

# POLITICAL CORRUPTION IN INDIA

## ROLE OF CRIMINALS

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The Constitution of India provides for elections based on adult franchise for the Central Legislature namely the Parliament and for the State Legislatures. The Representation of People Act was passed by the Parliament in 1951, to deal exclusively with the process of elections. After India got Independence, the first General Elections were held in 1952. Members of Parliament i.e., M.P.s and Members of Legislative Assemblies i.e., M.L.A.s for the State Legislatures are elected directly by the people. The President of India is elected indirectly by the people representatives, since India is a republic. Direct Democracy is not feasible here due to huge population. So, the elected representatives act on behalf of the people, but the Politicians who are governing as the ruling party, become very powerful as the governing class or the law makers. This enormous power act as a bait to the contestants who want to win elections by hook or crook. To achieve that, the help of criminals is taken by all the parties. Their muscle power and money power help the politicians to win power and in return the criminal elements do what they wish to do, affecting common man's life and liberty. Criminals helping Political parties to win from outside or by entering the fray, hurts the process of democracy. This article analyses various criminal elements and mafia on politics and political life of the nation.*

**Key Words:** *Corruption, Criminalization of Politics, Election Commission, Mafia, Mafia Raj*

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

A sustained non-violent movement under the able guidance of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and scores of other freedom fighters ensured that India got Independence after throwing off British rule in 1947. By then, Indians became attuned to a common law system. The political structure was also heavily influenced by the British model of Parliamentary type of Governance. The Constituent Assembly drafted the Indian Constitution, which came into force in 1950. It included universal suffrage for the sustenance of democratic governance in India.

## **II. POLITICAL LIFE AND CORRUPTION**

The first elections in free India was held in 1952<sup>1</sup>. At that point of time, people including politicians were imbued with national fervour. Most of the candidates in that election were part of India's freedom struggle

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movement. The determination to have self-rule was palpable everywhere, and the freedom fighters easily won the elections. It presented a rosy picture of the triumph of democracy. Very soon things changed and the ugly face of representative democracy became evident.

“Power Corrupts, absolute power corrupts”, absolutely said Aristotle. This came true in India within 2 decades of independence Politics was once considered as service by the politicians when India was a nascent nation. As decision makers, the party men in power wielded enormous power and clout. This realization was deeply felt in the 3<sup>rd</sup> General Election itself. The struggle to gain political power and retain it intensified from 1960's itself. Elections held the key to that and to win elections at any cost, the politicians initially sought the help of local criminals, who willingly extended their services to ensure victory for their political friends. In return the criminals were assured of the party support in all their nefarious activities. When the party they supported came to power, the political masters with their power became very rich and allowed the criminals too to prosper.

After a point of time, the criminals directly entered politics and they were given party tickets by all the political parties. This criminal-politician nexus was strengthened as those with criminal past were able to win elections using their muscle and money power.

### **III. POLITICAL CORRUPTION – DIFFERENT ASPECTS**

There are different aspects of corruption that have a negative bearing on the process of elections in India. Politics is now considered a business for acquiring enormous power and riches in a short span of time. Elections are very costly and corruption in political life mainly, emanates from the high expenditure incurred as election expenses. The candidates too have to spend huge amount towards elections. The Centre for Media Studies carried out a study on poll expenses in the 16<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha elections. It was estimated that around Rs. 4,000 crores was spent by candidates contesting 543 seats in that election<sup>2</sup>. This amount was contributed by corporates, contractors, business groups, criminals and others. The elections were held in 9 phases. It was conducted for 36 days from 7<sup>th</sup> April to 12<sup>th</sup> May 2014<sup>3</sup>. In fact, just before the 16<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha elections, the Parliament raised poll expenditure of each contestant from Rs. 54 lakhs to Rs. 70 lakhs<sup>4</sup>.

Political contestants and political parties have to spend large amount of money as part of electioneering campaign and an equally large amount to surreptitiously distribute among voters either as hard cash or in the form of material goods. Buying of votes for cash has become so entrenched in the minds of the common man that they have started demanding from every contestant in their constituency. It is well organized and well oiled. In the 2014 elections around Rs.43 millions was spent by those contesting Lok Sabha elections<sup>5</sup>. Only a small part of that money was white money, the major part was black money. Politicians got it from many sources including criminal mafia gangs.

Political analysts agree that the root of political corruption lies in the enormous election expenses. After they spend that amount to get elected, the politicians try to recover it back with interest from kickbacks, contracts, etc., while in power. They demand money for everything and it has a negative cascading effect from the higher level officials to lower level Government officials. Sensing that corruption in political life

is mainly fueled by election expenses, the Election Commission wanted the Government to spend. In the 16<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha polls, Government spent Rs. 3,426 crores<sup>6</sup>.

#### **IV. CRIMINAL – POLITICIAN NEXUS**

The political parties take the help of criminals and mafia gangs to fund elections and to threaten people. In return criminals are fielded as candidates and even otherwise they are protected by the Government and allowed to have a free hand in doing illegal activities. Of all the sources who give money for election purposes, the mafia dons and criminals pose a huge risk to the people, the democratic institutions and to the environment.

Organized crimes produce successful dons, whose muscle power helps in building their money power. Organized criminal activity is possible only when there is a strong link between the local gangsters, political leaders and the Government officials at the local level. India with a diverse geographical landscape is a reservoir of minerals and forest produce. So, small time criminals try to profit by illegally tapping at the rich resources and some become so successful that they establish mafia dom openly. So, we have coal mafia in Bihar, Jharkhand; Mining mafia in states of Andhra Pradesh, Chattisgarh, Jharkhand, Karnataka and Orissa; Timber mafia in Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Jharkhand. Apart from that drug mafia, contractor mafia and liquor mafia thrive in almost all parts of India, with strong presence in some places.

The dons need state protection for continuing their illegal activities. They grease the hands of local policeman and Government officials in their initial stages. Once they become rich, they fund elections in return for political patronage in expanding their illegal business. From local dons, they enter national and international areas with good political backup. The political parties remain indebted to dons for helping them to win elections.

Commenting on the unholy nexus between the politicians and criminals, DharamVira, Chairman of the National Police Commission from 1977 to 1983 said, “The manner in which different political parties have functioned, particularly on the eve of periodic election, involves the free use of musclemen and ‘Dadas’ to influence the attitude and conduct of sizeable sections of the electorate”<sup>7</sup>. In this article the illegal activities of certain dons and their impact on Indian polity, society and economy is analyzed briefly.

There are local dons throughout the world and they are called as ‘Mafia’. In India, the term Mafia Raj is used to refer to a situation where public property, public goods and funds meant for public welfare is controlled and systematically siphoned off by Government officials, elected politicians, business houses and criminals. With the connivance of Government and its staff, mafias are able to conduct their illegal activities covertly and at times openly. They also use violence to cow down any opposition.

#### **V. DONS OF BOMBAY**

The city of Bombay witnessed many organized criminal gangs and their leaders with political clout terrorizing people. These gangs dealt in illicit liquor, land grabbing, gold smuggling, kidnapping, extortion and

contract murders. VaradarajaMudaliar, a Tamilian settled in Bombay was a powerful don in th early 1960's. In the late 1960's and 1970's, there other gangs emerged headed by Haji Mastan, Yusuf Patel and Karim Lala. The first two specialized in gold smuggling whereas Karim Lala dealt in Drugs.

Emergency period in India witnessed a crackdown on many illegal activities like smuggling, hoarding, etc. The mafia also lay low as they were bounded by the Government during that Phase. After emergency, new gangs emerged. Dawood Ibrahim was the most successful gangster, who eliminated other gangs. Around the same time, Tiger Memom and Mohammed Dossa too operated and terrorized Bombay. They mainly indulged in smuggling gold, drugs, mediated in monetary disputes, exorted money from builders and film producers and undertook contract killing – also known as supari killings.

Bombay emerged as a fertile playing field for other gangsters like ChotaRajan, who specialized in drug trafficking and contract killings; ArunGawli, notorious for contract killing and taking protection money; Amar Naik and ChotaShakeel whose rise to fame was due to kidnappings and protection money. All of them were involved in kidnappings for ransom, gun running, money laundering, illicit boot legging, trafficking in women and children and other illegal activities. Bombay became crowded with too many dons and the political parties were unable to support them all. So, some of them shifted base to Delhi and Karnataka. Some gangsters left India and settled in Pakistan and Dubai. At the height of their power, the land mafia in Bombay with the backing of politicians intimidated and forcibly vacated people from their lands and helped the politicians to hoard ill gotten money. Their money in turn was used for election purposes. Once politicians take help and money from gangsters, they become puppets and do as commanded by the dons.

## **VI. STATE CONSTRUCTION ACTIVITIES AND MAFIA CONTROL**

The Central Government and State Governments have to undertake large scale constructions activities like laying roads, national highways, flyovers, bridges, subways, over bridges, foot paths, railway lines, parking spaces, parks, bus terminals, etc. It involves huge public money. There is a clear-cut nexus between greedy politicians, contractors and criminals to enrich themselves. From sending bids to getting Government contracts and carrying on the work, contractors have to transfer heavy amounts to politicians and Government servants. The contractors also work towards getting a hefty share. It results in shoddy substandard output, whether it is road, dam, building or any construction. Ultimately the public, for whose benefit such activities are undertaken are left high and dry. The entire amount spent by Government comes from taxpayers money. Thus public money spent for a public cause does not benefit the public as much as it does the criminals and politicians. Any person who brings it to light has to face the wrath of the powerful contractors, as it happened in the case of Engineer Satyendra Dubey. He was working as project director with the National Highways Authority of India, when he was murdered in 2003<sup>8</sup>. The case for his murder was his open letter to the Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, wherein he exposed the deep-seated contractor's mafia involvement in the construction of a part of the Golden Quadrilateral Project. The case was handed over to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), which brushed aside mafia's involvement in Dubey's murder and closed the case<sup>9</sup>. CBI is always controlled by the party in power and they have to cover up Government's involvement.

Roads are also laid regularly by every Government and they are battered after monsoon leading to accidents. Government contracts are taken up only by those who have muscle, money power and the support of the party in power.

## **VII. MINING BUSINESS**

India is a mineral rich nation, which fetches sizeable amounts in international markets. In mineral rich states, many criminals take to mining due to its profitability. With the connivance of political parties, the mining mafia is able to mine in large tracts of mines including Government mines illegally. The mining lobby is very strong abounding in criminals who were paupers becoming filthy rich. The mining mafia runs parallel and Governments in many states and also get elected to Parliament and State legislators. GaliJanardhana Reddy, the Prime Minister in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka Mining Scam, used to cycle to the mine where he worked. He became very wealthy and powerful and even served as minister in Government of Karnataka.

## **VIII. COAL MINING BUSINESS**

In Bihar and Jharkhand, illegal Coal mining business is very powerful. India is the largest coal producing country in the world. Major coal reserves are found in Jharkhand, Chattisgarh, Orissa and Andhra Pradesh. Government land is illegally leased out to contractors by Government officials and politicians. A former M.P. and Trade Union Leader, Mr. Jibon Roy, estimated that, “at least around 10,000 mafia groups operate in the country mostly concentrating in coal India Ltd. Collieries and the annual plunder is not less than 5 to 6 million tonnes causing huge loss to the state exchequer”<sup>10</sup>.

## **IX. DRUGS CARTEL**

India is geographically at a strategic location as it is wedged between the countries of Golden Triangle and Golden Crescent. It is a transit point for narcotic substances produced in other regions. Opium is grown in India under the control of Narcotic Commissioner in three states – Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. The Government exports it for medical purposes to other countries. Opium is also grown in Turkey and Australia. Apart from these Opium licit places, it is grown illicitly in many states and countries. Drug mafia’s presence is strongly felt in Golden Crescent countries. Golden Crescent is the term given to three illicit Opium producing nations in Asia – Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan.

## **X. TRADE IN TIMBER**

Local dons, local people, politicians and forest officials ensure illegal feeling of Timber. Without support from all these stakeholders, the transportation of logs of valuable wood from forests is not possible. The connivance of politicians and Government officials is absolutely necessary in this chopping and felling trees and

transporting them to industries. Denudation of forest cover, environmental degradation and loss to public in this activity is enormous. It affects animals and the entire eco system.

In Tamil Nadu, Veerappan, a notorious bandit specialized in illegal logging of sandalwood trees in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu forested areas. He also killed around 200 elephants and smuggled ivory worth Rs. 16 crores. For years together, he terrorized people near the forests and vandalized forests with the protection of some Karnataka and Tamil Nadu politicians. Finally, in 2004, he was nabbed and shot dead by Tamil Nadu police. Operation Cocoon, formed to nab Veerappan, was headed by K.Vijayakumar and N.K.SenthamaraiKannan Yadav of the special task force of Tamil Nadu police.

These are some of the criminal elements who in their days had political clout and by their nefarious activities affected not only the people, but also dented the credibility of democratic institutions and public offices. There are other mafia's like sand mafia, public finance mafia, etc. Major scams were also uncaught and probed.

## **XI. CONCLUSION**

This unholy nexus between politicians and criminals negatively impacts the entire process of governance. Rule of Law goes for a toss. People's right guaranteed by the constitution are negative. Giving and taking bribes has become the norm, like dowry. Without giving bribes, no file can move in public offices, with rare exceptions. This money transaction is from the top-level ministers to the lowest level office assistants. This affects the public. For example, when contractors who construct dams, roads, railways, bridges etc. have to pay hefty amount as bribes for getting the contract, they will definitely skimp on quality. Due to faulty construction and usage of sub-standard materials, there are instances of bridges falling down on the day of inauguration and roads that needs repairs a month after laying it. Thus, this politician – criminal nexus threatens not only the survival of democracy, but also the very fabric of society. Putting on end to this unholy alliance is thus of paramount importance.

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