

## **An Open Letter to Baba Ramdev & Anna Hazare**

Respected Baba and Anna,

Sadar Pranam,

With full humility in my heart and great respect for the efforts of both of you, I have chosen to write to you. I have no doubts that both of you are highly patriotic, extremely nationalistic and self-less human beings who have put a lot at risk to raise the issue of corruption. History will always remember both of you as heroic persons who contributed more than many a prime minister or president in the life of our nation. I am also aware that my own personality and achievements amount to nothing much when compared to your towering personalities and achievements. Yet, I have chosen to address both of you due to two reasons (a) because the issues that are in discussion are more important than any personalities and (b) because I believe that great men like you are always open to hear the truth even when told by a child and even when it is completely against their own beliefs and ideas.

While the approach of both of you differs in many details, the common thread is that both of you believe in state action to weed out corruption. Anna has been talking of creating a super-cop (named *Lokpal*) to hit on the heads of each and every institution of governance whether it is legislative, executive or judiciary. Baba has been demanding various legislative and executive actions to root out corruption. A super-cop as well as the series of actions demanded by Baba are state actions that use fear as a force. Both of you appear to believe that human beings can be best governed by fear and more fear. The fear of Supreme Court is not sufficient so let us have a bigger monster and if the fear of jails is not sufficient let us try with the fear of death.

The problem with using fear to build nations is that it works only up to a point and then it stops to have any influence. Harsh punishments make a society more inhuman and increase crime rather than lead to reduction of crime.

Corruption is no different from most other crimes. In fact, corruption is truly “opportunistic criminality”. It is like rape where one takes advantage of a person because one has the strength and opportunity to do so. Laws and policemen have not been able to stop rape in any part of the world. It might surprise many to know that countries with highest police-population ratio have the highest incidence of rape.

For example, USA has more than twenty times the incident of rape as compared to India even though the number of policemen and judges per 1000 persons is much higher in USA as compared to India. Obviously, it is ridiculous to suggest that a country should increase number of policemen and judges (or strengthen laws) to reduce rapes. Similarly, strengthening laws or law enforcing machinery is not likely to drastically reduce corruption in any country or state.

In the past two-three decades institution of Lokayukta was introduced in many states of India to investigate and punish cases of corruption. While the honourable men / women appointed as Lokayukta have done good jobs, no one will plead that corruption has reduced in the states where institution of Lokayukta has been established. I live in Madhya Pradesh and can say with full confidence about Madhya Pradesh that corruption has become more widespread and powerful in the state in the past two-three decades even though the office of Lokayukta has been active in the state. The same can be said about Maharashtra where Anna has been active for more than three decades. This is no reflection on either the concept of Lokayukta or on the individuals who were appointed to the august office. It is an illustration of the principle – though laws and legal institutions have a role in punishing crimes, their role in preventing crimes is very limited.

Of course, at this point, I must clarify that I am not against either Lokayukta-type institutions or against laws that punish the corrupt. My humble view is that such state actions, while necessary, have a very small role in preventing spread of corruption or opportunistic criminality in a society. The instruments of state actions – all of whom are based on fear – are the only recourse available to politicians, bureaucrats, policemen and judges. Any one who uses fear to achieve objectives is a petty person who can only do small things, irrespective of the lofty designation pasted on his / her head.

Respected Baba and Anna, in my view and in the view of history of any country, big people are individuals like you who strive for no labels, who do not need office to wield influence, who appeal to the conscience of people and who rule hearts for generations and whose influence transcends borders. It hence pains me to see that both of you with potential of immense greatness have chosen state action - the path of petty people. Both of you have the potential of rising to become true saints of twenty-first century India only if you do a course correction and expand your agenda beyond state action to attack the mentality that forms the foundation of opportunistic criminality.

Opportunistic criminality can be seen in most parts of the globe. We saw it recently in London and other towns of England when ordinary middle class citizens took advantage of weakening control of the police and looted shops. The world saw it in July 1977 at the time of New York City blackout when there was widespread looting, arson and vandalism in New York City. Opportunistic criminality in a country is not related to its economic situation. It is related to the value system in a society. A few months ago, Japan had a massive earthquake and there were blackouts in many

cities for days at a stretch. Yet, there were no cases of looting or arson as were seen in NYC during July 1977.

In most cities of India, blackouts are routine and cause no rise in crime. Of course, India is not on the same level as Japan when it comes to comparing opportunistic criminality. Within the country, there are large differences between regions. Delhi with all its prosperity and large number of policemen has much higher incidence of rape than Jagdalpur or Shahdol or Jharsuguda. In fact, Delhi is often called the rape capital of India. There is surely something in the Delhi mindset that makes the city a centre of opportunistic criminality in India.

High-level corruption that one reads about in newspapers is the tip of a pyramid. Base of the pyramid is to be found on the streets of Delhi where women do not feel safe, where businessmen consider it their smartness to cheat on their customers, where it is fashionable to be mean, where rich consider themselves above all laws and even morals, where a man driving a luxury sedan considers himself superior to a man in Maruti 800, where road rage and bad road manners are so rampant that driving is a nightmare.

State actions in the form of harsh laws or strict watchdog institutions can only, at best, knock a chip off the tip of the top of the pyramid. State actions cannot reduce the base of the pyramid. Obviously, if the base keeps growing, harming the top can at the most yield some minor cosmetic results. To make any real difference to corruption or opportunistic criminality in a society, we have to understand the root of the problem.

Criminality of any type is a state of mind. A criminal tends to look at the world in a slightly different manner as compared to a non-criminal. In general, one can say that for a criminal his own self becomes all important and everything else becomes worthless. The rise of "I" as opposed to "We" is the first step towards criminality. As long as a person sees himself / herself as part of a larger entity, the chances of his / her slipping into crime is low. On one extreme in this regard is the American individualism where a person does not see himself / herself even as part of his / her family. On the other extreme is the universal brotherhood that one sees in Oriental religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Shintoism, Daoism etc. where one tends to look at every person as part of the same cosmic reality to which one belongs. In the former case, taking advantage of the other is smartness as long as one does not cross the boundaries set by laws or as long as one can keep out of the eyes of the law-enforcers. According to the Oriental thought, the focus is on building relationships that strengthen the whole to which each one of us belongs.

The problem in India is that after independence we have blindly copied the American / Western individualistic way of life without understanding the negatives that it entails. Individualism is a life-ideology best summed up by slogans like "Doing your own thing" or "Just do it" or "I like it big" or "I do it my way". It places extreme emphasis on one's own likes, dislikes and above all possessions. In the Western / American society where each one is an island unto oneself and there is no glancing

at one's neighbor, the negative effect of it is limited, though huge. In the Indian context, where centuries of cultural evolution have shaped our minds to always look at everyone around and not be islands, individualism takes the form of "Neighbor's envy, Owner's pride". An Indian afflicted with the virus of "I-and-I-alone" does not just want to be; he / she wants to be better than the neighbor and also wants to flaunt it. Of course, even in Europe and USA, the tendency to use wealth as a social differentiator and a means to run down everyone else is present in large measure. It is just that in India it takes a different form that involves garish display of wealth. Warren Buffet and Bill Gates are probably richer than Mukesh Ambani (at least they are in the same league). They live in much simpler houses compared to the palatial 27-storey Antilia of Mukesh. Why does one need 400,000 sq. ft. living space with additional parking space for 168 cars?

It is unfortunate and sad that after independence, the new capitalists of India have moved away from Gandhi's idea of trusteeship of wealth. The rich of India no longer have the humility that was the hallmark of an earlier generation of Indian businessmen. Less than half a century ago, many rich stock brokers who controlled Dalal Street in Bombay (now Mumbai) had seven identical sets of white colored clothing for seven days of the week. Designer clothing and suits that cost a ton were unknown to them. Doyens of Indian industry like GD Birla and JRD Tata were also known for their simplicity. It might interest Mukesh Ambani to know that JRD Tata lived all his life in a rented flat. The only person in the present generation of prominent businessmen who can be said to fit in the mould of national wealth-creators like GD and JRD is NR Narayana Murthy who founded Infosys.

For people like GD, JRD and NRNM business was a means of creating resources for all the stakeholders including employees, shareholders, community and the nation. In contrast, for the businessmen of today's India wealth is just a personal ego trip. They do not see themselves as a part of a bigger whole. They are intoxicated by their own I-ness, by their success and by their riches. They use wealth to run down everyone else whether it is on the road or in life. Revenge, envy, jealousy, anger, greed, ego and hatred for one and all are the emotions that move this generation of businessmen.

Why blame the businessmen alone? In the past few decades, the whole country and especially urban India seems to be running desperately to get richer than one's neighbor and one's brother and even one's spouse (in some cases). During our independence struggle, the leaders constantly talked of ends not justifying the means. There was an insistence that even for the lofty object of nation's independence use of wrong means was not to be resorted to. Simple Living and High Thinking was the motto of leaders of pre-independence India. This permeated down to all classes of society. The worst tragedy of post-independence India is the loss of leaders who believed in such moral values. For some time during the eighties and early nineties, it seemed that RSS clan with its disciplined and committed cadre could fill the vacuum but their protégées – the smooth-talking BJP leaders – killed that hope with their private jets and lavish lifestyles.

Respected Baba and Anna, in the beginning of this letter I had talked of your towering achievements and personalities and talked about your historic role in the life of our nation. At this point in our history, the role that two of you can and should play is to revive the fervor, zeal and ideals that formed the core of our national thought during pre-independence days. Corruption in high places is the tip of the pyramid of widespread opportunistic criminality in the society. Opportunistic Criminality is external manifestation of a deeper malaise of unbridled ego-centric greedy valueless individualism. I request you both with folded hands to let the petty politicians and bureaucrats do all the state action that is possible within the boundaries of Constitution. You should aim for the root of the problem. You should strive for instilling values in the society and for generating a movement that changes the mindset of the present and future generations.

Respected Anna, you claim to be a Gandhian. The problem with many or rather most Gandhians after independence was that they started leaning on the state machinery. They thought that all social problems could be solved by some state action. As a result, they lost contact with the people. It must be mentioned that this post-independence behavior of followers of Gandhi was in sharp contrast to Gandhi's life and teachings. Gandhi, like many of his predecessor leaders of freedom movement, believed in going to the people for social reforms and never used state machinery for the purpose. In this context, it is interesting to have a glance at our history. First struggle for India's independence (1857) had the Moghul emperor and various kings at the core. The futility of this was realized by Swami Dayanand Saraswati, Swami Vivekanand, Lala Lajpat Rai, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Gandhi and other leaders of the freedom movement. India's struggle for independence from 1875 onwards did not assign any special place to the royals. The most noticeable part of the moving away from royals was the overall tenor of the freedom movement which emphasized simple living in sharp contrast to the lifestyle of the royals. After independence, Gandhi wanted Congress to be dissolved. Instead, the followers of Gandhi continued with the party and laid the foundation for the new royals – the political parties of today.

Respected Anna, if you want to be the Gandhi of this century you need to steer clear of the royals of today and must move to the masses directly. You must aim to educate, reform and revitalize the people of this country. Gandhian values of simplicity and self-discipline need to be revived. Anna, I am writing all this to you because I believe that you are not a typical run-of-the-mill post-independence Gandhian. What you have done in your village is indeed commendable. You achieved all that without any help from the state. Please do not get into the rut of post-independence Gandhians! Please rise up and lead the country towards a true rising up of the people against all forms of opportunistic criminality.

Respected Baba, you are the country's leading teacher of *yog* (yoga, as some prefer to call it). My knowledge of *yog* is limited. Yet, please allow me to speak to you about *yog*. Surely, there is nothing in *yog* that I can tell you about which you are not already aware. *Yog*, as I understand it, means joining up with and becoming a part of

the cosmic reality. It is a process of immersing one's "I" into the grand cosmic reality of "We". This process of immersion cannot be done without discipline and more discipline (*yam* and *niyam*). *Yam* and *Niyam* take precedence over *asan* in the *ashtang yog*, which is a complete system of life and not a course to be run by some gym. A person gripped with negative emotions of greed, anger, jealousy, ego, revenge, hatred etc. is unlikely to derive any benefits from the *asanas* or yogic postures. Kindness, compassion, love and empathy are essential parts of *yam* and *niyam*. You have surely done a great job in popularizing yogic *asanas* and *mudras*. Now, as you move forward, I most humbly request you to kindly move to *yam* and *niyam*. The solution to problem of corruption is not to be found in state actions founded on fear. The solution is in the first two parts of *ashtang yog*. Surely, no one is better equipped than you to lead the country through this internal revolution in the heart and soul of each and every citizen of the country.

Respected Baba, Let me also discuss two quintessential Hindu concepts that once again I am sure you know very well. The first concept is of *Dev-Danav*. A dev is one who gives without expecting anything in return and enjoys giving. A *danav* likes to grab all that he can by hook or by crook. In a dev society, everyone (excluding exceptions) is motivated by self-discipline to obey the law, while in a *danav* society law enforcement is by fear. The ultimate aim of yog is to create a dev-like society founded on self-discipline and love. It hence pains me to see a *yog* guru like you push for fear-based state actions which are the hallmark of a *danav*-like society. Though the ruling class might have to at times resort to punishments and other such state actions, the gurus must always look beyond the immediate and exert with full faith towards building a dev-like society founded on love, kindness and compassion.

That brings me to the second quintessential Hindu idea – the concept of *Trivarg* of *Dharm*, *Arth* and *Kaam*. *Dharm* can best be understood as the obligations that fall upon one by virtue of being in a relationship whether with another individual or with a holistic reality like family, society, humanity etc. Love, kindness and compassion are part of *Dharm*. *Arth* refers to all types of resources including material, human, animal, land etc. *Kaam* means desire and satisfaction that one gets from either an erotic alliance or wealth or other luxuries like perfumes etc. In the Hindu thought, while a balance between *Dharm*, *Arth* and *Kaam* is necessary, *Dharm* must take precedence over *Arth* and *Arth* must rule over *Kaam*. This position is, by and large, in different ways asserted by all religious thoughts in some way or the other. The Western / American thought, in contrast, emphasizes *Kaam* dictating *Arth* and *Arth* ruling over *Dharm*. Corruption or opportunistic criminality stems from the mentality that puts desires in the driving seat ahead of the resources that one has, completely ignoring the norms and rules of humanity and society. The fight against corruption will be a non-starter if Indian society continues its movement towards Western / American thought.

Resisting the consumerist, materialistic, individualistic ideology thought waves from the west cannot be done by any government or by judiciary or even by independent autonomous super-cops like *lokpal*. Baba, teaching the country's mind the right

priority order in *Trivarg* can only be done by gurus like you. I request you to kindly take up this challenge and save the country from falling into the quicksand of *danav* mindset.

All this might sound too theoretical, highly impractical and over idealistic to some. The challenge of leadership is always to take the mind of the people into a direction that seems impossible to others. But, I seriously think that it is neither impossible nor impractical. Baba and Anna, both of you either individually or jointly, can move the country towards the direction discussed by me above because this is something that runs deep in the psyche of the country. Both of you with your colleagues and associates can surely devise concrete plans to take the idea forward. Nevertheless, let me suggest a few action points to convert the abstract ideas into a movement across the country. I have no illusions that the action plans suggested by me are either complete or the best or the only possible ones. The suggested action points are only for the purpose of stirring up debate and stimulating thought before both of you and other well-intentioned people decide on a course of action.

**Action Point 1 – Simple Marriages** – Marriages and such social functions have become a means for garish display of wealth. If Pakistan can have one-dish marriages, India can surely do with six-dish marriages. Lavish marriages create social tensions with the not-so-rich trying to emulate the rich. They are a prime means of using wealth to rub down the not-so-fortunate ones.

**Action Point 2 – No Alcohol in Social Functions** – Alcohol leads to breaking down of social norms. It makes one do things that one would not normally do. Sadly, alcohol is becoming ubiquitous in various social occasions like marriages, birthday parties, kitty parties, conferences, seminars, conventions etc.

**Action Point 3 – No Wearing of Gold** – Gold ornaments are a way of displaying one's wealth. Our country is the single largest consumer of gold in the world. If Indian women stopped wearing gold, India's balance of trade will improve and India will become a stronger country.

**Action Point 4 – No Luxury Cars** – Luxury cars, like gold and lavish marriages, are garish display of wealth.

**Action Point 5 – Condemn Programs that Eulogize Negative Values** – It is sad to say that films and TV serials are full of programs that propagate negative values like revenge, greed, anger, jealousy, ego, etc. Simultaneously, kindness, love, compassion, simple-heartedness, empathy etc. are made fun of. One has to just watch serials like Beg, Borrow, Steal or MTV Bakra or the unending list of soap operas. It is high time that the society raised its voice against this pollution of minds.

**Action Point 6 – Praise Programs that Propound Dev Values** – The media moguls look at nothing but the TRP's and cash register. However, they are not immune to social pressure. While the negative must be condemned in the strongest possible terms, the positive deserves a pat on the back.

The above action points are illustrative and not intended to be exhaustive. Both of you, with your associates, have more practical experience than I can ever hope to get in this life. So, surely you can work out a practical plan better than I can hope to do.

My only suggestion and request is to both of you to build up a national movement which will lay stress on simple living and will revitalize the essential human values that have always been present in our cultural ethos.

I and probably many others like me across the country have confidence in your capabilities to lead this country towards a new cultural and moral revitalization, which is the only way to fight corruption and opportunistic criminality. For many of us, you are the only hope at this point in the history of our country. Please do not fail us.

With best wishes and regards,



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