

IAC Overtakes Political Parties In Ushering Personality Cult

IAC Lost Opportunity To Personality Cult

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The India Against Corruption (IAC) campaign may succeed in bringing a strong Jan Lokpal Bill to the country. However, India dire need is not a strong Jan Lokpal Bill. We essentially need an ideological-based movement that stresses on the process, than the end result. Such a movement is needed which could show us some way forward, at a time when our social values and political system is going down the drain - mounting corruption being one of its direct fallout. In the post emergency period in India, we have witnessed many movements which made some headway, but, finally, all ended up entangled around their own issues and agendas; involved with making one or other bill a success. They are involved with making Right to Education; Food; Information; Forest and so on. First the movement commit itself to making of strong bill, then comes its better implementation, at the end movements find itself so much entangled in the web of the bill that it is not left with any time and energy to raise the joint fight against the entire system, which has been needing overhaul, eversince we achieved independence.

To some extent, IAC could have been successful in building up a movement, which could churn the conscience of the country and push it towards pushing in some basic changes in the system. But IAC found to be so much pinned around the making of ' Jan Lokpal Bill' that, in the quest of quick success it has out-beaten political parties in their game and has instead fallen prey to the market strategy of selling its product on brand value. They have forgotten the words and deeds of all great leaders that a movement should stand on its ideological strength rather than on out-blown image of its leader. Be it Marx, Engels or Mahatma Gandhi - all of them were against pitching the personality before the institution. Marx and Engels were strongly against any manifestation of the individual, and attached greater importance to organisation-building rather than quick

successes through individual worship. Similarly, Mahatma Gandhi was against the idea of him being addressed as the 'Mahatma' - "Often, the title has deeply pained me; and there is not a moment I can recall when it may be said to have tickled me".

The people of India have pinned great hopes on the IAC, but the very denial of Mahatma Gandhi's teachings by IAC - of means being more important than the end result - is a great cause of worry. The IAC campaign, now known as 'Team Anna', has been strategically subverting the movement to a personality cult, by shoddily equalising the image of Anna Hazare with that of Mahatma Gandhi.

Some sections of the media did critique this nature of personality cult observed during the two week-long event at Ramlila Maidan in August 2011. Here, I am trying to critically analyse the diverse sets of information that I gathered from the official website of IAC. To draw a comparison with political parties, I also searched through the official websites of Congress, BJP and BSP. The comparisons prove that IAC beat all the political parties in its way of building a personality cult - parallels could be drawn with Congress encasing on Mahatma Gandhi, and BJP using the national tricolour.

While the official website of all these political parties seek public support for their ideologies, the IAC website has the Indian tricolour as its banner, with the words 'Support Anna Hazare' adjacent to it. The websites of political parties carry photographs of their various respective political leaders and mentor; the IAC website's photo and video gallery spills images of Anna Hazare. The publicity pamphlet too has an appeal from Anna, and not from IAC core team; it also carries names of shops in Mumbai and Delhi from where publicity badges and caps (bearing the words 'I Too Am Anna') could be purchased. Even IAC's Powerpoint presentation on the Jan Lokpal Bill begins with a photograph of Anna Hazare, captioned "Anna Hazare spearheaded a nationwide movement to demand anti-corruption law - Jan Lokpal Bill". While political parties do have their brief ideology and history posted on the website, the IAC has no

mention of its ideology; it only has photographs and names of its core team members. Furthermore, none of the political parties have any personal blog of their political leaders tagged on to their official website. But the IAC website has 'Anna Hazare Says: Blog' tagged to it. The blog has not been a simple platform to candidly communicate with masses; rather it has been another proxy platform to galvanise his already-inflated image. The same blog is now in the midst of several controversies.

IAC's Hindi website contains editions of its monthly Hindi e-magazine "Apna Panna", with Manish Sisodia as its editor and Arvind Kejriwal as one among its advisers. Its chronological reading from January to October 2011 reveals how 'Brand Anna' was strategically carved out. It attributes the making of the Jan Lokpal Bill to Anna, when the truth is that the Bill was a painstaking joint effort of several prominent intellectuals, much before Anna joined IAC.

While the January 2011 issue of 'Apna Panna' covers the broader issue of corruption, the February 2011 issue was on similar lines, with added three photographs of Anna handing the RTI 2010 Awards to the winners. There is no mention of the Jan Lokpal Bill in both the issues. Suddenly, the March 2011 issue carries the letter from Anna, addressed to PM Manmohan Singh. But it still gives due credit for drafting the Jan Lokpal Bill to Arvind Kejriwal, Prashant and Shanti Bhushan, Santosh Hegde, Kiran Bedi and JM Lyngdoh. The prominent feature of this issue is its appeal to the public: "Reality differs from Hindi cinema; we cannot be found waiting for an upright officer, a leader, or a charismatic man to change the system. People's effort alone can change it." But the April 2011 issue reflects a sudden U-turn from the previous statements, instead emerging with a sudden change of the strategy to float 'Brand Anna'. The cover page of the magazine bears a photograph of Anna with the words "Ek Mahatma ka bhrashtaachaar ke khilaaf aamara anshan" (One great man's indefinite fast against corruption).

Since then, IAC smelled success in its strategy of building the Anna personality cult at Jantar Mantar; the May 2011 issue of 'Apna Panna' had taken a big leap in further projecting 'Brand Anna' for the final show of strength later in August. That issue compared Anna with Mahatma Gandhi, and even glorifies Anna as the god of Ralegan Siddi. The entire issue was full of articles centred on Anna by various journalists. The subsequent issues of the e-magazine, in June, July and August, were furthering the pitch for Anna, giving enough indication about the way in which the IAC campaign would unfold at Ramlila Maidan. IAC suddenly found to be shifting from its strength of collective process to the image of 'Brand Anna'. The Jan Lokpal Bill was suddenly hailed as 'Anna's Jan Lokpal Bill'.

After the major success of 'Brand Anna' at Ramlila Maidan, the October issue of 'Apna Panna' pushed aside any fragment of the barrier of idolisation. It carried captions like "Naye Bharat ka Rashtranayak"; the inside pages were equally flaring. The issue also carries a column by a journalist, which, to me, demonstrates the effect of personality cult. The column says in their media house the assignments are divided into beats and in this Anna's personality out-beat that of Congress President Sonia Gandhi and Manmohan Singh. There is no separate beat assigned for coverage of Congress President Sonia Gandhi and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, both are covered under their respective organisation; Sonia Gandhi under Congress beat and Manmohan Singh under UPA. But, while it comes to coverage of IAC it is called 'Anna' beat rather than IAC beat. I wonder, whether Sonia Gandhi and Manmohan Singh must be thanked to have maintained their respective institution above their personality or Anna is too big for any institution to represent him.

In the past 22 years of my experience as a full-time activist, I have never seen any movement with such loud posters or banners or badges bearing the photograph of its leader, and an official magazine devoted to its leader. Political parties often become synonymous with their leader's name, and thrive on their leader's image rather than its own ideology. In an ideological based movement, however, conscious efforts are made to

prevent a personality outgrow the movement or the organisation. An egalitarian relationship among its members is the primary requirement of a movement. In a movement, efforts are always made to develop collective leadership; dalits, adivasis and women are always encouraged to be a part of that unified leadership. IAC must bear in mind that the success of any particular movement cannot be judged by the attainment of its major demand alone. Rather, it lies in the ideological base it lays through the means and process adopted by it. "We have always control over the means but not over the end. I feel that our progress towards the goal will be in exact proportion to the purity of our means," said Mahatma Gandhi. Mahatma Gandhi's success lies more in the moral strength of non-cooperation and non-violence, which he has shown to the entire world.

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