

# No representation without election

NO taxation without representation was the cry of Americans smarting under British rule in the run up to the civil war/war of independence in what is today the USA. Taking a line through that slogan and cutting to contemporary India, the principle of no representation without fighting (and winning) elections has finally been accepted by Team Anna, as the leaders of the anti-graft civil society stir led by social worker Anna Hazare are collectively known.

There has been a lot of debate about the decision, more or less announced, to form a political party before the 2014 General Election to provide an "alternative" to the voting public. Was that the only option left for Team Anna in the face of a Union government that refused to blink first? Was it something those supporting the anti-corruption movement would buy into? Whose idea was it anyway? These are all questions only time will answer.

Yet, this development is a consummation devoutly to be wished for. For no other reason but that just like the media, NGOs, other civil society groups, Team Anna's demand for participative democracy as opposed to a merely representational one that underlies its Jan Lokpal Bill campaign too is subject to acceptance by the people, acting through their elected representatives. As I have argued in another context whilst discussing the role of the Press, neither the Press nor sundry NGOs or civil society groups however laudable their aims, are representatives of their readers and/or members. These organisations are at their best making informed intervention and/or acting as pressure groups, ideally with an empathetic readership/membership to provide their arguments resonance in the public discourse.

As far as being a people's representative goes, notwithstanding the flaws in our electoral democracy which there undoubtedly are in significant measure despite valiant efforts by the Election Commission, it is the elected sarpanch, councillor, MLA and MP who is it. However venal, corrupt and bucolic s/he may, or may not, be. That's the bottom line. And that's the context in which to see Team Anna's course correction.

But I am also a longstanding advocate of tak-

ing a utilitarian view of contemporary (non-violent) political, religious and social movements whatever their angularities provided, and even if without knowing it themselves, they end up aiding the efforts of a self-confessed minority's attempts to ensure India emerges as a Spartan, muscular-liberal state and a meritocratic, secular nation where there is equality before law regardless of gender, creed, caste or class and where individual rights are never, ever, trumped by group rights. It is with this precept in mind, apart from being puce with rage like the rest of you at rampant retail and institutional corruption, naturally, that I supported the Hazare-led Jantar Mantar/Ram Lila Grounds campaign of circa 2011 whilst making a distinction between supporting the event, as it were, and Anna and his Team with its authoritarian, panchayati and paternalistic tendencies and world view.

It was precisely, as I had written at the time, because of the volcanic nature of the anti-graft movement with its mildly nihilistic contours and uni-dimensional focus on exposing the machinations of a self-serving political class with little to no interest in institutional reform or fighting corruption in any meaningful way that it was worth supporting. It shook the political system. Of course politicians brazened it out but it made a small yet significant difference in at least a section of the political elite ~ to the extent that they got it. How that will pan out in the fight against debilitating corruption, which with its twin or dehumanising poverty, has nearly brought India to her knees is as yet unknown. But it is such incremental, evolutionary steps that lead to change, not the radical chic slogans of revolution.

As for the Anna party if, as and when it comes to fruition, here's some unsolicited advice ~ treat it just like you would any other political party. Vote its candidates in if you want them to represent you, ignore them if you think they are incapable of doing so. Just don't go about confusing the party with the anti-graft movement that Team Anna managed to build in 2011, just as you should not have conflated the village elder/bully Mr Hazare with the rage he became a symbol of.