



The Enemy Within

A will to do something for society must be matched by determination to battle the decaying political system

▶ A 28-year-old woman goes on a fast unto death demanding the repeal of a law which at least some people think will improve governance in a critical area of the country. She is arrested three days later and continues to be force-fed even after 10 years. The law is still in place. A politician goes on a fast unto death demanding creation of a new state. Promises are made a mere 11 days later, enabling him to break his fast.

▶ Two former Directors General of Police request the Supreme Court to direct the Central and state governments to address the most glaring gaps and bad practices in the functioning of the police. Ten years later, the Court directs the Central and state governments to comply with the seven directives by December 31, 2006 and to file affidavits of compliance by January 3, 2007. It is 2010 and nothing has actually happened on the ground though a lot of paperwork has gone on.

▶ The Law Commission of India recommends that anyone who has a pending criminal case against him/her in which charges have been framed by a court of law not be allowed to contest elections. A group files a PIL seeking disclosure of pending criminal cases by candidates. The government opposes the petition. The High Court permits it. The government appeals to the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court rejects the appeal. Twenty-two political parties unanimously decide that this cannot be done and attempt to amend the Representation of the People Act. An Ordinance is sent to the President for signature. The President returns it. The Cabinet sends it again. The President has to sign it. The amendment of the Act through the Ordinance is challenged in another PIL. The Supreme Court declares the amendment “unconstitutional, null and void”. It took five years to get the disclosure in place.

The above are not pieces of creative writing but actual instances of people trying to improve governance in the country. And these are not the only ones, there are many more. In all the above instances, wherever “government” is mentioned, very often one tends to blame the bureau-

cracy. But we need to remember that the “executive” in our constitutional scheme consists of two parts: the administrative executive or the bureaucracy, and the political executive or ministers. While there is no doubt about the unholy nexus between the bureaucracy and the political executive, and the bureaucracy is often guilty of proposing decisions to suit the expressed or anticipated desires of their political masters, there is also no doubt at all that all the significant decisions are taken at the behest of and with the active approval of the political executive. The recent breast beating by all political formations over Bhopal is the latest example of political chicanery.

The political establishment of all hues systematically resists systemic reform. In recent times we have had Central governments led and supported by political parties of all hues, and also state governments led by different political parties but there has been no serious effort at changing anything of consequence. I have deliberately said political “hues” and not political “beliefs” because there is no place for beliefs, values, and even morality in the politics of the country

today. And the politicians are not even shy of saying so. A minister of a state Cabinet exposed for corruption was reported in the mainstream national press on July 12, 2010, as saying, “Am I the only politician in the state involved in graft? Give me cyanides (*sic*) to swallow if that can cleanse politics in (this state)”.

With this state of affairs, future action heroes need to understand that getting anything worthwhile done requires not only a strong desire but also doggedness and persistence, often in the face of harassment. As poet Siraj said over 45 years ago somewhat light-heartedly in the context of romance, *Aashiqon ki shakl kuchh bhoot si honi chahiye, Aql unki naap mein do soot honi chahiye; Ishq karne ke liye kaleja hi kaafi nahin, khopdi bhi mazboot honi chahiye*. Roughly paraphrased in the context of making systemic improvement in governance systems, it warns that mere crazy looks, foolhardiness, and a large heart are not enough to be an action hero; one’s skull should also be hard so that it can take many knocks. ■

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