Bribery and corruption as a yardstick of social progress

With his off-the-cuff remark at the Jaipur Literature Festival that OBCs, SCs and STs are among the most corrupt elements in Indian society, sociologist Ashis Nandy has unwittingly created a storm in a caste cup. A number of social organisations in several states have lodged police complaints against him under the law which proscribes any form of caste-based discrimination, including the use of language deemed to be derogatory. While the Supreme Court has stayed Nandy's arrest, it has rapped his knuckles and advised him to be more careful in future of what he says in public. On the other hand, a number of public personalities, including writers and academics, have
defended Nandy's constitutional right to freedom of speech, a right which daily is being attacked in what is seen to be India's increasingly intolerant society.

But perhaps everyone involved — those who filed charges against Nandy, the apex court which rebuked him, and those who seek to defend his right to free speech — may have missed the real point about caste and corruption which the social commentator was trying to make, and which he later tried to explain, so far to little avail. What Nandy seemed to be saying was that corruption was in-built into Indian society as much as the caste system was. When the upper castes used their privileged position to gain social, economic or political advantage over those of a lower caste — as they had been doing over millennia — they were in effect practising a form of institutionalised corruption.

Thanks to the social churning that has taken place post-Mandal, the lower castes have got a leg-up on the social ladder. As a result, an increasing number of them are in a position — thanks to educational and job quotas — to extend patronage in exchange for financial and other forms of gratification, which formerly was the exclusive prerogative of the upper castes.

The reason that corruption may seem to be more conspicuous among the lower castes could be that as it is a relatively recent phenomenon it appears to be more prominent: in other words, the lower castes have a lot of catching up to do in this, as in all other social indices. In this sense, corruption — the great equaliser in Indian society — could be interpreted as a yardstick of social progress and upward mobility.

One of the reasons given for rising food prices is that, thanks to economic progress, those who earlier subsisted on coarse grains are now including rice, wheat, vegetables, meat and dairy products in their diet, causing the prices of all these to go up.

High food costs are part of the price we pay for nutritional democracy. So, according to the argument that Ashis Nandy might have been trying to make, is lower caste corruption the price we have to pay for the democracy of graft, where...
everyone — and not just the privileged castes — has access to equal opportunity for receiving bribes?

Perhaps that's all that Ashis was trying to say: That the eggs of gold laid by Mother Ghoos are there for the grabbing equally by all citizens of our republic, irrespective of caste or creed. If that's not equality, what is?
the good life. They have arrogated power to themselves to dole out the ‘essential’ goodies to the ‘underprivileged’ and beat their chest in ‘triumph’. In the process the till then privileged classes cry about injustice while the rewarded have to indulge in corrupt practices to get their ‘due’. Nobody has any idea about what is needed and have all been really satisfied. Actually most of time the so called ‘doles’ do more harm by making the allotted ones prisoners of so called ‘unmet’ needs and of the ‘privileges’ accorded. Actually everybody is being reduced to levels to a lifestyle when we were really wild. What is the need of the hour? Conditions must become ripe for those who really provide true selfless service as one human being to another for just or no compensation. I dont want to elaborate on this as a little introspection will make clear of the horde of unmet needs to be delivered by human service.

Manish (Munger) says:
February 08, 2013 at 03:11 PM IST

Certainly Nandy’s comment is to address the few wrongs which may be committed by those who does not come from the higher category of the society so can not camouflage their acts of patronage in exchange of certain gratifications under color of the popular customs which have developed in the post independence era to the great extent in fact but the purpose might have been to awaken the masses in general not to fall victim of such support extended by high and mighty in the system. Lot much have to be done to let the people being near the poverty line live a life as few can enjoy the help coming with reservations and all while most of the population still remaining deprived of their entitlements in reality. Intolerance to his words is not from the people but can be seen in the form of opposition by those few who might be feeling hurt by the revelation of facts only and need to suppress such uttering of the civil society else the constitution is not against such activities provided explanation is put in place also.

Human Indian (Hyderabad) says:
February 07, 2013 at 09:40 PM IST

It is clear that govt reservations institutionalize abuse of power, and while there is a benefit of changing the inter-caste power equations, if does nothing to discourage the feudalism prevalent in Indian society - Hindus primarily. Also, it threatens to balloon
the corruption that depends on caste and religion vote banks, and threatens to blow up in India's face if it ever hopes to move towards a modern, democratic country. I think this is one of the reasons for the Hindu rate of growth that makes us a laughing stock in the world.

Anand Kumar (Bareilly U.P.) says:
February 07, 2013 at 08:09 PM IST
Ghoos is a great equaliser. Your social index jumps. You can afford the best education for your kids, move along with the rich and famous, afford best medical facilities available, afford stay, food and beverages in 5-7 star hotels and so on. You can kick off all class/caste barriers. Only thing you have to do is to manage the Govt prying eyes but again ghoos may be used as a tool to silent them.

bsc1934 (Karnataka) says:
February 07, 2013 at 07:16 PM IST
25 Followers
Gold : 5298
Why was corruption very less before 1947 and increased after independence and increasing decade after decade ? Is Mr. Nandy right by his simple statement?

vidyaakolkar (Mumbai) says:
February 07, 2013 at 04:30 PM IST
9 Followers
I am not against the reservation. But I remember a bright SC student from a remote village received admission in VJTI Mumbai. He could not cope up with English, so he left the course and got admitted in the Gauridatta Mittal Ayurvedic College. Lacking knowledge of Sanskrit he again quit for a BSW course in Nirmala Niketan. One open candidate might have received the seat at VJTI may gets frustrated for not get admission. Likewise second student at the Ayurvedic college. Same happens with the reservations in jobs. The people who promoted on the basis of...
Caste and not on the basis of experience find work difficult as they lack in experience. The subordinates sometimes are more experienced than their bosses and they hate them. Both the upper class and lower class people are frustrated. So the castes must altogether abolished and merit & experience must be counted irrespective of caste and class.

psseth (Singapore) says:
February 07, 2013 at 03:21 PM IST  1 Follower
I agree. Corruption has no barriers. Every one in power has a price tag.

Neha Agarwal (uk) says:
February 07, 2013 at 02:01 PM IST  54 Followers
ok

barkha (new delhi) says:
February 07, 2013 at 12:55 PM IST
I totally agree with you...but Ashis had pin pointed only OBCs, STs, STs people but i would i say that everybody whether of lower caste or upper caste all are becoming corrupt, but government is giving more privileges to the lower caste people which therefore, against the equality of people..

Sumant Chavan (Shrirampur) says:
February 07, 2013 at 09:52 AM IST  2 Followers
Nandi’s quotes are not intending to any person in particular. It is the mindset of corrupt people despite being at the responsible posts they hold. Constitution has given chance to wide cross-section of society to educate and to secure themselves jobs in governance. It is their duty to serve the nation honestly in
recognition, but we find corruption as usual practice at all levels in the administration and done jointly by persons belonging to all castes and creeds. So their behaviour becomes 'Shudra' according to Hindu doctrine! So do Nandi’s thoughts! What’s wrong in saying corrupt people as corrupt?

Chandu Lakhani (UK) says:
February 07, 2013 at 09:47 AM IST
9 Followers
Silver : 1614

Here the watchword in these sensitive times should be, should have been, to exercise due care so as not to hurt feelings of others. And why single out OBC/ST and so on when ALL of the society are equally guilty of corruption.

Sthithapragnya (Mumbai) says:
February 07, 2013 at 08:09 AM IST

Jug Suraiya (JS) Ji, With humility fortified with abundant ignorance I am propelled to cite an instance (it might be quite surprising and eloquently shocking too ??) of what can be termed as REVERSE UNTOUCHABILITY or better still as INVERTED UNTOUCHABILITY ?? This instance of RU/IU took place some 4 decades ago ?? The official on his inspection visit to the Hypotheca (the immovable asset mortaged as security for the loan) of a Tribal (which was his dwelling abode with some land surrounding his hut with some fruit bearing trees) had finished the inspection and was returning back to the jeep. He was quite surprised to see the tribal (when the official was about to climb back into the jeep) cleaning with broomstick the threshold of his hut and spraying cowdung water! The quite stunned official asked his accompanying local junior from the concerned agency, he in turn after enquiry with the tribal came back and told thus: The tribal had indicated to the local official (who had enquired the background of the tribal’s actions) that their Tribal God would be angry that the coated, suited and booted official would have defiled the abode and as such the environment had to be properly cleaned and further absolutely sanitised!! Should I continue to elaborate further for the Apt&Appropriate/Accurate acronym caption RU/IU any further ??

Agree (1)
Disagree (1)
Recommend (0)
Offensive

Agree (1)
Disagree (0)
Recommend (0)
Offensive
What their political leaders do their followers follow

H.L. Chulani (California) says:
February 07, 2013 at 02:21 AM IST
Are you Mr. Nandy's surrogate to decipher what he was 'trying' to say?

Rajeev Narayan (Nagpur) says:
February 06, 2013 at 10:57 PM IST
Very well put. We're an intolerant society. Ban this, ban that. Whatever, is against our line of thought, is a danger to the society and we protest for banning it. Corruption is a phenomenon and has taken deep roots in the society.

Akshay (Delhi) says:
February 06, 2013 at 09:14 PM IST
Food for thought

*an increasing number of them are in a position — thanks to
educational and job quotas — to extend patronage in exchange for financial and other forms of gratification, which formerly was the exclusive prerogative of the upper castes.” ... ROFL ... Ashis Nandy will be reading this and thinking - " Now wasn't that exactly what I meant ...and where did I go wrong " ?? .

bintuglaq (Bangalore) says:
February 06, 2013 at 03:37 PM IST 4 Followers
Hope Mr.Suraiya has his tongue well stuck to his cheeks when he explained what Mr.Nandy told that corruption like death is an equalizer of all human beings from 'chandala' to 'brahmin'. In an old Malayalam film song with a philosophical message King Harischandra whom fate had made the keeper of cremation ground sang that in that cremation ground all including king and beggar will take final rest. Here it is in the corruption field where brahmin or chandala will be treated as equals. Or is it the litmus test to ascertain whether the lower caste has attained salvation? I feel that the excuse that earlier the privileged castes used their position to further themselves up is a bit exaggerated one. In those times merit was given preference over other considerations. Only when there is a tie then influence played an important role. When a King appointed a Diwan it was more for his ability than his caste consideration or on recommendations purely based on favouritism. In the times of Kings, Brahmans who were considered to be intellectuals were always advisers for the king and never administrators. Administration was in the hands of others lower in the wrung of caste scale.

Yuvak Patil (K 12) says:
February 06, 2013 at 03:29 PM IST
True 'ghoos' has become an Indian culture and a way of life. Recently I came across two bold examples I experienced. The BSNL lineman who attends complaints after deliberately and willfully creating problem in the line or the broadband, hinted me to pay ghoos to get uninterrupted service and left my place only when I greased his hand. Next is the police constable. I was called to the police station of my area for verification for renewal of my passport at 6 PM. When I went thee, the constable audaciously and shamelessly demanded 'Service Charges ' in cash or kind. Kind means two bottles of premium brand whiskey, one for him and one for the Inspector. The commissioner of
Police happens to be known to me and after giving his reference, I was spared and got the renewed passport. These are the ground realities. In both of the cases the persons obviously are from the lower strata what Ashish Nandy is facing the brunt.

**girishck2005** (Bangalore) says:
February 06, 2013 at 03:24 PM IST

Nandi’s assertion and Jug’s justification in support of Nandi are both off-track. There are good people and bad people in all castes and communities. But the intelligent ones among the bad lot manage to get away with their crimes, while the novices and unintelligent persons get caught. The golden egg of the ghoos needs to be encashed some day. That is when you get caught if not earlier.

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**RK RAJAGOPALAN** (BANGALORE) says:
February 06, 2013 at 02:30 PM IST

An interesting blog by Jug Suraiya on the remarks made by Ashis Nandy on Corruption being proliferated by SCs and STI s in this country. I agree with Suraiya that High food costs are part of the price we pay for nutritional democracy.

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**M.L.Gupta** (New Delhi) says:
February 06, 2013 at 02:25 PM IST

The choice before the aam aadmi is: ghoos yaa ghoosaa? Jhoot yaa jhootaa? TOI or I Am India?

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**Deepak** (China) says:
February 06, 2013 at 02:12 PM IST

Corruption in India ( and anywhere in the world ) is an all pervading ill across all castes & religions & levels of education.
Also trying to analyse the phenomenon caste wise etc. is pointless - it does not lead anywhere - definitely not towards a solution. Infact its the big ticket corruption at higher levels of society (Raja, Kalmadi etc.) which causes much more harm than the small time one at lower levels (a cop taking small bribe for a traffic offence).

Neerja Jetly (New Delhi) says:
February 06, 2013 at 12:51 PM IST  2 Followers
you are right sir. this is also a corruption of our mind that we do not try to understand what the other wants to communicate.

hasan (Doha) says:
February 06, 2013 at 12:03 PM IST  2 Followers
Sir, very good question raised, if Nandy really meant to say what you just explained..........but it doesn't only needs to be brought to a public platform for discussion but it also needs individual introspection by all of us, whether higher or lower caste, to find that this is indeed true!!

rajlaxmijain (gkp) says:
February 06, 2013 at 11:43 AM IST  2 Followers
calling SC, ST, OBC comes under derogatory remarks, but taking the privilege of this tag for admission, promotion, financial assistance its proudful? it seems freedom of speech applies to few and not all. if we really want to come out of this caste system, remove reservation system on the basis of caste. instead financial assistance/relaxation to be given for education, not for ensuring seat and promotion.

dev kumar (gurgaon) says:
While I agree with JS sir, the problem is larger than seen here. The reservation seems taken for granted and the law to protect a privileged vote bank is taking undue advantage of the situation. This kind of HOLIER than HOLY position is damaging this society. People just talk rights here........no one is bothered about the sacred duty one has to perform towards nation. Ours has become a protected and defensive society where law favours a particular vote bank blatantly because that vote bank is sizable and united and no NETA can afford to ignore it and that is where the problem lies. We must do away with this reservation on cast/creed lines and should devise a way to help out all below poverty line irrespective of cast/creed.

RAGHAV ARORA (Bangalore) says:
February 05, 2013 at 10:40 PM IST

Mr. Nandy had a clear view but could not match up with his thoughts, I wonder why do we have such cases when people forget where they are and to whom are they addressing, you might be right but dont expect the same from the listeners.

(Reply to RAGHAV ARORA) -
Human Indian (Hyderabad) says:
February 07, 2013 at 09:42 PM IST

Raghav, I hope you didnt just send your ears there, but also carried a tongue? If so why did you not discuss with him. or you can approach the Ministry of Hurt Feelings that is about to be set up soon.

Have something to say? Post your comment
Comments are moderated and will be allowed if they are about the topic and not abusive.
Golden ghoos by Juggle-Bandhi: Jug Suraiya's blog - The Times Of India

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