

Commentary

The 'Anna Movement' and Its Message

–Nirupam Hazra¹

With the decision of Team Anna to form political party, the Anna Movement or the so-called 'Second Movement of Independence' comes to an end. But was the movement only about sound and fury or had it some message for every one of our society?

The hurly burly is done, but the battle is neither lost nor won, because the battle has reduced into a burlesque. With the decision of fighting corruption in a democratic political way, the phenomenon called Anna Movement comes to its much expected farcical end. In a country where a new scam hits headline every second day; Anna suddenly appeared as a Saviour, a Messiah. Clad in white *khadi*, this short, supple, septuagenarian instantly caught nation's imagination. Nation suddenly woke up to 'Second Independence' movement and in Anna people found another Bapu and media stumbled upon a treasure trove of 24/7 reality show.

When Anna began the first fast in April 2011, people gradually started to lend support. The demonstration against corruption slowly took the form of an urban movement, a movement of middle-class. Joining the movement became a moral obligation for the middle-class who so far has been part of the conundrum called corruption. It is the middle-class who implicitly supported the corruption either as a victim or as a beneficiary. Anna movement brought to them an opportunity of collective catharsis. It became a spectacle to vent out their frustration in a meaningful, if not patriotic way. Apart from that it also became an escape from humdrum of mundane middle-class life.

On the other hand for the young generation, who did not have the opportunity be part of any great movement like freedom struggle or JP movement, Anna gave them their '*Rang de Basanti*' moment. It was their chance to prove that they still exist beyond Facebook, gyms and Roadies. It was for them to show that they are not less patriot than their pre-Independent counterpart. With tricolor in one hand and Blackberry in other, they became the new revolutionary.

Media played the role of catalyst in this 'Second Independent'

¹ Pursuing Masters in Social Work [MSW] from Delhi School of Social Work; University of Delhi: Email : hazra.nirupam@gmail.com

movement. For media, especially electronic media, Anna movement came as an Indian version of Arab Spring. The electronic media, which generally remains obsessed with three Cs –crime, cricket and celebrity –, found another one, corruption. After 26/11, Anna's movement was the major event that provided substantial fodder for 24/7 news channels for several days at a stretch. On the other hand, Anna desperately needed the disproportionate attention that the media bestowed upon for the movement to thrive and survive. So, it resulted into a symbiotic relationship for news hungry media and attention-starved Team Anna.

So, armed with formal mandate of middle-class and maddening media coverage, Team Anna marched ahead to save the country, the democracy and the ordinary people. But, unfortunately they ended up setting a classic example of putting the cart before the horse. To save the country and its people, they resorted to challenge the very foundation of a democratic country and the faith of its people. With the casual support of a few lakh people in a billion plus country, Team Anna became the pseudo-representative of the whole nation. They got engaged to build a superman called Jan Lokpal, which will eventually wipe out the corruption on the face of India. The thousands of gullible, myopic Indians set an ideal example of 'willing suspension of disbelief' by blindly supporting whatever proposed by Team Anna. But a superman must be built through a supernatural (or unconstitutional) process. So, they demanded to be part drafting committee of the Bill, a demand which was not only extra-constitutional, but also outrageously ridiculous. What encouraged them more were the government's initial genuflection and opposition's opportunism. Actually; government did not know how to deal with such an unusual phenomenon.

So, suddenly Anna became India, and the ubiquitous 'Main bhi Anna' cap the totem of patriotism. Then the tug of war began between inefficient, corrupt, elected government and megalomaniac members of Team Anna. They obstinately stood at their demand.

One fast was followed by another fast, then another one, until it was reduced to the level of farce. Media grew disinterested and cynical, people got disillusioned and the government turned indifferent. The 'Second Independence' failed to reach epiphanic moment of Independence. But it taught some lessons to all. Team Anna realized that end cannot justify the means. It is not possible despotically to achieve anything in a democracy by holding the government to ransom. The government learnt it well that it was the vacuum created by their ineptitude and inefficiency that led to

the rise of Anna and his team. The media realized they went overboard in creating a halo of hype and hoopla surrounding the movement. And the gullible common people, who accepted everything on just face value, may find them disillusioned and dejected – but they had learnt the much-needed lesson of critical thinking. A democracy becomes stronger when the common people start ‘thinking’ instead of being swept away by anything and everything.