the people he also has to discharge the duties of a lawmaker. For this he needs to know the Constitution, the important laws and regulations, and also keep abreast of latest developments that concern our society. Hence, a true politician has to be a manager of the finest grain of affairs involving his particular region. This is possible only if the leader culls out time for his people, for study and for better managerial activity. Hence politics is the most evolved form of management.

In fact, I believe politics should be a subject of specialized study at the university level. The biggest thrust of this study can be the Unit Area Management System with a village knowledge centre as dreamt of by our former President. India is the largest democracy in the world. It has an unparalleled working Constitution that is constantly evolving. It is a lively treatise on governance that features democratic gems such as the Fundamental Rights, and the principles of Liberty and Equality. It is for us to demonstrate to the rest of the world that politics is not to be loathed since politics in a democracy means the empowerment of its citizens.

With this end in mind, I passionately feel that we need to have a university of politics to nurture the intellectual pool from where will emerge better politicians, diplomats and statesmen.

Is it not painful to see that the states are not able to spend their allocated funds and aid for development projects? It's a shame that we have the money but are not able to spend them for public good. We cry for hospitals, schools, roads and factories but the paperwork for all these gets bogged down in the bottomless cesspool of red-tape, leaving us nothing. We have to address our weaknesses and utilize our strengths to make our system efficient. My perception of these strengths and weaknesses are discussed in the next chapter.

# BEING GOD - FEARING IS OUR STRENGTH

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**Dear Campaigners!**

*W*e have discussed on several occasions the problems India is faced with today apart from the most obvious one of lack of emotional integration.

During our parleys at Build India Group meetings, Sudha, Sanmugha and Kiran lamented the fact that Indians despite being God-fearing indulge in corruption. All of us agreed that corruption and terrorism are two major impediments in the country's progress. These are spreading in our system like cancer.

We need to first see the symptoms of and reasons for corruption and terrorism being so rampant in Indian society. For this we need to make a rain check of the strengths and weaknesses of India and Indians.

## **Our assets:**

Indians of all faiths fear god. As we know, witnesses during court trials take the mandatory oath in the name of God to speak the truth and nothing but the truth. Some may still lie in court but such oaths do make them think twice before doing so.

The Indian Constitution is our Supreme Law. This solemn text governs every aspect of our lives. The Constitution has ensured Fundamental Rights for all Indians. We speak of these Fundamental Rights very often when it comes to protecting our own interests.

Our country has one of the largest network of schools and other educational institutions in the world. Millions of our students form a huge reservoir of promise to contribute to nation-building. They are the nation's future.

We also have a large number of lawyers in this country. Lawyers are generally eloquent communicators. They had played a stellar role in our Freedom Movement. Now we are to fight for a different kind of freedom from within ourselves: freedom from corruption, which is actually a reflection of one's state of mind.

India has a large number of teachers at the school, college and university level. Notwithstanding the fact that education has been greatly commercialised, teachers all over the country can still shape the minds of the young so that they are equipped to face the challenges of the life ahead.

India's media, keeping in mind its enormous reach and connect, is probably the most powerful instrument in the country to mould public opinion. It is an effective and excellent medium for information, entertainment, education and empowerment.

The wonders of 21st Century technology have reached even our villages. If the 20th Century saw the advent of the radio, television and computer to revolutionise communication, highly advanced

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versions of software have now penetrated even our remotest villages. Communication is easy, fast and cheap. Websites and other such tools have proliferated. Distances have disappeared.

Another huge strength is perhaps the sheer talent in all fields including medicine, engineering, management, English education, enthusiasm and motivation of our youth. And there are many more attributes which we could cite as our inherent strengths. There is a vast untapped reservoir of talent not only in the cities but also in rural India. Despite poverty and illiteracy, Indian villages continue to foster traditional moral values.

### **What ails us?**

India remained enslaved under foreign rule for a thousand years. Even today most Indians do not necessarily have an “independent” mindset. We have not come out of centuries of obeying a master. This is what I spoke about in the first chapter. We require instructions and directions and guidance and a host of other aides on even issues concerning our welfare.

Most of us do not think positive. Any independent step in the right direction is not easily appreciated. We do whatever we are required to do in our jobs simply because we feel someone else (read boss) has directed us to do so. Little that is ingenious or constructive is done of our own accord, and even less of initiative is displayed.

Our governments do not spend lavishly on education. The Economic Times in its June 1, 2004 edition carried a report that India was spending 4.1% of the GDP towards education and its literacy rate was 65 per cent. Even today India has over 40 crore illiterates. We have many billionaires in India. We are emerging stronger as an economy. We have been making rapid strides. Yet we are lagging behind in literacy. Most of our teachers are ill-equipped, and therefore below par. According to recent media surveys, nearly 25% of teachers of government schools do not even attend them

except for pay day. What kind of education are we giving our children? What kind of employment could we expect to provide them?

We are unproductive and un-enterprising when we are home. The same Indian toils unceasingly to notch up incredible success stories when he is on his own outside his state or country. We can toil without limit if we want to or if it concerns our personal gain, yet we have perhaps the worst work culture in the world.

We do not react when we are required to. And if we do, we react too slowly. Sometimes, or most of the times, we as individuals close our eyes to events which occur in front of us that are wrong and dangerous to the interests of society. For example, if a goon or policeman demands hafta in our neighbourhood market, we tend to remain silent. The best we do is to think about our personal safety. "At least I am not being harmed" is the refrain.

Individual liberty is the brightest aspect of a democracy. Democracy is a wonderful mechanism of governance in which individual liberty and freedom of expression are safeguarded. The Judiciary is the guardian of democracy. But many may wonder whether the same legal system, often the last or only resort for many who have been seeking justice, has met our expectations? It is because those who serve as the custodians of our rights and liberties are, after all, drawn from the same society.

The common man is, to say the least, skeptical about the institutions of the Judiciary and the police. The police are, in particular, not regarded as people-friendly or competent custodians of the law particularly when it comes to criminal justice system. A careful look at cases will reveal that out of thousands of cases filed every day by litigants, a substantial number of these are false, frivolous and luxury litigations. We do not trust the police. The police department is the biggest litigant in trial courts. So how does the average Indian repose complete faith in the trials or lower judiciary as a repository of justice?

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Many a time I feel the whims of babus lead to the filing of writ petitions in the High Courts. The whimsical order of the babus forces the common people to come to the court for invoking writ jurisdiction. If the government loses a case, the babu would say he would not have to pay from his pocket. It is the poor litigant who pays money for the relief that he is entitled to. But he gets it at a price. A litigant never wins a case. He suffers endlessly awaiting for justice. File after file gets stacked in the racks of record rooms. The rate of Pendency, which includes substantially false and frivolous litigations, keeps on increasing in the absence of proper scrutiny at the beginning.

The Times of India in its Delhi edition of November 30, 2007 carried a report titled "Timely Justice at Re 1 per head per month" which said almost three crore cases were pending before the courts in the country of which 37 lakh cases are pending in the High Courts alone. The newspaper advocated increasing the salaries and number of judges for better efficiency and speedier disposal of cases.

Will increasing the number of judges or hiking their salaries introduce efficiency to the system? Don't we have the problem of inefficiency on part of the judges while handling cases?

Are only lack of infrastructure and commitment on the part of the court staff contributing to the delay in justice delivery system? Can anybody honestly say what happens if some judge is incompetent to discharge his duty as a judge or that a judge is not willing to perform?

A witness is always a great asset in establishing the truth during the trial procedure. But what happens to the witness who comes to court in support of the truth? The courtroom situation is too unfriendly to him. He is subjected to intense cross examination and at times he undergoes terrible mental stress. Imagine an eyewitness voluntarily coming to the aid of a road accident victim. He gets into trouble first with the police, and then while deposing as

a witness in court. Consequently, an ordinary man would not like to come to the court as a witness to avoid harassment. A witness fears that he may have to face the music from the litigant against whom he is deposing. A rape victim who cries for justice has to narrate her sordid trauma before a litany of policemen, mostly males. She then has to repeat the story before the male officers who may be judges, lawyers and police officers. Either way, she has to relive the ignominy in the presence of the very man who violated her, and not be sure that justice will be her's at the end.

All who are accused are not always criminals. Yet many innocents languish in jails when justice is miscarried or awaited. Many keep running round in circles in the endless game of pursuing litigations. The most painful fact is that in India we get the feeling that we do not get justice and we have to spend money for it though getting justice is one's fundamental right. Trial courts generally accept the story of the police as the gospel truth unless something is very glaringly wrong with the investigation. Our High Courts many an occasion express their dismay pooh-poohing the practice of magistrates behaving like the rubber stamp of prosecution. In most cases, the perpetrators of the crime are the rich and powerful who can afford to hire the services of the best and most exorbitant lawyers. Very often the genuinely wronged person may lose the legal battle simply because he lacks the means to sustain exorbitant legal costs. Criminals, who have the power to pay, go scot-free in a large number of cases because good money buys a good defence.

It troubles me to hear news reports of a three-year-old facing trial for alleged rape in Bihar or a septuagenarian incarcerated for nearly four decades in Assam. Or about some judge being judged on charges of graft.

No human being is infallible. So are judges. It is difficult to ascertain on the basis of records as to who is the real culprit? It is possible that the real culprit may not be the one who is convicted.

Sometimes, I feel what is lacking is the right will and the right approach. Social obligation requires you to give something in return. This is what Justice Sanjiv Khanna, when he was my senior as a lawyer, used to say.

There is a recent trend in the media that we praise a judge whenever he sentences some powerful person to a prison term. Why should a judge be praised for pronouncing a judgment? He is only doing his job, right? We go on praising the Judiciary on many occasions for all the wrong reasons.

There are cases of judges calling reporters and giving them information just to see their names in print. This desire is fuelled by the unusual levels of enthusiasm of reporters to get access to the inner portals of the court to collect information. Many judges are under the impression that they are doing a public service. Is it just public service? There is also the desire to get fame and recognition. Most of them are interested in seeing their names in print in the national dailies and or being repeatedly broadcast in news bulletins. Arrogance and whim take their toll on justice on many an occasion. I know this would hurt many judges, but I say this with utmost humility and the greatest respect to the institution of the Judiciary. Give it a good hard look: Are such judges, though they may be very few, not bringing a bad name to the institution of the Judiciary? This is not to criticize the Judiciary but to state that the members of the judiciary are also drawn from the same society. If there is moral degradation in our society, it is bound to have an effect, howsoever small, on the judicial system as well.

No one regards the relationship between judges and lawyers as that of master and servant. They work in tandem. For both the Bar and the Bench, the interest of justice is paramount. The problem with the Judiciary can be tackled by judges and lawyers themselves. Delay, inertia, lack of commitment and sometimes the eagerness to dismiss cases simply to boost disposal rates erode the commonman's faith in the Judiciary.

Justice V.R Krishna Iyer and Former Chief Justice J S Verma speak highly in favour of Judges Accountability Bill, 2006. The country's top intellectuals also talk of greater transparency in the Judiciary. But it would indeed probably be hypocritical on our part to say that we repose absolute faith in the Judiciary.

Though truth is now being accepted as a valid defence in contempt after the latest amendment to the Contempt of Court Act, writers still run the risk of being thrown behind bars. If an innocent man is pronounced guilty, the media goes all out to demolish the accused. Nobody except for the accused knows for sure whether he is innocent. But for an innocent to prove his point, he may have to even sell off his home and hearth to be able to afford a lawyer to fight his case, and then remain in glorious uncertainty for years to come. And if he does wriggle out of the mess, it would only be at enormous cost. In such cases, the media cannot undo the damage already caused to him.

Bureaucrats lack initiative at work but yet complain about their work not being appreciated. Their efforts are focused not on improving the lot of the people they serve but on ensuring personal comforts and career advancement. The most corrupt sections of society emerge from this group and yet they are the ones who claim to hate corruption the most.

I am appalled to know that in India 57 out of every 1000 newborns do not live to see their first birthday. Or that the people of 157 of India's nearly 550 districts live under the shadow of the militant's gun. It hurts me no end to hear of a patwari or revenue inspector charging a bribe from even the poorest of the poor in states like Orissa or Andhra to issue a residential certificate. I feel like slapping the clerk at Tis Hazari courts when he charges cash from a lawyer for listing his case before the District Judge on an urgent basis. Is this the country we wanted for ourselves?

This is the stark reality. Our growth and successes have been

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lopsided. Cities have grown at the expense of the villages. We have nothing for the villages to invest in their development and bridge the gap between urban and rural India.

Indians have an uncanny propensity for all things foreign. The label 'Made in India' does not instil any warmth or pride in our hearts. That's because we have since our childhood been inculcated with the impression that anything foreign is something good. We are indifferent about our culture and heritage. We are obsessed with ourselves. We are not bothered about our neighbours, our communities, our society and nation.

The spiralling growth in population has negated many of our social and economic achievements since Independence. Millions of Indians go through the motions of life without basic education or access to decent healthcare. Millions of Indians do not get two square meals a day. We do not have a competent system of management of resources at the village level that involves the people. All this stokes the fires of angst among our people. This lead to dissatisfaction and disaffection among the younger lot, many of whom are easily misguided into joining violent anti-national movements which pose a threat to our collective security.

Our growth and development is neither planned nor balanced. While the cities grow rapidly inviting pollution, disease and a host of other problems, our villages continue to remain in the blind spot of our policymakers. We lack competent planning to boost the economy, education, healthcare, infrastructure and employment levels in our villages.

Despite all tall claims by successive governments since independence, rural India has been left in a state of utter neglect. If unabated migration is allowed to the cities, people will continue to cry out for water, clean environment, sanitation, electricity, healthcare and blame the government for everything that is wrong in the cities.

India has been making rapid strides in its economy. Yet Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen the essay titled "Class in India" in his "The Argumentative Indian" writes, "India's over all record in eliminating hunger and under-nutrition is quite terrible. The percentage of undernourished Indian children is a gigantic 40% to 60%. About half of all Indian children are, if appears, chronically undernourished and more than half of adult women suffer from anaemia."

The biggest challenge India is probably facing today is to uplift the life of about 30 to 40 crore people and the number is increasing. A serious and planned effort is needed to provide them education, healthcare and food. Unfortunately, in our country, we face drought in some areas while excess rainfall in others leading to waste of valuable rain water.

Over a period of 100 years, our forest cover has come down drastically from one thirds to one sixth. Water table at most places is depleting. The River Ganga is dying a slow death, while the Himalayan glacier reducing by 25 metres every year. There is very real threat of global warming. Pollution is revisiting us in form of calamities. We need to have serious and concerted efforts to change the situation and the masses should be involved.

But the common refrain is : "Who will do it?"

"We also do not champion issues leaving it to others to take the initiative. The others in turn do exactly the same, that is, to leave it to someone else. So we are left with a thousand issues facing the country and no champions in sight. What difference can I make? Is it our well reasoned attitude? What does it matter if I also do not vote? Will the country's corruption rating on Transparency International get any better if I stop greasing a palm," V Rathunathan says with pain in his book "Games Indian Play".

If we go on discussing what ails us, the list could be endless. These are some of the crucial points to ponder. Our country has a great pool of talent, intellectuals, writers, statesmen, technocrats, lawyers, doctors and teachers, who can add to the small list that I have stated. We have our strengths and we have our weaknesses. Our politicians, bureaucrats, journalists, judges, lawyers, policemen and doctors are talented citizens who can summarily change our lot with a little bit of effort. What they lack is the right will and approach.

But while our strengths remain strengths, our weaknesses have to be addressed with ideas and sincere effort. As all my fellow Campaigners agreed, corruption is the biggest and most conspicuous problem. Let us talk about corruption first.

# CORRUPTION IS ANTI-NATIONAL

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**Dear Campaigners!!**

*I*s it correct that every fourth Indian pays a bribe to get his legitimate or illegitimate work done legitimately or illegitimately? Is it correct that India ranks as the 18th most corrupt countries today in the world? This is what the anti-corruption watchdog, Transparency International, has to say based on its last annual survey. A report in this regard was carried by The Hindustan Times in its December 7, 2007 edition titled "India No 18 in Global Graft Index". Whatever may be the truth behind such an assertion, there is no denying the fact that corruption is the worst enemy of society and spreading itself in our psyche as an integral part of the Indian way of life.

The Times of India in its Delhi edition dated November 26, 2006, published a survey on "How Indians view god". The survey report claimed more than 92 per cent of Indians are god-fearing. The survey had taken into account people of all faiths, and both urban and rural. Being 'God-fearing', one believes, refers to those who would fear providential retribution for doing an act that is immoral

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or illegal or that would not be appreciated by the large majority.

If more than nine out of 10 Indians fear God and, by extension, believe in Him, it perturbs me to think how “godly India” can be considered one of the most corrupt countries in the world? Why are there lakhs of corruption cases pending in the courts? Why is it that corruption is taken to be a fact of life in everything that we do? Many more questions emerge. What is the total volume, in terms of a realistic ballpark figure, of corruption in this country? Is there any quantifiable impact of this corruption? Why is it that in India, a nation which has always commanded respect from the Western world on account of its inherent spirituality, people readily resort to corruption even in the name of God? Do our parents teach us corruption? Is it part of our collective legacy? Do we glorify corruption? And do we bask in the fruits of corruption?

Hardly does anybody try to find an answer to these questions. We readily accept that corruption is rooted in our society, even perhaps in our genes. It is taken as a given, almost like second nature. Not only do the vast majority of Indians condone corruption, it is also lauded and appreciated in many cases. An honest man is often taken as an oddity, and sometimes made a subject of ridicule. If you say you hate corruption you stand the risk of being called stupid or inane.

A few concrete facts on corruption provided by former Chief Vigilance Commissioner N. Vittal some time in the year 2001 are worth the mention here. In a speech delivered at a college in Haryana he said, quoting a report by the PHD Chamber of Commerce (a reputed body of financial experts), that the Government of India was losing revenue to the tune of Rs 63,800 crore every year on account of corruption. This figure was roughly thrice the entire foreign direct investment made in India that year. Needless to say, the corresponding figures for this year could be much higher.

Mr Vittal estimated the quantum of unaccounted money at

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that time to be anywhere between Rs 350,000 crore to Rs 750,000 crore, more than the combined revenue earnings of the Centre and all state governments. With this as the benchmark, it wouldn't be surprising if the figure now crosses Rs 1000,000 crore.

There are countless instances that can be cited from everyday life to highlight the magnitude and extent of corruption in India. But it will be a futile exercise because most Indians are all too familiar about it. If media reports are to be believed, exporters spend 1% to 15% of their earnings to grease the corruption machinery. Social worker and journalist Madhu Kishwar's path breaking magazine *Manushi* had conducted a survey in 2001 on Delhi's rickshaw-pullers. The results were shocking: That year the police and MCD officials collected Rs. 10 crore from rickshaw-pullers in the Capital to allow them to ply their trade without harassment. Rickshaw-pullers are one of the poorest of the daily wage-earners, and a most visible part of the unorganized sector, providing a crucial service to a large segment of the population, particularly women, children, the old and the infirm. Yet they continue to be exploited by the police and civic officials ostensibly because they are responsible for the congestion on the roads.

Corruption costs street vendors in the National Capital Region about Rs. 480 crore every year to keep their trade going. About 20% to 30% of the quoted figures in all government tenders change hands illegally to secure the same. The figures are equally horrifying in all Indian cities, small and large.

A survey conducted amongst a section of NRIs in the United States, quoted in *The Hindustan Times* in July 2007, claimed that 81% of them had paid a bribe at some stage or the other in the course of doing business in India. The same newspaper also quoted another study that said 25% of teachers of government primary schools draw their salaries without taking a single class.

All of us have experienced, first-hand, what corruption is. Its

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omnipresence in our system need not be proved nor do I intend to pile you with statistics here. Statistics may not always be accurate and often stand the chance of being far off the mark, and on the lower side. The enormity of corruption cannot probably be presented correctly in statistical format.

Corruption, thus, is a very real and tangible menace that comes in the way of the country's progress at all possible levels. To deny its existence, even without statistical confirmation, would be preposterous. We feel it every day every where; at railway ticket counters, in the courts, corporate offices, on the roads, at police stations, PDS shops, government offices and departments, schools and colleges ... the list is endless. In the absence of any formula on how to deal with corruption, and since in most cases protest does not get us anywhere, we mostly give in or acquiesce meekly.

Even the educated and socially more empowered amongst us have a love-hate relationship with corruption. A journalist friend of mine spent most of his working years writing a plethora of reports about corruption. One day in the summer of 1998 I had accompanied him to New Delhi Railway Station to buy tickets, soon after covering the JMM MPs' bribery case trial at Vigyan Bhavan. It was a terribly hot afternoon in May, when the sun was at its cruelest in Delhi. My friend was not carrying his "Press" identity card and so could not queue at the special counter for journalists, senior citizens and others. He had no option but to queue up at one of the "ordinary" counters with about 60 people ahead of him.

After about five minutes a young man came up to him and whispered if he would like to have an instant ticket for a price. My friend asked, "how much?" "Just Rs. 200 extra," he was told. Without any hesitation my friend handed over the extra cash and got the ticket of his choice in five minutes flat. "What a relief," he said as we left the station. When we later discussed the bribe that he had paid, my friend claimed that it was not an act of dishonesty on his part. "It would have been stupid to let go of the opportunity.

The boy who collected the money and the staff who issued the ticket for a bribe were the ones who were corrupt," he said. He sincerely believed in what he was saying.

"No, this is not a bribe, this is just a tip," says Bharat (name changed), a clerk at Tis Hazari — whom I have spoken of earlier — who charges around Rs. 50 for every file made available for inspection. He says, with a straight face, that "this is not corruption". This, he claims, is the reward for the "extra pain" he takes, despite his pressing schedules, to dig out the file for an advocate to inspect. Not once will he understand, or at least admit, that this is a part of his duties too. Incidentally, whenever someone wanted to see a file for free he would promptly say: "Sorry, I have no time; come back at 3 o'clock". But just one fifty-rupee note makes him scurry with the file unflinchingly with a smile and a salute.

Bharat has his own set of reasons to assuage his conscience. He has a family to run, his son studies in a good school, lawyers mint money through their clients ... so what's wrong if poor clerks like him make an extra buck? One day I asked him, "Would you teach your son to do the same as you?" He literally came up with a speech in reply. "I will never be happy if my son becomes a clerk like me. I hate corruption. See, this country is being destroyed by corruption...."

Some time back a police officer was caught taking a bribe inside a government office in a sting operation. Another officer, who was sitting in the next room when this happened, saw the entire episode of his colleague being caught in the act on television. In a spontaneous reaction he heaved a sigh of relief that it was not his turn that day.

We are unanimous in agreeing that corruption is one of the greatest impediments to progress in any civilized society. Whenever we talk of corrupt people, the first group we refer to is the political class. Bureaucrats, businessmen, policemen and government clerks

and petty babus come next in descending order. To simplify, I have categorized on a whim corruption into three classes named: **Fat Corruption, Mat Corruption and Rat Corruption.**

**Fat corruption:** This is corruption involving politicians, businessmen and policy-makers. This forms the biggest chunk of all the illegitimate transfer of wealth (read: corruption) that occurs in the country. We know how the government's family silver — PSUs, land, offices, mines, hotels, state undertakings and the like — is being sold for a song. Fat corruption is corruption involving policy matters wherein the top business classes benefit through unfair means from the government of the day. Fat corruption involves huge sums of money and gratification given without it being reflected in any manner in the incomes of politicians and other recipients. Politics, especially electioneering, involves considerable expenditure and investment. Using their high offices, politicians try to accumulate enough money so that they can fund their elections and also stash away more than they will ever need to survive in the trade of politics. Election victories often depend on how much money is spent in the campaign. Though in elections in India the general mood of the citizen gets reflected in the outcome on a larger canvas, money and muscle power does play a role and can influence the verdict in most parts of the country. When a politician spends money to get himself elected, he deems it an investment. Those who fund his campaign do it in the expectation that he would become an MLA, MP or minister and return the favour in a big way. Hence elections in India always involve big money, big business and big projects. The ordinary citizen, in whom is vested all power according to the Constitution, is thus taken for a ride most of the time.

**Mat Corruption:** This is corruption involving bureaucrats and businessmen. Mat corruption refers to direct cash transactions between politicians and businessmen with the active involvement of bureaucrats. While aiding and assisting politicians in the discharge of their functions, a cohort of bureaucrats and high-level officials in various government and private departments do their bit to get

their own and their bosses' palms greased, and greased well. It is interesting to note that both the politician and the bureaucrat are well paid in terms of salaries and perks including accommodation, conveyance and other benefits. Yet, politicians and bureaucrats take more than a fair share of their pound of flesh while discharging their duties. This illegal gratification comes mostly from businessmen and those who require favours from the government. On most occasions these officers serve as conduits between politicians and businessmen. Huge sums of money change hands through below-the-table transactions. Businessmen bribe politicians for tenders and favourable deals and try to earn this "investment" back by passing on the costs to the consumer or the common man. Incidentally, the most corrupt businessmen, politicians and bureaucrats miss no opportunity to attack corruption in public fora.

**Rat corruption:** Rat corruption involves lower level government employees, small-time politicians and brokers, clerks, police officials who take money for whatever they do. For them charging money is the norm or practice for what ever they little they do which they think as matter of favour.

Some observers attribute corruption amongst the salaried class to their low salaries. The salaried middle class works hard to save enough to educate their children, dreaming of giving them a head start in this competitive world. They need money for all this. These needs grow. Their children play with classmates from more affluent families and seek the same levels of comfort as their richer friend. In a social system where the inequalities are glaring, people with moderate or low salaries are always ready to resort to any means to earn that extra buck. This mostly comes by way of bribes which go under a clutch of euphemistic names such as "tips" or, more grandiosely, "incentives".

Perhaps I will not be wrong to say "tips" is branded as "upuri" in Bengal and Orissa. Government and municipal employees charge money for doing a particular work which happens to be part of their

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job profile and for which they are paid for through their salaries. These people make their work conditional to ensure their “upuri” of the day and this is treated as an accepted practice.

I was explained about this term “upuri” by a retired Bengali teacher some time in February 1992. I had put up at Chowringhee Hotel in central Calcutta while on a two-day visit to the city. I cannot speak Bengali fluently though I understand the language well because of its close phonetic ties with my mother tongue Oriya. I was feeling terribly handicapped when I could not speak to the local Bengalis in their language. I came across a retired school teacher Basuda (as he was being referred to) who helped me on the first day when I was looking for a room to stay. We shared an instant rapport and befriended each other. In the hotel room, I had a long chat with him on a variety of issues including “upuri”. He had an interesting story to tell. In the case of a marriage proposal in a middle class family, generally the representative of the girl side would ask how much the prospective bridegroom earns and if he is making anything ‘over and above’ his salary. The word “upuri” in Bengali means over and above. Then Basuda said this practice existed in Bengal till the seventies. Thank god, things have now changed, he said.

Basuda may have spoken of the scenario in Bengali marriages, but I am sure that this has been the case in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Orissa too. Many middle-class marriages involve grooms employed in salaried services in government offices. In fact, such grooms are highly sought after in middle-class families.

This speaks volumes about the mindset of the common man in most parts of the country. It is also part of the mindset that the income of such salaried government servants can be expected to be supplemented by a bribe or two. It is almost accepted practice, and hence we do not react adversely when we see a petty or middle-level babu taking money for a favour. Though at the lower level the amount of illegal money exchanged is comparatively lesser, it is quite visible. Policemen collecting money from buses, hotels,

vendors and liquor shops is commonplace in all cities. If we try to install a close circuit TV in court rooms, we will find that in all courts clerks take bribes either from lawyers or litigants. No, this not the case with only Tis Hazari, go to any part of the country and you will witness this. The Tis Hazari example is one of thousands. My intent here is not to malign the clerks of Tis Hazari but only to say that we tend to ignore such practice although this action is illegal. In almost all parts of the country, clerks taking money for doing a favour is accepted practice. We call this **Rat corruption**.

Some may argue that these bureaucrats and pretty clerks and policemen take to corruption because they are not adequately paid. But this serves as merely an excuse for the corrupt. Does an inadequate salary bring with it a licence to indulge in corrupt practice? Why then do we blame a poor thief for breaking into a rich man's house to steal? Should such an act be excused, condoned, glorified the way we do with corruption? I believe penury has nothing to do with criminality. Criminality is a reflection of the mindset, and is the outcome of perverse thought.

Corruption is an act of criminality. Corruption begins with the individual motivation to acquire something beyond one's legitimate right. This acquisition is usually money or something that can be translated into wealth. In fact, our babus know that there are lakhs of officials in the country taking money in lieu of a favour. How many of them are caught? The figure must be abysmally low, not even 1%.

I remember tuning in to a programme some years back on a TV channel where they debated that the degree of corruption would come down if salaries are raised across the board. Psychologists would call this a myth. One of my professors at Utkal University, Dr Fakir Mohan Sahu, had once said long ago that "if a thief sits in heaven there too will he indulge in thieving". In fact this is exactly what happens. Government salaries were handsomely increased by the Fifth Pay Commission. Corruption level, however, did not

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go down. We cannot punish all corrupt government officials. It is a common argument in India that those who work against corruption are themselves corrupt. Some also call for severe and exemplary punishment against the corrupt. In heated discussions I have heard some people say, with feeling, that the corrupt should be hanged. This may provoke laughter and derision in India but this actually happens in countries like Singapore. But going by the extent and enormity of corruption in India, the radical punishment of hanging the corrupt will not be successful. In such a case you may have to hang simply too many people, many of them probably our lawmakers themselves.

Another very intrinsic aspect of corruption is that it reflects one's perverse and bestial thoughts. The innate zeal for acquisition and possession of material wealth is latent in everyone's consciousness. Despite the enormity of the craving, ways to fulfill the same are, logically, only two: 1) through legitimate enterprise; and 2) the quicker route offered by crime, graft and manipulation.

This leads us to another question. If the pay and perks of those who fall in, or at least are believed to belong to, the first category were raised, would it deter them from taking to the corrupt. Would this steer those who have opted for the second route back to the honest path? Will the corrupt stop being corrupt with a few hundred rupees more in their pay cheques? Definitely not. Corruption breeds corruption, and the craving to possess more than one does is almost always insatiable. The corrupt, if better provided for, will only seek an even bigger share of ill-gotten wealth.

What is, in summary, the general effect of corruption? With our infrastructure glaringly inadequate, most Indians take the short cut to graft to get work such as securing access to a file or obtaining a railway ticket or a job done. Largely, corruption hits our national exchequer and turns the system of equity and fairness upside down. The undeserving pip the merited to the post by virtue of their ability to pay more. But sometimes the consequences of corruption could be

far worse than that. If a security guard lets a terrorist into Parliament House or a school or hospital or munitions dump in exchange of a bribe, how much blood will he have on his hands for that single moment of greed? What happens when a driving instructor grants a licence to a man who has not learnt to drive and the same man loses control of the wheel in front of a school?

All monetary transactions and business and pecuniary enterprise are founded on the edifice of contractual law. Corruption, to put it simply, is an illegitimate contract. It rewards the undeserving, deprives the genuine claimant, and leads to inefficiency and mismanagement. Public administration and governance is denied fairness and equity. Development projects may be derailed from the implementation plan. At its worst, security is grossly compromised by corruption.

It is the common man who becomes the biggest victim of corruption. The Rule of Law which governs our day-to-day lives is besmirched. If a corrupt policeman takes a bribe from the accused, where does the complainant go? Is there any guarantee that the courts will not allow corruption to come in the way of securing him justice? We may glorify our legal system but the fact remains that the common man has very little faith in it. I will be dishonest to myself, as a practicing lawyer, if I say that the Judiciary is the best and most honest institution in our country. After all, the judges who form the apex of the judicial system are drawn from the same society which throws up the most corrupt amongst us.

Let us look at a few media reports. A man in Assam spent more than 50 years in jail without a trial with nobody having any clue as to why he was arrested in the first place. In Bihar in late 2006 a 7-year-old child was named an accused in a case of attempted murder and rape. If this is not a miscarriage of justice then what is it?

Instances of the law being violated with impunity are too innumerable and too familiar to all of us. In Delhi we spot a giant statue

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of Hanuman striding a busy traffic intersection constructed on land that is part of the protected Ridge and near a historical monument. We regularly see temples sprouting on the environmentally fragile Yamuna River Catchment Area in violation of a slew of laws. There are a million unauthorised constructions. When law enforcers go to demolish an illegal property, the commonest refrain is "why did the civic authorities allow the building to be built in the first place? Why did they then accept a bribe to legitimise the act?" There is reason enough behind their angst. All illegal constructions and extensions were possible only after handsome bribes were paid to a host of government officials and cops. It suited both parties; the man who made the illegal construction got an extra room or annexe and the police and civic officials got some extra cash. The Rule of Law, in the process, is reduced to a mockery.

Delhi is an excellent example of a city where corruption thrives. Corruption here has acquired a pedestal; it is an institution, a fine art. People indulge in corruption even in the name of God. A senior barrister practicing in Delhi High Court once told me with élan: "You Oriyas offer only a diya as bribe (this is the exact word he used) to Lord Jagannath in Puri. That is why you are poor. Look at us from Delhi. We offer the God no less than Rs. 500/- each time we visit the temple and obviously the returns are greater". A lady journalist (name withheld) was present. She agreed with the barrister, saying "we must move with the times".

The barrister went on to say that if one wished to survive comfortably in Delhi one has to cultivate contacts, and it is these contacts that fetch work, money, jobs. Most professionals in Delhi thrive on these contacts, which is referred to by the vernacular jugaad. Interestingly, I remember that not once in the animated monologue did the barrister refer to merit as the keystone to success.

This reminded me of a very popular joke on jugaad. A Japanese automobile engineer was travelling on Delhi's roads in his car, which was of a brand yet to be introduced in India. The car developed a

snag in Daryaganj. The Japanese wondered where he could find a mechanic. A young man in soiled clothes came up to his window and offered his services. The Japanese engineer wondered if this unimpressive-looking young man could really be of any help. The man opened the bonnet, eyed the engine curiously and said: "Foreign parts are not available in India but we have jugaad". The engineer was curious. He asked the Indian to get the work done with this jugaad. The latter brought out some used motor parts and fixed the car. The car developed another snag in Agra. There too, another young man in soiled clothes offered him his services and said the same thing regarding jugaad. But this time he explained jugaad as "roadside engineering". The Japanese came across this jugaad again in Jaipur and Chandigarh, with similar results. When he returned to Tokyo he was understandably all praise for India's miraculous jugaad. The Japanese Prime Minister was curious about what this jugaad actually was. So he asked his Indian counterpart. The Prime Minister of India replied with a straight face: "I cannot disclose the secrets of jugaad since it is this technology that helps me run my 14-party coalition government. Hence it is a state secret."

In India it is not one's labour, merit or dedication that delivers. I do not blame this barrister for his ideas on jugaad. Jugaad in the Indian connotation means contacts and resources. The more jugaad you have, the more powerful you are.

In cases of government tenders, more often than not there is actually no bidding. The contractors simply bribe the bureaucrats and politicians involved. The one who bribes the maximum gets the contract, usually. If bribes are paid over and above the tender amount, the bidder tries to recover the same during the execution of the contract. He, after all, is doing business and not charity (though charity too is a big, and corrupt, business in India today). But in the ultimate analysis the quality of the work suffers and the common man is taken for a ride. Do you not read about newly constructed houses, bridges and dams, built by tender, collapsing or cracking up? While the money spent for its construction was collected from

us through taxes, dishonest contractors greased sarkari palms to secure the contract and then used inferior material to make up for the bribes.

Delhi saw a colossal boom in real estate in recent years. When a property is sold, the registration papers continue to quote the old, pre-boom prices while huge amounts of black money change hands. Most property dealers in and outside Delhi have played a role in this artificial escalation of prices, while the government gets only peanuts as stamp duty.

An NRI litigant had invested money in a big real estate venture and bought a plot on the outskirts of Delhi. When he went to take possession of the land after making the full payment he was informed that the property had already been sold to another party and that he could either take back his money with interest or choose another plot. The NRI moved the consumer court. The real estate company reiterated that they were ready to pay the money back with interest. The NRI wanted to retain the plot but the consumer court urged him to accept the money offered. The consumer court did not raise any questions about how realtors inflate prices while at the same time going back on their promises.

Some time back allegations of favouritism were levelled against a reputed medical college in the matter of appointment of doctors. The best among the lot were denied the posts. Most of those denied the posts moved out of the country in frustration. In this case the nation lost out on a clutch of competent doctors due to debilitating corruption.

In fact the jugaad that I had discussed boils down to a form of favouritism that even honest people won't mind giving a try. In his brilliantly written essay "Long live the Sycophants" in the book "In spite of the Gods", Edward Luce writes: In Delhi "if you are rich and important, you rarely pay. If you are poor, you usually pay through the nose and there is no guarantee that you will even get what you

paid for.”

An even brighter instance is given by V. Raghunathan in his book *Games Indians Play*: “Take the case of the demolition drive in Delhi in early 2006. How is it that we first allow illegal constructions to come up for decades and then one fine morning wake up to the fact and wage a war on such structures overnight? Even when the drive is on, how come the properties of the powerful are rarely touched? It is not as if these deviations are unknown to the authorities. But once these authorities receive their illegal gratification, any deviation is there to stay. For some reason, giving a bribe, particularly when you have no choice, appears to be less of a defection than taking it. But in realty, is it? Isn’t it a collective thing? If there is no giver, there will be no taker. But who will take the initiative?”

The way I look at it, corrupt activities impair our economy and efficiency. Corruption is destructive. It is unproductive. It leads to inefficiency. If corruption is rampant, the consequence is that businessmen, contractors, clerks, politicians and officials will only think of serving their own interests with the common man getting short-changed.

If this trend continues, organizations may very soon seek manipulators and miscreants for their posts. Consider how corruption can wreak havoc in institutions such as the Army and the Judiciary.

Tell me, dear Campaigners, is corruption not a symptom of a severe illness that plagues our society? Corruption is just not about an amount of money changing hands; it is the mindset. The mindset that encourages us to promptly resort to corrupt means to get one’s work done instead of taking recourse to the tedious due process of the law. The problem is so rampant that putting a few corrupt men behind bars would simply not be enough.

If our leaders are themselves corrupt then solutions will obviously not be immediately forthcoming. The entire system will

collapse after a point. Corruption in all its forms is one of the major causes of poverty, under-development and terrorism. There is corruption at the decision-making levels because those in power are greedy and encourage corruption in every which way. For such people, money is their sole motivator. They are not bothered about the needs of the aam admi. Nor are they worried about the poor roads, inadequate infrastructure, lack of potable water in villages, shortage of schools, colleges and hospitals all over the country. Only money drives them, and more money makes them crave for even more of it.

As I have repeatedly said, corruption is a reflection of the state of mind of the corrupt. There exists only a minuscule section of society that has managed to stay insulated from the poison of corruption. Though they are not able to make much of a difference on account of their numbers, they do prove a point: It is possible to shun corruption.

I too believe that the virus of corruption cannot be eliminated altogether from our system. But I more strongly believe that it can be controlled so that it does not deny our children the true legacy of Bharat that they rightfully should inherit.

Given that corruption is a state of mind, I feel that it can be forced to stay suppressed in our subconscious like many other bestial traits that we possess but do not allow to surface. A human being regulates or suppresses his or her negative and destructive qualities so that these do not get the better of him and invite sanction from the law or from society.

Corruption is an illegal act. It invites punishment under law. But the law alone has not proved an adequate deterrent mainly because of the level of percolation and pervasiveness of corruption. Unfortunately, in India we have accepted corruption as a matter of practice. We have to attach a bad name to corruption. For this we have to have an atmosphere around us that can create a sense of

overwhelming hatred against corruption.

Accumulating power and pelf is always a pleasure. But immoral ways of acquiring them gives more pain than pleasure to those who think it is sinful. One suppresses the urge to steal because of his upbringing, education, conscience and moral faiths. There is no religion which gives sanctity to corruption. Therefore, in the courtrooms a witness is asked to take the oath in the name of God to speak the truth.

Why do even the corrupt hate corruption? It is due to the inherently robust moral value system that we inculcate in childhood. The above observations are not merely from conjecture. I sought the views on corruption of dozens of courtroom clerks whom I have known for nearly a decade. I spoke to policemen, who often glorify corruption with the excuse that they collect hafta since they too have to cough up bigger amounts to their superiors. I spoke to officials of government departments including Customs, municipalities and educational institutions. They feel corruption is the most inevitable part of life (Corruption nahi rahega to desh kaise chalega?). But there was one strain of thought common to all of them: they do hate corruption. Why? Their answer is that their parents taught them to be honest and imandaar.

Almost all of us have taken part in mass prayers during our student days. This practice continues even today. These prayers always stress the need and importance of building character over everything else. They say it is important to be a good man rather than a rich and powerful one. These prayers are at imbibing the best values in the child; after all, the child is the father of the man. These values always stressed honesty, hard work, and patriotism as the prerequisites of 'character'.

But once out of school, these prayers are forgotten. Struggling to survive in the rat race, most of us either forget these values altogether or push them back into some cobwebbed corner of the

mind to be dusted out only when our children go to school. And the wheel comes full circle.

While honesty is a matter of practice and self-discipline, corruption is a reflection of one's mindset. It also involves a considerable degree of intelligence. After all, the corrupt go about their game while ensuring that they are never caught in the act.

Corruption is a dangerous virus. Haven't you come across viruses that infect your computer and bring it crashing down? You are then required to reboot the machine and scan its innards thoroughly. Eliminating corruption necessitates such a comprehensive step. The most palpable consequence of corruption is terrorism and all other forms of anti-national activity. The government has brought in several laws to curb corruption but it is yet to do something as comprehensive as rebooting your computer for kicking out that virus.

Let us go back to the age-old Indian system of governance: village panchayats. One form of punishment meted in the olden days to individuals found doing an illegal act is to ostracize them. Though panchayats as an institution have been grossly abused over the centuries, this practice reflects the firm edifice on which social justice was based in India. It also gives us a beacon light for a reformed future; since such a form of complete segregation deals effectively with perceived social evils.

Nobody is going to listen if we shout from the rooftops against corruption. Instead, there will be more frequent and more alarming reports of how the fruits of development do not reach the targeted poor. Or how the lion's share of money sanctioned for public projects gets embezzled. Corruption is being discussed a million times everywhere every day in this country. But do we try to find a tangible, practicable solution?

But can we say that the answer to all problems of corruption,

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and by extension a host of other national problems, lies in ostracizing those who are corrupt or anti-national? This is not practicable either. We cannot hang the corrupt overnight; they are simply too many and too powerful. We cannot beat them up. Legislation too cannot bring about its end.

If we cannot keep the corrupt away, can we not ask honest people to come together, asks my lawyer friend Nishant Dutta? But can it happen? I feel that many of those who we believe are honest may not actually be honest. Some of them may be afraid to be dishonest while harbouring the desire to the same. There are people who have been honest for decades before greed caught up with them, and then there was no going back.

This country does have a large number of people who are honest and incorruptible. Can we not reach out to them? The answer is certainly yes, if only we would know who they are. My Campaigner friends are optimistic when they talk about building a mass movement against corruption. Shanmugha wants to get going at the earliest.

Nishant wants us to focus on the young, our citizens of tomorrow. They must be taught to follow only those honest and dedicated people who have devoted themselves to the cause of the country. I agree with Nishant.

Sudha Passi believes it is all a question of mindset. "We have to cultivate a mindset that can distinguish between the good and the evil, the right and the wrong, the fair and the unfair."

But how does one distinguish between the good and the evil, the right and the wrong, the fair and the unfair?

Says Sudha: "I got the answer from former Prime Minister Chaudhury Charan Singh. In a television interview given by his daughter, she quoted him to say that the right thing is that which

you feel proud of doing and want to share with others. And if you feel that an act of yours has to be hidden from others, then you have done something wrong, unfair and incorrect. This answer has been etched in my mind for so many years. I realise that the most difficult and complex answers have the most simple and straightforward solutions; only, we should have the courage to face them and live with them.”

India is at heart god-fearing. People of all religions bow before god, whatever be their method of doing so.

Let us combine all these forces: honest people plus clean-hearted students plus worshippers of Krishna/Allah/Jesus/Buddha/gods of all faiths plus lawyers plus bureaucrats plus all who believe at least to create a sense of hatred against corruption. Let this huge force of people work in the interest of the country. We all know we cannot eliminate corruption. We can hate corruption. Can we not ask them to join us in our method of hating corruption? If they do so, such a force will be invincible.

But how do we unite? What could be the touchstone for this unity? Is it culture, language, or faith? What is that magic band that can bind all such people?

# CORRUPTION SHOWS THE WAY TO TERRORISM

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**Dear Campaigners!!**

**M**y campaigner friend Sudha Passi is emphatic about her view, and rightly so, that corruption plays a major role in nurturing and fostering terrorist activity. Thanks to our "I, me, myself" attitude and approach, our vision has become so myopic that we (Indians) have unwittingly played into the hands of terror spawning organizations. All because we have lost sight of seeing anything beyond ourselves.

India has been a victim of terrorism and insurgency for several decades now. Terror brooks no compassion; neither does corruption. An act of terror is an act against humanity and civilization. A terrorist is worse than a beast. So is a corrupt person, who has lost the ability to distinguish between the right and wrong in the hot pursuit of acquiring ill-gotten fame or wealth.

According to former Central Vigilance Commissioner N. Vittal, **while corruption is a cause of terror, it is also a consequence.**

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Corruption as an extension of financial terrorism can have the same disastrous impact on human lives as physical terror attacks. Vittal attributes the rampant and pervasive corruption in the North-East and Jammu & Kashmir as one of the direct causes the militant activity there. There is usually a high economic price to be paid for the tumult and upheaval wrought by terror.

Terrorism draws its strength from its intense sense of hatred, Vittal says. "This hatred is continuously nurtured to such an extent that those indoctrinated are prepared to sacrifice their lives to take on their enemies. In the case of financial terrorism, greed is the driving force. This greed grows to such an extent that corruption virtually becomes a way of life. People are not shocked by corruption and do not realize its dangers. We realise that we cannot cure what ails our economy unless we are able to tackle the issue of corruption."

The United States proclaimed a war against terror after the shocking attacks on the Twin Towers of the World Trade Centre in New York and the Pentagon in Washington on 11 September 2001. "While the physical damage caused by terrorism grabbed public attention, (financial terrorism) is another kind of terror unleashed in our country every day which apparently does not shock the people to a similar degree," said Vittal in a lecture in Haryana in 2001.

**Corruption is nothing but an arm of financial terrorism.** The 9/11 attacks reminded many Indians of the 1993 Mumbai blasts in which more than 300 people died. This was an instance of twin terror attacks: physical and financial. The RDX that was used in those blasts to kill innocents was actually smuggled in by bribing customs officials to the tune of Rs 20 lakh.

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the tumult and upheaval wrought by terror.

The 9/11 attacks had an adverse impact on the stock exchanges of the United States and elsewhere in the world. Industries such as travel and tourism reeled for months and years after. Thus financial terrorism has a much wider impact on the corpus of a nation and the lives of its people than physical terror attacks.

Giving a convincing example, Vittal says, "on Terror Tuesday about 10,000 people might have lost their lives. (On the other hand) in the UTI scam two crore investors who had put their life savings in US64 found that their trust had been betrayed. The suffering of the victims who lost their means of financial support, especially in old age, is no less (than victims of 9/11). Once we realize that corruption in India today is in real effect nothing short of financial terrorism we should mobilise public opinion and effort to ensure that the kind of worldwide consensus that is sought to be evolved today to fight terrorism is also brought to bear in tackling such other forms of terror."

In most cases terrorism is an import of transnational criminal activity. Terror is a violent instrument to destabilize states, intimidate legitimate authorities and blackmail governments in pursuit of its goals, which are in most cases religious or political fanaticism. Those masterminding terror acts or movements are generally young, intelligent, educated and fanatically zealous persons. They also have connections in high places and access to influential sources of funding. In many cases the source of this money and manpower is the state itself. It is appalling that in civilized societies states are often themselves the motivating and sustaining forces behind terrorist movements. This they justify in the name of history, stratagem and diplomacy.

What is the link between corruption and terrorism? Possible areas where the two overlap or interplay are information and communication, both extremely vital in strategic terms. We have

seen many cases of sedition and treason wherein vital documents, maps, defence programmes, etc, were passed on to inimical forces for cash, thereby severely compromising national interests. It may not be surprising if every key government department throws up a faceless mole, who could fit into this role when approached. You will not be surprised to find pimps and dalals — government babus — who will copy and pass on important pieces of information from their offices in lieu of a bribe. In all sensational espionage cases, the pimps and middlemen are very highly paid by the foreign agents and mercenaries. Sometimes senior officials, including defence officers, and politicians are found to be hand in glove with such elements. They play into the hands of the agents in exchange for some ready cash and a lifestyle that is beyond their legitimate means. Their minds are irreversibly mortgaged to these dangerous elements. A gangster or terrorist don can trigger a bomb blast in Delhi through a network of operatives from any corner of the world. It is also common knowledge that many hawala deals are routed to terror organizations. And all of this happens because the mind is corrupt and unable to see beyond one's self even as the earth underneath him is slipping by like wet sand on a seashore.

We often talk of an unholy nexus among cops, criminals and politicians. The one big link between them is cash. There are two types of terrorism: triggered by internal forces and external forces.

Internal terrorism is generally an act of gangsters and the mafia. But their ends are limited to acts such as abduction and extortion. But these gangsters and mafia dons can assume lethal forms when they join hands with multinational criminals or terrorists.

Transnational terrorists are imports from beyond the borders.

India has always been vulnerable to attacks from beyond its borders, be it by nation states and imperial clans in the ancient past or global terrorist organizations today. **Our inherent weakness is that we do not react.** And even if we do, it is never enough or at

the right time. If our neighbour is having a problem we may do lip service but would rarely be interested in getting to the root of it. Corruption and terrorism are always interlinked. These emerge from the crucible of sheer hate and perverse thinking. Corruption is cancer.

Here I want to narrate a legend related to Lord Krishna and Putana, the mythical demon. Putana went to the village of infant Krishna to seek him out and kill him at the behest of his uncle Kansa. She disguised as Krishna's mother. Finding Krishna alone she started breastfeeding him. But instead of being poisoned the infant Krishna suckled the life out of her. Moments before she died, Putana moaned: "Oh Krishna! Don't you know that I am your mother? How can you kill your mother?" "In the same way that a mother tries to kill her baby ... you deserve to die; you are an evil," Krishna retorted.

But Putana continued to argue. "I may have committed a crime but you have become a murderer by killing the woman who breastfed you. I shall curse you before I die." Krishna softened, and said, "Tell me what do you want from me apart from your life?" Putana said, "Make me loved by all people while I continue to harm them". Krishna smiled and said "From today you will be the avatar (incarnation) of corruption. Wherever you go you will spread like cancer but the people will continue to adore and crave for you."

Thus Putana acquired immortality as the embodiment of evil. We see her handiwork all around us. But Lord Krishna did not show us the way to do away with the Putana that is deeply entrenched in our society in the form of corruption.

Terrorism does the talking through bullets and bombs and kills people with a thunder. Corruption does the same subtly and on the quiet.

We have seen the blasts in Mumbai in 1993 and 2006, the assassinations of former Prime Ministers Indira Gandhi and Rajiv

Gandhi and ex-Chief of Army Staff Gen. A.S. Vaidya, the December 13, 2001 attack on Parliament, carnages at Akshardham Temple and Ajmersharif dargah ... the list is endless. Even religious sites are not spared in this unrelenting gory tide of terror. We have lost more lives to terrorism than in all the four wars that we fought since Independence. What is worse, terrorism is not always the handiwork of the foreign hand; many of them have been executed by our own brethren although the brain might have belonged outside. Many of the executors of such heinous acts are educated and nurture a deep-rooted hatred for this country, its institutions and beliefs. Others are unemployed and misguided. Some do it for money; some are forced into doing it. Organizations and individuals who inject terrorism into India are flushed with funds and can afford to pump in cash to implement their plans because there are many a lacuna in the social fabric of the society. They further their aims, and build their defences, by resorting to corruption.

Twenty years ago, two persons dying in a terrorist attack in Jammu & Kashmir would make national headlines. Today, such an event would not merit an inside page "brief". We have become "used to" such killings. We are now desensitised, rendered immune by the recurrence of such acts. In 2004 there was a bomb blast in the heart of Delhi's busy Karol Bagh market on Diwali-eve. At that time I was shopping in Bengali Market, just four kilometers away. When the television sets in the shops flashed the news, only a handful of shoppers turned around to look at the screen. The rest did not even bother. Those who did too turned away within seconds and went back to their shopping. It was business as usual in a matter of minutes.

The common man's reaction to terrorism nowadays is almost indifferent. He is more concerned about himself, his home and family than the blood of their fellow citizens. Today a terror attack evokes lesser public reaction than an act of demolition by the local corporation in the cities. Those having anything to do with illegal construction follow the news with rapt attention lest the axe may

next fall on them. This because, today there would hardly be a person in town who has not bent the law in one way or the other to grab every inch of land that he could lay his hands on.

In a city like Delhi most people are educated, employed and make a more decent living compared to those in other parts of the country. Yet, despite their high levels of awareness about issues concerning them and the country, they are not bothered about acts of terrorism in their own city.

Do we care? Are we alarmed? The shadow of terrorism looms directly over a fifth of the nation. This means, more than 200 million Indians live under a perennial threat of terrorism. Going by media reports, there were as many as 5900 acts of terrorist and insurgent violence across the country between 2001 and 2006. This means an alarming daily average of two strikes at one place or the other in the country! The same report mentioned that 4000 Indians were martyred in the wars against Pakistan and China in 1948, '62, '65 and '71 and the Kargil operations in 1999. In Jammu & Kashmir alone, more than 20,000 people were killed in terrorist strikes and anti-insurgency operations since the start of militancy in 1989. We have thus lost five times more lives in Kashmir in 20 years than in five wars spread over 50 years.

A Hindustan Times report of July 2007 titled 'One in every six Indians lives under insurgency' says: "As armed groups spread their influence across their country's sprawling triangle of rebellion, from J&K to Manipur to Andhra Pradesh, more than 17 crore people in militancy-affected areas live with no access to functioning schools, decent roads or other basic development work." The report featured a villager from Jharkhand, Dinesh Mahato, standing on the ruins of a primary health centre. The centre was yet to be visited by a doctor since its inauguration 15 years ago. Utterly neglected and non-functional, it crumbled into a heap of rubble. Mahato asks a pained question: "Are we a part of this country?"

Students in half of India's schools pass out with a shoddy, half-baked education that leaves them incapable of meaningful employment in this globalised world. Such youths from many parts of the country where this situation is compounded by poverty, backwardness and lack of opportunity and infrastructure — such as Jammu & Kashmir, the North-East and parts of Orissa, Jharkhand, Bihar, Chhattisgarh and Andhra — are tapped by terrorist and Naxal groups. It is the absence of even the slightest iota of love and patriotism towards our country among such youths that makes them readily accept the offers of terrorist organizations. Apart from serving as a happy hunting ground, India is also gradually becoming a safe haven for international terrorists.

The advancement in information technology is also feeding terrorism. Terrorists, transnational criminals and drug lords are increasingly using IT as a potent tool to beat the authorities at their own game. A terrorist in, say, Kerala can trigger a blast in coordination with accomplices in Kashmir through the effective use of email, the cellular phone and the Internet. Terrorism can be remote controlled from not only within India but also outside. The Internet today is flush with all kind of information – like tips on bomb-making, etc – and such sites can be accessed by one and all. Drug barons and the betting mafia operate globally through internet. The 9/11 terror strikes in the United States have unveiled the new image of the global terrorist as a technology-savvy, educated, intelligent, and resourceful person who moves with a number of aliases.

India has one of the largest pools of trained manpower in the world in the information technology sector. The number of competent software professionals is growing inexorably. The terror machine also takes advantage of this large unregulated pool of talent. Sometimes we are shocked to hear young educated professionals being hired by terrorist groups without their knowledge. While some professionals would double-check the credentials of their employer, many would not think twice if the money is good. The software industry knows no protocol or official restrictions. Spies in the

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Internet can open the doors of the Indian establishment to prying eyes across the world. Documents can be smuggled and information can be leaked. Sometimes terrorist groups can be tipped off about a possible crackdown even as the same measures are being debated at the highest policy-making level, making their getaway all the more easy.

Why have things come to such a pass? The answer is because our people simply do not react. The people are indifferent; the government is corrupt. Corruption weeds out the will to take hard decisions that strike at the root of evils plaguing the country. And the people are simply not concerned with anything that extends beyond their living rooms and workplace. While a corrupt police is always on the lookout for a bribe, the average Indian can be made to play into the hands of terrorists and other anti-national elements for money. In most cases of terror attacks, the police and Army get into the act when it is too late. By then the damage is already done. The political leaders pay lip service to the bereaved and at best an ex gratia of a few lakhs of rupees. Meetings are convened with the standard refrain that "terrorism is a dastardly crime against the nation which should be condemned in the strongest possible terms". No one, however, takes the lead in weeding out terrorism. Thanks to a sick and sort-sighted mind-set, the consequence of terrorism has proved to be more severe than the loss of lives and limbs.

In Jammu and Kashmir two decades of terrorism has ruined the once-flourishing tourism. India has tremendous potential to attract foreign investment. But the threat of terror has affected the investment climate. Add to this the work culture and corruption in our bureaucracy and political system have earned us an image of being most corrupt in the eyes of global investors.

Can a corrupt government provide peace and security to its people? Can a corrupt government offer a fair and level playing field to investors and industry? If the system lacks transparency, work culture gives way to the culture of bribes and the end result

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is sheer inefficiency. The number of employees who will simply not deliver unless they are bribed, I am sure, is more than the number of corrupt politicians.

With Planet World opening up its markets for all, terrorism has taken a new avatar. In this avatar, terrorism spreads faster than cancer or corruption or both. This is financial terrorism that seeks to dominate the world through the control of its commerce. India by many counts is one such huge state where financial terrorism flourishes. The NGO Azadi Bachao Andolan estimates that more than US\$ 1000 billion of Indian money is lying in various foreign banks and financial institutions. This is 13 times our total external debt. The NGO calculates that if this money is distributed among all Indians, each one of us would get at least Rs 35,000. Without going into the authenticity of this information, I am sure you will agree that this money is certainly not the fruit of honest labour and income. This money actually belongs to the people. Ironically, many of the true "owners" of such a colossal sum die of hunger and disease everyday, and our government cannot afford to spend even 2 per cent of its GDP towards their health and education.

The illegal transfer of money from one country to another (made possible by technology), counterfeit currency, satellite phones, laptops and other modern gadgets are easy tools for unleashing this vicious form of terrorism called financial terrorism.

According to Vittal, financial terrorism is to blame for the starvation deaths of millions of poor in our country. He had, in 2001, cited the example of Orissa where poor villagers in the interior districts died of malnourishment while the Food Corporation of India's granaries were overflowing in other parts of the state. The Union Government provides substantial quantities of grain free to states such as Orissa but little of this reaches the starving and the needy. On the contrary, a substantial part of this grant made available to Orissa is recirculated and sold back to the Food Corporation of India at commercial rates. That year paddy cultivation in Orissa was

down to 30% of the average because of a poor monsoon, but the FCI had managed to equal, if not exceed, the procurement target for paddy for the state! Is this not a glaring example of how financial terrorism in the public distribution system plays havoc with the lives of the hungry poor? Are not these deaths as heinous as those in New York on 9/11?

As we have discussed earlier, in India the term "contacts" is often bandied about to refer to the most effective means of securing favours. Industrialists bag the biggest contracts to the exclusion of honest bids through their "contacts". Through our contacts we can get the most sought after flat in a government housing colony allotted to us. Tender rules are manipulated often. This is not new. But we do not realize that the culture of "contacts" kills the spirit of honest competition and diligent enterprise. Those who benefit from their "contacts" are willing to meet their ends through any kind of corruption, be it "fat", "mat" or "rat". Take a look at how the government is selling the nation's family silver for a song to understand the "wonders" that these "contacts" work.

According to Vittal, "our focus on bringing about a radical cultural change must therefore be an outright attack on the culture of corruption through transparency. Corruption flourishes because of two elements in our culture of governance: lack of transparency and delay. We must extensively use information technology to bring in transparency and to eliminate, or at least, curb delay."

This delay in execution while leading to corruption is often the direct consequence of corruption too. If delay is not born out of corruption, then it is begotten by inefficiency. Again, if someone is inefficient in his work, I am sure he lacks commitment.

Vittal has suggested "a three-point strategy as a broad framework for the onslaught against corruption. The first is by simplifying rules and regulations so that the scope for corruption is reduced. The second is by empowering the public so that they know

their rights and can have access to information. In this context, the Right to Information Act has a vital role. The third is an effective and prompt mechanism to punish the corrupt.”

Vittal’s roadmap is excellent indeed. His suggestions should be followed, if they are doable.

But we must go down to the basics. Human behaviour is extremely complex. Curbs alone will not do unless accompanied by change from within. A law does not work unless it is respected by the citizens. Transparency and simplification of the laws could be effective only when the people are ready to accept the same. Therefore, Vittal’s suggestions will work only when our hatred against corruption becomes second nature. Perhaps we can destroy the Putanas in our society only by hating them, or at least by ceasing to love them.

# HATE CORRUPTION LOVE YOUR NATION

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**Dear Campaigners!**

*W*e do agree that corruption, terrorism and other anti-national activities in India have to be tackled at all costs. And the mother of all these evils is corruption. Corruption is a kind of mental perversity reflected in one's actions, either to satisfy personal greed or bolster one's ego and beliefs. Crores of rupees have been poured into the investigation of corruption cases. Several major corruption cases have rocked our collective national conscience in the last two decades. In the recent past we have also seen the rise of several voluntary organizations dedicating themselves solely to fight corruption. In 1988 Parliament also formulated a special legislation, the Prevention of Corruption Act, to deal with corruption cases. We also have a host of legislations, apart from the Indian Penal Code, such as FERA and FEMA to deal with corruption. Our courts are increasingly passing judgments on corruption cases. But has all this really served the purpose of bringing down the levels of corruption? Have such judgments and laws actually proved to be a deterrent?

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Legislation is the brainchild of a few individuals who, in their wisdom, believe that a specific punishment can check a particular malaise. However, most of the time many of our laws have failed at the execution or implementation level as a result of which the wrong doers have walked away cocking a snook at the system. One thing is clear: deterrence, rather, the lack of it, whether social or legal, has failed to curb corruption.

With none, minimal, or at best superficial understanding about the genesis of crime, lawmakers and researchers have proposed a plethora of measures that have gone on to form the edifices of new laws. But in many cases, if not most, these laws and legislations have not achieved the desired impact. Nonetheless, these are positive steps forward and should not be undermined.

The recently formulated Right to Information Act is one such instrument that holds promise in the fight against corruption and reining insincere babus taking advantage of red-tape. It could prove to be an effective tool of empowerment in future. Armed with it, an ordinary citizen can peep through the bureaucratic curtain and track the movement of dust-laden files. Computerization has also helped make things transparent in a big way. But has anything been done to change the mindset of the people? Several NGOs have resorted to novel methods to fight corruption, such as the one in Chennai which issued fake notes to pay for bribes demanded or beat up corrupt functionaries in their offices.

If we go back to our roots and take a look at the social justice system of medieval times, the theory of self-punishment would help us understand corruption better. Without glorifying any such activity I would like to cite certain self-imposed punitive mechanisms that proved to be powerful deterrents without being legal statutes. Such mechanisms have evolved over a period of time and are in vogue even today. In some states like Orissa, Bihar and Bengal, Hindus consider killing a cow among the gravest sins -- equivalent to murdering a Brahmin. One who killed a cow had to atone for the sin through a

series of self-inflicted measures. He was supposed to wear a rope made of straw like a noose around his neck. He was not allowed to talk to fellow villagers or enter his own house till he had fully atoned for his sin. He was treated with the contempt reserved for criminals by his fellow villagers. In Orissa till the 1970s the village panchayat used to punish any person accused of killing a peacock or an animal considered auspicious for the village.

One very interesting feature of the village justice system was that the alleged offender had to take an oath in the name of the presiding deity of the village. The fear of God is inbuilt in the psyche of every Indian. It is such that no individual would ordinarily commit a crime in the name of God unless some kind of extreme perversity crosses his mind.

Let us also not forget that in India society does not forget or forgive a murderer or rapist even after he has served his sentence and is released from prison. Such people continue to be stigmatised and are looked down upon by other citizens. This is an extreme mental torture that convicts once released are subjected to for the rest of their lives. But unfortunately, our society has not yet branded corruption as heinous a crime as, say, rape or murder. Corrupt people are not ostracized by their communities or neighbourhoods. **Social segregation is a bigger deterrent than segregation behind bars.** As I have already mentioned earlier, corruption involving the misappropriation of public money in Singapore can invite a life term without parole. In India a similar punishment would be very difficult to implement. Just imagine what would happen to hundreds of our MPs, MLAs, contractors, police officers and babus if all the corrupt were sentenced to life in prison like Singapore. Lawmakers in India cannot draft such stringent laws here since corruption is yet to be stigmatized in the manner that is being sought.

I have often during my visits to various places in the country felt that being a god-fearing nation repulsion towards corruption comes naturally to Indians. In fact even the corrupt hate corruption

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in India, just as smokers hate the very tobacco they have been addicted to. A clerk with the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), Hari Malik (name changed), who takes bribes unfailingly every day, once told me that "I am honest merely because I am not caught. I take money just as anyone else, (But) I don't want my son to be corrupt. I want him to be an IT Engineer and go to America for a better future. But then how do I know if my son will not be corrupt? I hate corruption."

Be that as it may there is a unanimous opinion that deep within themselves, people in general dislike corruption but generally end up abetting it as a matter of compulsion. This dislike is, more often than not, latent. Corruption has to be given the label of a plague or pestilence, and this latent hatred has to be whipped up among the masses. Corruption should be likened to rape or murder if it has to be wiped out. And for this we need to create a wave against it in the whole country.

Hatred against corruption can be spontaneous only when it comes as a sense of duty to each and every individual, irrespective of his or her background. The contours of this sense of duty are yet to be defined. In 1976 we included in our Constitution the Fundamental Duties through the 42nd Amendment Act. The Constitution makes it binding on every citizen of India to bear in mind some duties towards our society and nation. These are:

- To abide by the Constitution and respect its ideals and institutions, the national flag and the national anthem;
- to cherish and follow the noble ideals which inspired our national struggle for freedom;
- to uphold and protect the sovereignty, unity and integrity of India;
- to defend the country and render national service when

called upon to do so;

- to promote harmony and spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India transcending religious; linguistic and regional or sectional diversities to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women;
- to value and preserve the rich heritage of our composite culture;
- to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers and wild life and to have compassion for living creatures;
- to develop scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform;
- to safeguard public property and to abjure violence; and,
- to strive towards excellence in all spheres of individual and collective activity so that the nation constantly rises to higher levels of endeavour and achievement.

In a family, the duties of a husband towards his wife, of a son towards his father, a brother towards his sister and a father to his son are well defined. It is the emotion and love towards our near and dear ones that binds us and instill in ourselves the sense of belongingness. If we consider our country too to be like our home and family then performing all our duties towards our motherland would be spontaneous. So the key element required in discharging our duties towards our nation is the sense of being Indian. Kiran Patro and Nishant Dutta have asked how we can think of an instrument that will help us create a sense of being Indian. Shanmugha Patro says we can do so by an intense awareness campaign through the media and other channels. Avtar Nehru disagrees, saying we need to do much more.

We have already discussed that more than 92 per cent of Indians are god-fearing. Indians are by nature emotional, peace-loving and caring. Most people go to temples, churches and mosques regularly. We have a large number of students who say prayers to the Almighty every morning. The power of God, who may not be visible, is so immense that providence is also invoked in trial proceedings. Since we are expected to say nothing but the truth before God, we take the oath of veracity in courts in the name of Providence too.

Man became more and more rational as Civilization progressed. This rationality segregated man from the rest of the animal kingdom. Every animal has a basic desire for food, sex, greed and power. The human being is an animal too; he possesses all these qualities at the time of birth. When a child is born, parents pay great attention to him. The child too learns to respond to this attention, and gets used to it. As he grows up he hates to share this attention with anyone else. This is a manifestation of the inherent selfish quality in him. This is what we all are at the beginning of our lives.

When civilization began, human beings, as many philosophers and anthropologists say with certainty, lived in the forests much in the fashion of animals. With the passage of time they changed, refined themselves and altered their behavioural patterns. This was made possible by the sharing of experience, which we call knowledge, and the process of refinement, which we call culture.

This process of refinement that we call culture is an unending one. Refinement is never static. It keeps on changing, discarding the irrelevant to embrace the more meaningful. But what was meaningful yesterday may not be relevant today. Hence every process has some anomalies and grey areas and, thereby, room for improvement. In the era of the homo sapiens, fighting over food for survival and wanton sex were normal. Why then have our behaviour patterns changed?

Niranjan Mahapatra of my village Sarangadharpur gave me

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the answer to this question way back in the summer of 1985. He had then just joined Swami Chinmayananda and later given the title Swami Saranananda. Niranjana Mahapatra was trying to explain how the early human beings behavioural patterns gradually changed as he settled down to "civilization". He explained the philosophy of Moh Mudgaram, authored by the great saint and philosopher Adi Shankaracharya.

Niranjana Mahapatra explained that the Shankaracharya had written Moh Mudgaram with one message: our bestial qualities must be hammered away to oblivion so that we can live life on the god-given path. When bestial qualities remain latent in our heart, punishment will not work as a deterrent till we would start hating those very bestial qualities. How would one do away with these bestial qualities forever? The answer is through samskara. Samskara teaches us to reject what is bad and accept and continue with what is good. This process of refinement is called "culture". Our culture has set for us, individually and collectively, the parameters that we are not to transgress. In retrospect I believe Niranjana Mahapatra gave me a beautiful mantra to fight one's bad or bestial qualities.

In primitive society there was no regulation of sex. A man could have sex with as many women as he could. A father could have had intercourse with his daughter. This is perverse, is not it? But why is this perverse? It is because such acts are considered taboo in all societies. Such relationships were considered sinful. A new principle was formulated prohibiting sexual relationship between a man and a woman other than husband and wife. Marriage could have come up as an institution to formalise the act of union, transcending all religions. After this, sexual relationships among couples other than husband and wife were viewed as immoral and illegitimate.

The same was the case with theft. There was no concept of legitimate ownership in the primitive world. Gradually theft and robbery were viewed as crimes, and the concept of property, both collective and individual, emerged. Theft and plunder were given

a bad name. Those who still perpetrated it were reined in by the justice system that evolved from the edifice of such beliefs of right and wrong. The justice system prepared deterrents for those who did not adhere to the norms that governed society. These deterrents came in the form of social segregation, personal boycott and corporal punishment.

These deterrents were elaborately stipulated in Puranic and historical texts so that the human being would clearly be able to distinguish between right and wrong. The never-ending process of refinement continues even today, not only in India but the whole world. Unless you hate the bestial qualities in you, you are no different from that of a beast. These bestial qualities are manifest in a host of activities such as bloodshed, communal conflagrations, terrorism and corruption.

It goes without saying that the god-fearing people of India would hate activities of such nature. But it is also true that people representing vested interests encourage criminal activity to satisfy their selfish interests. Honest and educated people fail to unite themselves and others against such practices. This happens simply because we do not have enough courage to stand up to such men. It is something like chickens waiting their turn at the chopping block. In my discussions on this subject, many educated and thoughtful persons have expressed the fear that if this trend continues the impact on our succeeding generations may be irreversible. Do we want that?

# A NEW RENAISSANCE

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## Dear Campaigners!!

*T*he cauldron of India's unrelenting problems is simmering. Corruption, militancy, terrorism, casteism, poverty and economic inequity are rudely shaking the very foundation of its social and political edifice. There is widespread dismay that the situation is worsening by the day. Now, if we know that the situation is worsening, should we allow it to continue? Our silence or lack of response not only fails to deter but actually encourages vested interests to further their mendacious cause.

It is indeed paradoxical that Indians while being one of the most "god-fearing" people in the world are also perceived as one of the most corrupt. With over a billion people and an enormous reservoir of talent and resources, India still struggles to cope with, apart from corruption, terrorism, poverty, casteism and a host of other social inequities. This is shameful to say the least. Now what can we do to change this?

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The frustration of our youth and the middle-class, denied opportunity and growth commensurate with their abilities and ambition, is translated into terrorism, militancy, fraud and corruption. Those who unleash this wave of terror and create this cesspool of corruption are more often than not provided refuge and protection by the rich and the powerful. While they claim to be messiahs of the downtrodden they do not hesitate to threaten the very system at its roots. Where lies the solution?

Gautam Basu would say we need to initiate a concerted drive to instill patriotism and love for the country among the people. Since we take our nation for granted and rarely ask ourselves what we can do for the country and not what the country will do for us, this probably could be a pragmatic, albeit slow, solution. But my lawyer friend R.K. Singh would say "nationalism is not the right choice in this global village of ours". He feels nationalism has a parochial edge to it as we transcend borders with the help of technology and the people of the world become international citizens. "Today we need global leadership," says Singh.

But what good can leadership of the comity of nations do when our own home is not in order? Can we lead the world while we struggle to lead our own people to a better future? We have given a system of governance to ourselves. There are many inherent flaws in this system of governance, and these flaws are growing cancerously.

Gautam agrees with me when I say we need to have a national movement against corruption and terrorism. Sudha Passi too supports this wholeheartedly. During a number of meetings that members of the Build India Group had among themselves, there was a broad consensus that we need a new national movement, this one against corruption and terrorism. How are we to galvanize the nation into unleashing another wave of a movement of this colossal scale? Can our educated citizens spare the time and will for such an initiative? How do we identify the ills that we wish to have

eradicated? How do we fight corruption and terrorism and other insidious ills that plague our society while we do our duties as family men, professionals and sons and daughters at home?

Nishant Dutta wondered how such a movement could be organized and made to sustain itself in the battle against the twin evils. Kiran Patra and Avtar Nehru agreed on a national movement but wondered what its modalities would be.

For quite some years now I have been thinking about how to have a movement in which we can involve all kinds of people from all levels of society in the cause of the nation, and how we can organise mass protest against corruption, terrorism and militancy. For this we need to first inculcate a sense of Indianness in the minds of each and every individual from Kashmir to Kanyakumari and from Kohima to Kutch and all other islands forming part of this country.

Every Indian parent teaches his child to recite a prayer of honesty and truthfulness. Every Indian mother tells her wide-eyed offspring the triumph of good over evil. We have a natural propensity towards reposing an unshakeable faith in Providence. Yet from our colossal nursery of millions of children are spawned thousands of dishonest people to adulthood. This is because we forget undying values of virtue that we are taught in our childhood as we grow up and allow the winds of our times to permeate us. We decide instead to focus on gaining as much money and power as we can. The bestial qualities of human beings emerge to the forefront when an individual is bestowed power by his society. As the bestial qualities such as greed and lust are nourished, the latent cultural moorings are overshadowed. This is where our trouble begins. To overcome this, we must learn to hate, and then abandon, our bestial qualities.

Can we hate corruption or create a sense of widespread hatred against it? My fellow BIG founders had initially planned to name the organisation the "Hate Corruption Campaign". They were charged

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up whenever we discussed taking corruption head on. But we had to debate endlessly on a practical way of creating and fostering a sustained hatred against corruption.

After much thought and deliberation I realized that fighting corruption and terrorism will need something far bigger than an NGO or trust or any other social organization. In fact most people would be suspicious of you if you spoke of the evils of corruption and fighting against it. One would have to, time and time again, face the poser "Are you yourself not corrupt?"

Corruption is inexorable. It is omnipresent and fast-spreading. We cannot simply uproot corruption and eradicate it with one decapitating stroke. The only solution, I feel, is creating a pervasive hatred against it. We must be psyched to equate corruption, at least within the portals of our minds, with heinous crimes such as rape and murder. But to universalize this hatred we have to have a working strategy. I feel that a pledge against corruption would sow the germs of such a desirable hatred. This Pledge will institutionalize this hatred. It will be a signpost or testimony that we can revert to each time this hatred that we intend to churn in ourselves wavers. Such a Pledge could be initiated from right in school. Today's school goers are, after all, tomorrow's citizens. We discussed this to the bone and agreed that we need to have something on the scale of a National Pledge.

There are pledges in some form or the other with select target audiences and a sectoral appeal. The Government of India already circulates such an instrument in all government departments to promote transparency among babus. As to what extent this has helped promote transparency and erode corruption is anybody's guess. The current text of the pledge for honesty that the Union Government has adopted reads as under:

"We, the public servants of India, do hereby solemnly pledge that we shall continuously strive to bring about integrity and

transparency in all spheres of our activities. We also pledge that we shall work unstintingly for eradication of corruption in all spheres of life. We shall remain vigilant and work towards the growth and reputation of our organisation. Through our collective efforts, we shall bring pride to our organisations and provide value-based service to our countrymen. We shall do our duty conscientiously and act without fear or favour."

The idea is salutary indeed. But the same cannot be said about the results. I spoke to a number of officials, policemen and government clerks about how they feel when they are required to recite this pledge. Most agree that the pledge did not tug at their heart-strings. "The pledge is not touching enough ... it is a mechanical instrument. Officials do not take the pledge seriously. It is recited mechanically," is the general refrain.

A pledge has to have the power to touch one's heart. Moreover, why do only officials take the pledge? Why can't every Indian join in?

There is also the moot question whether this pledge should only be against corruption? I always believe that the pledge should serve the bigger and all-encompassing purpose of inculcating a sense of Indianness in the minds of each and every citizen. The pledge should promote nationalism. And the pledge must promote love for one's country.

If such a pledge is institutionalized in the nation's consciousness successfully, it could become an extremely effective tool for transmitting a gamut of messages aimed at cleansing the muck from our social and political fabric. It has to be simple, direct and yet forceful, and should be competently translated into all Indian languages. The common man must comprehend it and relate to it, and must address him directly and simply.

I have seen several NGOs having a manifesto, and even

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personalised pledges, against corruption. But no such pledge could work in India?

The problem is corruption and militancy have become a fact of life and there will be no dearth of people mocking someone who says he hates corruption. Few would lend him an ear. But what if the majority of Indians cry out aloud against corruption and terrorism? This is the genesis of the "National Pledge" that we in the Build India Group believe should become a part of our collective national identity. In fact this is perhaps the only way of making all Indians hate and shun corruption and militancy. Such a National Pledge, however, must be acceptable to all Indians.

Imagine a situation where the entire country right from the village peasant to the President and Prime Minister solemnly proclaim their love and loyalty to India and in unison pledge to keep the nation's interests paramount in all that they do or say in every day of their lives. It would take a minute to make such an affirmation, but a nation of a billion would be changed forever if we were to abide by it.

Gautam Basu outlined the broad contours of such a pledge: It should be taken by all Indians, in unison, and at an appointed moment. If such an affirmation is made by us in all sincerity at a particular chosen time, an unprecedented wave of unity will sweep through our nation. If we even attempt, with all probity that each one of us is capable of mustering, to make the sentiments of such a pledge the cornerstone of our life and work, the destiny of this country will be scripted anew.

Sixty years have passed since we won our nationhood. We speak with pride about the strides we have made in science and technology, education and economy. We have held our heads high in the comity of nations. As a democracy we have given ourselves an unsurpassed Constitution.

In this backdrop, Dear Campaigners, can we not give ourselves and our country just a couple of minutes in a year to pledge our love, loyalty and commitment to it? Can we not ask our school-going students to rise for a minute at a particular time to pledge their undying respect for India? Can our brave jawans not click their heels in attention, raise a salute to the Tricolour and take this Pledge? Can each one of us not spare a minute or two in a year when we shall think of only India and nothing but India?

Recalling the feedback that we have received from so many people we are confident that such a Pledge will unleash a great wave of patriotism that will course through the veins of every Indian in every walk of life. All my friends agree, but also raise a pertinent question: "How is it doable?"

I shall be coming to that. One of the most pragmatic aspects of such a National Pledge is that its rendition will require little or no expenditure. But it will entail a great deal of sincerity and love for this land. While the Government spends several thousand crore rupees every year in the investigation of criminal cases related to corruption and in dealing with terrorism and other anti-national activities, it will be worth the effort to devote a minute's time to an endeavour that seeks to eliminate these very evils from their roots.

The thought of every Indian taking a National Pledge in unison is not exactly utopian. History gives us instances of millions of people, even entire populations of nations, dedicating themselves to a single thought or emotion to commemorate or honour an event or entity or person. In the United States the Pledge of Allegiance to the Stars and Stripes (the American flag) was uttered by more than 12 million schoolchildren across the Union on Columbus Day in 1892. The original US Pledge of Allegiance had only 23 words. It is significant to note that these 23 magical words keep America firmly in place in the hearts of all its citizens:

"I pledge allegiance  
To my Flag  
And (to) the Republic  
For which it stands.  
One nation, individual,  
With liberty and justice for all."

The US Pledge of Allegiance has since been amended only three times. In 1923, "the flag of united states" were substituted for "my flag". In 1924, "of America" was added. A providential element was introduced on Flag Day (June 14) 1954 when the words "under God" were introduced after "one nation", to read as "one nation under God". The pledge, which was recited by school children across the country in 1892, became popular among the adults and this pledge had created a patriotic fervor during World War II. In 1945, this pledge received official title as "The Pledge of Allegiance".

As a part of its National Flag Day activity, the US congress recognized the pledge urging all Americans to recite the pledge of Allegiance. When this Pledge is administered, Americans stand facing the Stars and Stripes with their right hand over their hearts, fingers together and placed horizontal to the arm forming as close to a right angle as possible. The arm drops to the sides after the words "justice to all" are pronounced.

This gesture triggered a patriotic fervour that is still evidenced in the veneration that Americans have for their National Pledge to this date. When Thomas Alva Edison died, every American home and office switched off all lights for two minutes to honour the man who illumined their lives. Just imagine what could have been the

impact of such a programme in unison.

Singapore has also adopted a national pledge for itself and the pledge is recited in schools during assemblies, during SAF day and national day parade and at national day observance ceremonies. There is a rider that the pledge is not to be used for commercial purpose.

Individuals while reciting the pledge shall clinch their right fists to the left side of their chests as gesture to symbolize loyalty to the nation.

The pledge of Singapore reads:

“We the citizens of Singapore,  
Pledge ourselves as one united people,  
Regardless of race, language or religion  
To build a democratic society  
Based on justice and equality  
So as to achieve happiness, prosperity and  
Progress of our nation”.

So US has a national pledge. Singapore has a national pledge. There are several other small big countries who have national pledge. Can we not think of one for our country- A national pledge for India? It is our belief that the new renaissance can usher in with a national pledge – if taken in unison.

# THE PLEDGE FESTIVAL

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India is a country of rituals. Millions of Indians reaffirm their faith in God every day in temples, mosques, churches and gurdwaras across the land. People love and worship Vishnu, Shiva, Allah, Jesus, Buddha, Mahavira and so many other gods and god men that I may not be able to complete the list. As human beings we love music, songs, bhajans, illumination, pictures and dance as a part of festivals. Traditionally we all love festivals.

I believe we celebrate two types of festivals. One we bask in glory as the saga of our achievements comes out alive in the form of opera or some other symbolic functions like we celebrate Dusshera or Janmashtami. Such functions remind us what we can do for ourselves. It gives us lessons about victory of the good over the evil. The other type of festivals are a promise or commitment. For example, Raksha Bandhan festival, in which a brother commits protection to his sister, or Karva chauth in north India, wherein wives pledge absolute love and loyalty towards their husbands. Similarly, every religion has an occasion for commitment to the faith

in some form or the other. The Muslims may observe Ramadan or the Catholics the Lent as a sign of commitment to the faith.

There is another festival of commitment that I will now talk about. Only, instead of commitment of individuals to their faith, families and near ones, I am seeking the same kind of commitment of Indians towards our nation. And this is a different kind of festival ... it is not religious but truly secular festival. Yet we can celebrate it religiously and that too, for a great cause. A cause for the nation! This has to be a festival to be celebrated across the country, from the Andamans to Anantnag? And if we observe this festival with the sincerity of our hearts, this will be the biggest festival in our history ... the biggest stepping stone for a future which will see greater glory for our country. A future of prosperity and transparency when temple bells and church chimes will ring in a resurgent India with every new dawn.

The main feature of this festival will involve Indians happily reaffirming their love and loyalty for "Bharat Mata" for only a minute by reciting this solemn Pledge? People from so many cultures and communities across the world demonstrate their love and loyalty to the soil to which they belong. We will do it but with a difference.

As we have discussed, most Indians are God-fearing. Many possibly worship this land as a goddess or benign mother. Indians of all religions do not mind bowing before the National Flag. Some kiss the soil of this land in veneration. Therefore, all Indians for that matter would not mind demonstrating their respect to the country in some fashion or the other. We in the Build India Group propose an oath in the form of a National Pledge and a ritual in the form of a National Festival.

Swami Sarananandaji tells me that if a Pledge can be taken by all, or at least the overwhelming majority of, Indians, it will be a historic event. He also finds such an idea in tune with the transcendental message of the Scriptures. Gautam feels that if such a Pledge can be

taken as part of an institutionalised National Festival, it will be the greatest triumphal moment for India since the clock struck midnight on August 14, 1947.

There is some magic about taking such an oath in unison. My lawyer colleague T.A. Siddiqui and journalist friend Nadeem Ahmed had once told me that there was greater spiritual satisfaction in saying mass prayers during namaaz with hundreds of others rather than doing the same in private. When I first mentioned my idea of a National Pledge to my 73-year-old mother in Puri, she said: "Nothing could be a greater religion than loving your country; nothing could be a greater prayer than taking such a Pledge".

Such a Pledge, for obvious reasons keeping in mind India's diversity, has to be simple and lucid, and capable of being uniformly translated into all Indian languages so that the time taken to recite it is the same in any part of the country. Prominent short story writer Das Behhur during course of conversation tells me "national pledge is a wonderful idea and we need to do it at the earliest".

It will take some amount of debate to formulate and finalise such a National Pledge. In fact we are inviting suggestions from all over the country? The underlying philosophy of the Fundamental Duties in the Constitution can serve as the edifice of such a Pledge, with an abhorrence of corruption as its focal theme. It should also exhort Indians to love their nation and do their duty to their best. I thought of a draft. My Campaigner friends discussed it exhaustively. Gautam has worked on my draft. We zeroed in on one of our many drafts. The last one we concurred is appended at the end of this document. It may not be acceptable to each and every one of us, but we feel it encompasses all that we want it to convey and all that it should incorporate.

Many may ask us what good will a National Pledge do? We would like to ask what good will it not? A National Pledge will be a major step in changing the collective Indian mindset towards the heinous

ills that plague our nation. It can be the most effective vehicle to convey the message of hatred against corruption and terrorism. The Pledge will constantly remind us of our national and social duties, so much so that even a child will rebuke his father when he finds his actions lacking probity. Not only will it tangibly infuse patriotism but the shades of regimented discipline that it inherently carries will also build commitment among citizens just as the morning assembly seeks to teach the value of orderliness among schoolchildren. It will also bolster leadership qualities in our youth and instill in them a sense of nationalistic pride.

But how do we of the Build India Group go about institutionalising a National Pledge? Such a Pledge has to be taken in unison by the maximum number of Indians from all over the country. It is, therefore, imperative that a particular hour or a particular day is earmarked for this ceremonial recital of the National Pledge by our countrymen. We have decided to call this day the "National Pledge Day". On the first such National Pledge Day will we kickstart a campaign to hate corruption and its sibling evils. This campaign, which we have named "Hate Corruption Campaign", will run in tandem with the movement to instill patriotism and love for the country.

The media will be key to this initiative. Television and the print media will be instrumental in bringing the Pledge into every Indian home just like it does with the Prime Minister's August 15 speech from the ramparts of the Red Fort.

The concept of a pledge is not new in India. In every prayer that we recite everyday there is an inherent pledge that we make. But for the first time we will be having a public reaffirmation of a national missive. Hence the National Pledge will be taken concurrently and widely by the greatest number of individuals together.

A university teacher had once asked us to name a festival which is celebrated all over country by all people of all religions, castes and languages? A friend said it was the Georgian New Year's Day.

This applies internationally. On the other hand, we have two other exclusively Indian festivals, that of Independence Day and Republic Day. Both these days are unique. On 15th August 1947 more than 350 million Indians won the freedom to determine their destiny after centuries of foreign rule. And on 26th January 1950 more than 500 princely states officially aligned with the nascent republic to forge one great nation.

New Year's Day has no mode or ritual specific to it. There are only personalized conventions; one may send out greetings cards or choose to celebrate a holiday with a family outing. It's a day spent in thoughts of welcoming a new year of hope and dreams.

A family wedding in India also assumes festival contours. Relatives far and near gather at one place to celebrate and cement family ties. A wedding also serves as a benchmark of one's position in one's family circle. The gifts that we buy for the newly-wed couple are our way of reiterating this position. At other village functions the entire clan gets into celebratory mood. Here the occasion morphs into a carnival, a festival jamboree, involving the entire village and even beyond. Festivals essentially make up merge our identities into the collective and are occasions for mirth. One very significant aspect of a festival is that it provides a great opportunity to the participating people to bond among themselves. When marriage was solemnized into an enduring institution, humankind gave it the colour of a festival. While both partners promise undying faithfulness, their friends and kin celebrate the union in one great display of festive mirth.

Keeping in view the potent unifying force of the festival, Bal Gangadhar Tilak converted a festival into a social and political platform. The rousing call to unite and oust the British was given to the people of Maharashtra on Ganesh Puja. In 1893 he extended the religious celebrations to all over the country to make the occasion a part of the campaign against British imperialism. Thus here we see a family and community festival assuming the dimensions of a

national event.

Another example that comes to my mind is an annual festival in Bargarh district of western Orissa. All of Bargarh, a nondescript township known for its fine-quality paddy, is transformed into a sprawling proscenium to recreate the myth of the slaying of Kansa by his nephew Lord Krishna. The city becomes the capital of Kansa and the people his subjects in a month-long colourful pageant called Dhanu yatra. No one is sure who started this unique festival which first happened in the early 20th Century after the British placed a garrison there. The purpose again was to create an event which will involve all residents so that a particular message can reach out to the maximum audience.

When Dhanu yatra was initiated, the British were depicted as Kansa. Citizens of Bargarh had devised a unique method to beat the British ban on nationalist propaganda. Every resident carried a whistle on him. Every time an Englishman beat up or insulted a native the latter would blow his whistle. Anyone hearing a whistle was required to blow his. Thus every resident was alerted within moments of something going wrong. This is how the festival began. The trick adopted by the people to communicate with was a huge success.

The British have left but the yatra continues till today in Bargarh as an integral part of its tradition. Consider this for a moment: Today we have more dangerous Kansas in the form of corruption and terrorism. Such Kansas have proliferated into all corners of the country. What if we all blow the whistle to alert every one else about these Kansas of our times?

In this land of religious festivals, there are no truly secular or nationalist festivals but for August 15 and January 26. The primary intent of celebrating these two days is to inculcate a sense of patriotism and unity among the people. These two days have been declared national holidays. The hoisting of the Tricolour on

these two days is a symbolic activity to remind the people of their nationhood. As Sarojini Naidu put it, "under this flag, there is no difference between a prince and a peasant, between the rich and the poor, between man and women."

Many of us feel a tug in our hearts when we hear Vande Mataram being sung or see children carrying the Tricolour walk past with cries of Bharat Mata ki jai. At the same time, do we wonder often how many of us participate spontaneously in Republic Day and Independence Day events instead of being compelled to do so as part of a group or institution?

Indians do not identify with these two celebrations at the individual level. Accept it or not, we do not feel the urge from within to participate in such programmes. These have become mere official dos that we have to get done with. Even in educational institutions many children attend such programmes twice every year simply because they have to or they do not wish to displease their teachers.

Had Indians empathized with these two "national festivals" or made these family events that are participated in with pride, it would have immensely contributed towards inculcating a sense of being Indian in us. This pride could have been translated into solidarity with the nation and contributed to nation-building. But this has not happened.

I discussed the National Pledge with several friends, acquaintances and colleagues, and extensively with my excellent team of Campaigners. I also thought on how this Pledge could be linked to some kind of a ritual or festival with nationalistic flavour involving the entire country. Such a festival would be India's one true National Festival.

The idea of a National Festival is to bring people together to sensitise them towards their motherland and dedicate themselves to

its betterment. And if there ever was a time when we needed such a festival the most, it is now. I believe a National Festival should be organised simultaneously all over the country on a particular day during which every Indian would take the National Pledge in unison and commit himself to his country.

My Campaigner friends agree that a National Festival with a National Pledge will indeed be a powerful instrument in building national unity. If you do not agree, ask yourself what the impact of such a festival is successfully organised and such a pledge meaningfully taken.

In the years preceding our Independence in 1947 almost every Indian newspaper had joined the campaign against British rule. The media has proliferated today in its reach and access. The Internet has also increased the speed of communication exponentially. If the media gets involved in propagating even a cracker of an idea, the message will reach millions of Indian homes instantaneously. That is the power of the media; and ours is a media-centric proposition.

To begin with, we can involve schools and educational institutions. We first can try with them. The pledge will truly be a mass movement. If all conscious people in the country motivate their neighbours, friends or relatives to take the Pledge, the message can also be amplified to millions of others through the e-mail and by word of mouth. This would be an excellent beginning and the impact would be tangible indeed.

I am sure you would agree that this model is workable. Why should we not give it a try? One fine morning we will see citizens, office-goers, servicemen, students, housewives and children come out of their homes in an unrelenting wave of solemn purpose to take this pledge in unison at sites which will be hallowed by their patriotism. Such a moment would be the greatest moment for national unity in our history.

If the National Pledge is taken even once, the consequences will certainly be startling. And if the Pledge Festival can be institutionalised and observed with true patriotism and zeal, the nation shall be changed forever. Greater transparency in our national lives and a lessening of corruption due to a change in our mindsets is inevitable. An Indian who has pledged himself to the nation will think twice before he allows corruption to even cross his mind.

Dear campaigners, never must you once feel, while reading this book or discussing it, that we are spreading the message of loving our nation at the expense of hating others. When I respect my country will I not understand that others too respect theirs? The purpose of taking a National Pledge is to reiterate that our nation's interests are paramount for all of us. My country comes first, and I am proud to be its citizen. This principle applies to all men of the civilized world. Nationalism never implies that you hate another country. If you love your soil and your land, you love all humanity and the whole world. You hate only the bestial qualities in yourself. If we shut our eyes for even a moment and ask ourselves what bestial qualities we have, our conscience will answer us truthfully. Only when we learn to hate our bestial qualities will we become better human beings and, by extension, better and more worthy citizens. Perversion within oneself transforms us into thieves, fraudsters, rapists, murderers, hooligans, mafia men and even terrorists. And once we are one of these there is no coming back. The Pledge is the pill that can cure an entire gamut of social ailments. Let us then take it, and take it in unison!

If a victory by the young Indian cricket team at the Twenty20 World Cup can instill so much patriotic fervor and Indianness amongst us, imagine the lasting impact of a nationwide affirmation of Indianness made by all Indians. A National Festival can unleash similar euphoria, and with more lasting impact. Let all our celebrities, public icons and opinion-leaders from all fields — who command respect by virtue of their merit — take the lead in this unique mass movement. Let the media, the entertainment industry, the clergy

and the governing class take the lead to endorse such a festival to the common man. And let the aam admi take it upon himself to treat this as doing his bit for the nation.

Taking the Pledge in unison will take less than a minute. The Pledge, however, has to be associated with some kind of festival for setting the stage. The modicum of such a festival can be left open to the opinion of the people. The one rider is that such a festival must be truly secular and in no way hurt the sentiments of any community or religion. This shall be a festival for all India, by every Indian and for all time to come.

Friends and peers who have been enthused by the idea have come up with many suggestions. The National Festival has to be a secular festival, but it has to be observed religiously. Let the pledge be printed on a greeting card-sized paper that is flushed with the colours of the Tricolour. Let it be translated in all Indian languages. Let it adorn the porch of every household like a solemn pennant on the appointed day. Let it also be displayed in our homes, schools and offices as a totem that we take pride in. Let it reach every nook and corner. Let it enter our hearts and homes!

At the stroke of the appointed hour, let the sirens and conches be blown, let the cymbals crash, drums beat and bells ring to augur the sanctimonious moment.

It is Pledge time!

Let every Indian fill his heart with pride and step out of his home to pay homage to the nation. Let us take the Pledge solemnly, and with our hearts and minds resolved to abide by it for the rest of our lives. Let the Pledge be uttered in unison, and let it ring in our hearts true!

That is all I ask.

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## **THE PLEDGE**

We the people of India today  
Do solemnly pledge ourselves to the  
Service of our nation  
With honesty, sincerity and commitment;  
Always keeping our nation's  
Interests paramount  
In all that we think, do or say  
For the greater glory of this land.





Do you think we can modify the present draft national pledge, if so, kindly suggest your idea in not more than 50 words.

“

Do you want to become a member of this group, if so please tell us in what way you can contribute to the mission? (not more than 50 words)

Recommended by

- 1.
- 2.

We value your opinion. We respect your sentiment. We wish to further strengthen our group with your commitment and endeavour. The committee will get back to you with its response soon.

(If you do not know any member of this group and wishes to work for the cause, you may contact the undersigned.

Nishant Dutta

Advocate

Ch No12

Delhi High Court

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