

Oh Tempora, Oh Mores!

■ Dr. M. N. Buch

From time to time newspapers need a juicy story in order to provide large headlines which would attract the reader's attention. The unending saga of corruption as sung by the great balladeer, Arvind Kerjiwal is providing just such grist to the media mills, to the discomfiture of political parties and to the amusement of the multitude which loves a good scandal. At one level Arvind Kerjiwal, is probably doing some service in that there is heightened awareness of political and official wrongdoing, but at another level he is doing immense damage to his own credibility and that of the anti corruption movement by making allegations against all and sundry, with an expectation everyday that something new would be revealed. In some ways Kerjiwal reminds me of a scamp called Nandlal Poddar, who enjoyed a certain notoriety in Ujjain in the fifties and sixties of the last century. On the positive side he highlighted the sanctity of the Panchkoshi yatra at Ujjain, which forced the authorities to suitably improve facilities along the route for the convenience of the lakhs of pilgrims who undertake the yatra. Unfortunately he was also a scandal monger and a petty blackmailer to boot, whose standard practice was to collect a small gathering around the abode of some wealthy man and comment loudly on his private life and workday shenanigans. In the best soap opera style he would then invite people to return the next day to hear spicy details about the victim's wife, daughter or some other relative. The victim was only too happy to buy out Nandlal Poddar. Strong intervention by the district authorities ultimately curbed Nandlalji, but certainly for twenty years or so he provided great entertainment to the more idle sections of citizens of Ujjain whilst making a tidy profit from the proceedings.

The question then arises whether Kerjiwal is a genuine crusader for probity in public life or is he a publicity seeker who has found an ideal vehicle for getting such publicity. Kerjiwal in his own official career gave strong signs that he is self-centered, promoted his own interest without caring too much about rules and regulations, misused such facilities as a paid sabbatical and used every possible influence to obtain postings of his choice. I do believe that people change and perhaps Kerjiwal has done so after leaving the service. There is a lingering doubt, however, whether an Abyssinian can change his hue or the leopard his spots. Is Kerjiwal's campaign against corruption genuinely aimed at eliminating this ill or is it meant to promote the interests of Kerjiwal and his group?

Let us examine this issue at slightly greater length. There is no denying that there is rampant corruption in government and in society and, therefore, people are now absolutely disgusted with it. That is why Anna Hazare's campaign initially attracted a large cross section of society. However, when the movement went into the hands of such clever people as Prashant Bhusan and Kerjiwal it turned from a crusade against corruption into an agitation to force Parliament to enact a law against corruption verbatim as dictated by these activists. The movement soon degenerated into a slanging match and Anna Hazare virtually quit in disgust.

This was the moment awaited by the opportunistic members of the movement, which has degenerated into a political road show led by Prashant Bhushan and Arvind Kerjiwal. It is only a question of seeking votes and perhaps Kerjiwal and company have decided that the best way of

doing it is to reveal a scandal a day so that citizens hold all other parties in contempt and vote Kejriwal to power as their own St. George who will slay the dragon.

In order to achieve his political objectives Kejriwal has promised to reveal scandal after scandal and initially has targeted Sonia Gandhi's son-in-law, Robert Vadra and Union Law Minister, Salman Khurshid. Without commenting on the merits of the two cases Congress, as usual, made a complete ass of itself by its leaders jumping to the defence of Robert Vadra. If Vadra's dealings are commercial and personal between him and other parties why are our Ministers and Congress politicians taking up cudgels on his behalf? Salman Khurshid, the Law Minister, is capable of defending himself. Why are Congress leaders rushing to support him? In the Vadra case if there is any wrongdoing it would be investigated by the Company Law Board, the Income Tax authorities or, if there is any criminality, then by the police. Where does government come into the picture and why is Chidambaram, the Finance Minister, giving a certificate of integrity to Vadra?

One of the basic principles of physics is that sound does not carry in a vacuum. If government and the Congress Party were to create such a hypothetical vacuum and not react collectively to Kejriwal he would soon lapse into hysteria and would either ultimately become silent or produce proof which would lead to legal action. Instead government by the type of reaction it is indulging in is only amplifying the voice of Kejriwal, giving credence to his allegations and furthering his political ambitions. In the meanwhile the credibility of government is rock-bottom, governance has taken a toss and the political system is in shambles. This is not a healthy development.
