

Role of spirituality and Religion in Curbing Corruption in India

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Abstract

This paper aims at exploring the possibility of fighting corruption through spiritual sensitization. Corruption has become an important issue in India. However, the problem is global in nature. Corruption of one kind or another is found in every society. All societies have tried to fight corruption through legal and institutional mechanisms but experiences show that they have not achieved the desired result. The reason is that corruption is not a disease but a symptom of the disease called spiritual bankruptcy or lack of spiritual motivation. This paper explores into how spirituality and religion can help in curbing corruption.

Key Words: Corruption, Spirituality, Religion, Renunciation, Violence, Justice

It is undoubtedly hard to characterize spirituality as it is regularly mistaken for some other indistinguishable terms. In any case, it tends to be seen extensively as looking past a simply realist world. It is one's steady and cognizant battle to keep the person in question free from the unlimited desires and interests that frequently progressed toward becoming hindrances in the way of purification of soul. It is an endeavour for looking for the genuine freedom for it spares man from the subjugation of material wants and gives him peace of mind and satisfaction throughout everyday life and henceforth. It spares man from turning into the captive of material belongings and injects him with satisfactory reinforcement against the corrupting influence of the material world. It is likewise instils value of love, affection, brotherhood, peaceful co-existence, tolerance, forgiveness, sympathy, compassion, mutual respect, and the spirit of respecting and celebrating diversities.

Spirituality is often interchangeably used with religiously. There is no uncertainty

about the covering of the estimations of religion and spirituality. Be that as it may, there are clear contrasts among religion and spirituality. Religion is formal, organized and ceremonial in nature, though spirituality is transcendental and does not really endorse a specific ceremony. Religion depends on a lot of convictions, qualities and practices regularly acknowledged as consecrated by the followers whereas

Spirituality is a quality that goes beyond religious affiliation and which strives for inspiration, reverence, awe, meaning and purpose, even in those who do not believe in God. The spiritual dimension tries to be in harmony with the universe, strives for answers about the infinite, and comes essentially into focus in times of emotional stress, physical (and mental) illness, loss, bereavement and death (Murray and Zentner).

According to Kaiser,

Spirituality refers to a broad set of principles that transcends all

religions. Spirituality is about the relationship between us and something larger. That something can be the good of the community or the people who are served by your agency or school or with energies greater than us. Spirituality means being in the right relationship with all that is. It is a stance of harmlessness toward all living beings and an understanding of their mutual interdependence (Kaiser).

Patrick G. Love delves deep into the difference between spirituality and religion and finds that,

Religion beings as, and is for the most part, an external phenomenon. Its primary concern is external to the visible world; it is centered on the existence of a Supreme Being or eternal principle, and includes an agreed upon set of beliefs and practices that are to the individual.

Again, religion can exists separate and apart from the individual, not so for spirituality. Spirituality begins and is perpetually an internal process, though there is the moving outward from oneself through self-transcendence, connectedness to self and others, and relationship with that which lies beyond the known and knowable world. In a way, the inner world expands to include the outer world (Patrick).

Here, thus, we find that scholars and experts have tried to find the differences between spirituality and religion with a purpose of establishing the independent existence of the two terms. However, it must be pointed out that religion and spirituality are not antithetical to each other rather they are complementary and

supplementary. In fact, the essence of all religions is spirituality and without this essence the religions are reduced to the status of a bundle of prescribed rules, regulations and rituals. Religions achieve the stage of spirituality when it goes beyond the narrow interpretations and becomes universal embracing all with love and dignity. The narrow and sectarian interpretations of religions are distortions manipulations, and are the most visible manifestation of corruption.

Corruption has become a universal phenomenon. Kofi Anan, the then Secretary General of the United Nations, observed on the eve of the adoption of the UN Convention against Corruption:

Corruption is an insidious plague that has a wide range of corrosive effects on societies. It undermines democracy and the rule of law, leads to violations of human rights, distorts markets, erodes the quality of life and allows organized crime, terrorism and other threats of human security to flourish. This evil phenomenon is found in all countries-big and small, rich and poor; but it is in the developing world that its effects are most destructive. Corruption hurts the poor disproportionately by diverting funds intended for development, undermining a Government's ability to provide basic services, feeding inequality and injustice and discouraging foreign aid and investment. Corruption is a key element in economic under performance and a major obstacle to poverty alleviation and development (Kofi, 2003).

A global corruption-fighting NGO, Transparency International (TI), emphatically defines corruption as hurting anyone whose life, happiness or livelihood depends on the integrity of people in a position of authority. Vivek Kumar adds dimension in defining corruption as he says:

Corruption can be defined as a mechanism by which, a numerically small section of society denies majority of its people a plethora of rights and privileges whether it is 'Human Rights for dignified existence', 'equality: economic, political and social', 'liberty of occupation, residence and religious practices, fraternity etc. By doing this numerically smaller group monopolizes religious, political, economic, educational and judicial institution etc. Historically this mechanism is created, at the inception of the society, through religious texts and sanctions. Later they are legitimized socially by theories of Dharma and Karma. The traditional structures, created in this fashion, do not die in modern times. But they remain alive changing their form and style of functioning and influence keeping the monopoly of numerically small section of the society intact (Vivek, 2011).

It is unfortunate that despite useful insights about the phenomenon of corruption as discussed above, it is narrowly defined and understood as misuse of public office for private gains, as if corruption is found only in government offices. Corruption is not only nepotism and redtapism, embezzlement, bribe, etc., but scams, scandals, maximization of wealth without an iota of care for our future generations,

wars, terrorism and violence, arms race, communalism, casteism, religious fundamentalism, liberal extremism, untouchability, apartheid, female feticide and infanticide, dowry deaths, and causing ecological imbalance, etc. are also the various forms and manifestations of corruption in our time. If we delve deep into the root causes of all these evils we find that these are intrinsically linked with the spiritual bankruptcy of man. Unfortunately, man perceives image as reality and constantly ignores the transcendental reality unfolded in various forms.

Most often, the phenomenon of corruption is understood with myopic approach and sought to be solved with cosmetic measures ignoring the most subtle and deep rooted elements involved in it. Material corruption is in fact the outward manifestation of the spiritual degradation. It can be cured only through spiritual reorientation and moral rejuvenation. Paradoxically, however, we are trying to fight corruption through legal and institutional means. History testifies the fact that legal and institutional measures adopted to combat corruption and crimes have never yielded desired results. Contrarily, these measures have become tools to amass wealth and increase exploitative capabilities of those who are at the helm of affairs. Lord action has rightly observed that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

Corruption is a symptom not the disease. The symptom can help in diagnosis and suggest effective remedies. However, the symptom is wrongly being understood as disease and therefore, all measures to combat it are proving ineffective. The remedy to corruption lies in spirituality for it develops immunity against corrupting

influences of the material world. It transforms an individual from within to enable him or her to connect with the Ultimate Reality i.e., God. It develops humanistic qualities in man with a sense of accountability towards his creator. There is no doubt that there can be secular spirituality as well. However, spirituality devoid of belief in God as the creator tends to become corrupt in given circumstances. Political and social morality emanating from secularism changes according to changing times and circumstances whereas morality based on the centrality of God is eternal and is always valid. It does not become redundant in any circumstances whatsoever. When man understands this fact that he has been created with a purpose and has to return back to his creator before whom he shall be made accountable for all his deeds, he makes efforts to lead his life in accordance with the will of that creator. Therefore, man has to lead his life according to the will of his Lord to receive His mercy and benevolence and avoid His wrath. This is the cardinal principle of spirituality emanating from the Abrahamic tradition.

Islam is not a religion but *Din*. The exact translation of *Din* is not possible in English. To consider Islam is a religion is tantamount to not understanding the true nature and essence of Islam. Islam as a *Din* seeks its followers to go beyond the rituals. It wants its followers to lead a spiritual life. It is evident from the numerous verses of the Holy Qur'an where Allah warns of the *nafs* (self) and says: "Whoever purifies it has succeeded; and failure is the lot of whoever corrupts it" (Surah, 91:9-10). Prophet Ibrahim (PBUH) also spoke in the Qur'an of "The Day (of judgment) whereon neither wealth nor sons will avail, except him who comes to

Allah with a clean heart" (Surah, 26:88-89). The Mystic (Sufi) tradition of Islam is inspired by these noble ideas and values. The great Sufis always approached Islam with spirituality and tried to realize God through mystical experiences. Sometimes, they liberated themselves from the grip of theological Islam and therefore earned the ire of the traditional '*Ulema* (Religious scholars). Despite opposition from the tradition bound quarters the Sufis remained popular and revered among the masses. The message of love and brotherhood spread by Sufis and their simplicity, spirit of renunciation and piety made people to flock toward them.

The spiritual values like love, forgiveness, compassion, charity, sympathy etc. occupy important place in the Christian teachings as well. These values are emphasized to make this world a happy place to live in. These values can make our world what Jesus (PHUH) says the 'Kingdom of God'. Jostein Gaarder elaborating the concept of 'Kingdom of God' in the teachings of Jesus Christ observes:

The expression 'Kingdom of God' was indeed a recurring theme in the preaching of Jesus- but in a much broader sense. Jesus said that the 'Kingdom of God' is loving thy neighbour, compassion for the weak and poor, and forgiveness for those who have erred (Jostein, 1996, p.132).

Jesus also said that

We must love our enemies. When they strike us, we must not retaliate; we must even turn the other cheek. And we must forgive – not seven times but seventy times even (Jostein, 1996, p.132-133).

This spiritual teaching of Jesus has been molding the behaviour of the followers in a manner that they become a role model for the humanity at large. Motivated by the Christian ethics of forgiveness the people following the path of Jesus have shown the spirit of forgiving even the most horrific crimes committed against their near and dear ones. In spirituality, man passes through many stages of sensibilities, such as existential, social/moral and mystical. All these stages emphasize special sensitivity towards our fellow beings. In fact it is a continuous process of sensitization that is maintained throughout a spiritual journey. Our spirituality starved and materially advanced society of today has reached a stage of scientific and technological developments that has never been achieved at any point of time in human history. We have *conquered* this world and are trying to explore the possibility of annexing other worlds. We have reached at Moon and Mars and are exploring the possibility of creating living conditions over there. On the other hand, paradoxical though it may sound, we have created a situation in our own world where no life will be possible at all. The constantly depleting ozone layers and ever increasing global warming may bring the complete destruction of our planet. Moreover, the weapons of mass destruction with guided missiles in the hands of misguided men are serious to our existence on this planet. Perhaps this is the reason that major powers are exploring the possibility of living on planets hitherto uninhabited by self-destroying human beings.

According to a survey done every year and throughout the world, more than half a million people are killed in armed violence. Amnesty International estimates

that one person is killed every minute in armed violence across the world. The proliferation of arms in the world can be understood from the fact that worldwide there is one weapon for every ten people—men, women, and children. This is because we are living in mutual suspicion considering others artificially divided into nation-states as our competitor and enemy. Thus, weapons are produced, piled up for destroying our presumed enemies. Military alliances and security pacts are signed by the countries to weaken their adversaries. Unfortunately, these alliances and weaponization are justified in the name of statecraft. Revolutionary theorist and media critic Noam Chomsky cites the story narrated by St. Augustine of a pirate captured by Alexander the great, who asked him “how he dares molest the sea.” “How dare you molest the whole world?” To this the pirate replied: “Because I do it with a little ship only, I am called a thief; you doing it with a great navy, are called an emperor” (Chomsky, 2002, p.vii). In this context, we can notice the how powerful countries, corporations, companies and individuals subjugate their weak adversaries through unjust laws, policies and programs.

Unjust violence is the most visible manifestation of spiritual and moral corruption. The Prophet of Islam and his companions have showed unprecedented tolerances and forgiveness even when placed in the most difficult circumstances. They did not believe that ‘inhumanity is just humanity under pressure’ as the Realists claim to find the human behaviour irrespective of place and time. The Holy Qur’an warns:

He who killed any person unless it be a person guilty of manslaughter, or of spreading chaos in the land,

should be looked upon as though he had slain all mankind, and he who saved one life should be regarded as though he had saved the lives of all mankind (Surah, 5:32).

The reason was that they were motivated not by the material needs and their corrupting influences but by the highest stage of human sensibility i.e. spirituality.

Spirituality emphasizes values that can make our world admirable. It inculcates positive values like love, compassion, sympathy, sacrifice, tolerance, mutual respect, forgiveness, contentment, humility, courage and wisdom, sensitivity towards the suffering of others, the spirit of peaceful coexistence and kindness to all. It motivates us to give up inordinate desires lead a simple life which is in complete harmony with nature. If these spirituality motivating saying of the Caliph of Islam are internalized by us, most our today's problems will be solved. Corrupt practices by individuals, groups or nations will wither away altogether. However, our day to day life is showing the signs of increasing demand for luxurious of life. While claiming these luxuries for ourselves we hardly care for others. To achieve our luxuries and justify our claims we have divided mankind into nations and communities that are always at war. Thus, the right to champagne of few is as important as the right to water to of many. The increasing disparities of income, wealth, power and opportunities are the necessary fallouts of the unspiritual codes of conduct developed by the mankind. We must remember that there is a mismatch of scarcity abundance in the world. There are nations and peoples living in affluence because of abundance of resources at their disposal. They create conflicts; develop war-like situations, finance wars and

terrorism, and manufacture weapons and arms to make wars physically possible. They do all these to maintain their power and privilege. For them wealth and power are gods. They are never ready to depart them from their material possessions.

It is indeed interesting to notice that many emperors renounced political power and is attendant benefits and adopted the life of an ascetic. However, there are few spiritually motivated persons or mystics who deserted their spiritual journey to become emperor. Spiritually is deeply rooted in human conscience and it is reality the essence of human nature. It is material corruption that makes the spirituality dormant. It, however, never dies and there is always a chance to activate or reactive the dormant spirituality inherent in a man. History is a testimony to the fact that many cruel, corrupt, and otherwise incorrigible anti-social individuals were transformed into a noble, soul through spiritual training and motivation. Justice occupies an important place in spirituality. In fact, spirituality cannot be achieved without a great sense of justice in our day to day conduct. It has become a fashion today that people talk about peace. However, it should be kept in mind that peace is not merely the absence of violence. It requires positive conditions and justice is one of the most important requirements for peace. Islam places justice on top so far as the organization of society or administration of state is concerned. Sayyed Qutb observes:

For by its own nature Islam is a faith of achievement, of work in the sphere of practical life; it is not a religion of mere words, or idle theory existing only in a world of shadows (Qutb, 1953, p.29).

He analyses the concept of justice in Islam and asserts its holistic nature:

The nature of Islamic belief about human life makes social justice essentially an all-embracing justice which does not divide the individual into body and soul, into differing intellectual and spiritual sides. It holds that the values of life are material and spiritual at one and the same time, and that no division is possible in such a unity. It holds also that mankind is essentially one body, its members mutually responsible and inter-dependent, a body in which there are no isolated and outcast societies (Qutb, 1953, p.29).

This was the reason that Prophet Muhammad (S) inculcated values of justice and fairness in his religious teachings. He understood the plight of labourers at the time when inequality was justified, and exploitation and subjugation of others was believed to be natural and divinely ordained. He also observed that no one can earn his livelihood better than the work of his own hand. He not only preached but also practiced the same and thus provided dignity to labour and work. This was unlike those who glorified the life of contemplation at the expense of physical labour. Khalil Gibran beautifully puts in these words:

A day spent by the soul in lamenting the death of the rights of the poor man and in weeping for the loss of justice is nobler than the age lost by a man in enjoyment of his appetite (Khalil, 2005, p.108).

In today's globalising world the labourers and workers are not only facing various kinds of exploitative tendencies but also losing their right to resist workers across

the globe and insensitivity of the employers speak volumes about the deep-rooted corruption in our present production system.

We find efforts to counter corruption through amendments in existing laws or by bringing in fresh legislations. It must be emphasized that the amendments in the laws will not change anything unless the human beings themselves are changed. The transformation of human beings themselves to achieve their essence i.e., spirituality can effectively solve the problem of corruption. We find increasing violence and wars despite the establishment of the United Nations with high hopes of maintain international peace and security. Since its establishment, the United Nation has been leaving no stone unturned to avoid violence and wars. It has adopted a plethora of treaties and conventions in this direction and created specialized bodies and agencies. However, all these efforts have not yielded the desired result. This is evident from the fact that thousands of people are being killed every year in wars and terrorism. We also see increasing violence against women in India despite stringent punishment against such crimes under the law of the land.

These facts suggest that legislation alone is never a lasting solution to these maladies. It is only through spiritualization that the human beings can be morally elevated to create conditions of for peaceful coexistence and mutual respect. It is often suggested that cruel punishment like stoning to death will work as a deterrent against rapes and molestation. What is however ignored here is that it is not the fear of law but the fear of God- the fear to displease Him who has created us that will prevent humans from committing acts which are prohibited by Him. This is the

reason that prayer with sincerity is prescribed almost by all religions because prayers may not change God but they indeed change the people who pray. It is again not a very healthy sign that prayer is nothing other than a means to realize God. If a prayer does not serve this purpose it is merely a ritual without any substance in it. In fact, spiritualization is ultimate goal of all religious prayers.

Conclusion:

It may be observed in conclusion that material corruption is the symptom of the disease of spiritual bankruptcy and moral

perversion. Therefore, this disease can be cured by spiritual motivation and moral reorientation. Institutional mechanism and legal measures will fail us to combat material corruption unless we reemphasize our forgotten spiritual values of love, compassion, sympathy, peace, sacrifice, forgiveness, justice, honesty and renunciation. Rumi beautifully puts it:

Knock and He will open the door,
vanish, and He will make you shine
the sun, Fall, and He will raise you
to the heavens, Become nothing, He
will turn you into everything (Rumi).

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