

## Anna's Anti-Congressism

by A.K. VERMA

The recent strategy of team Anna to take the Congress by the horns in the Hisar Lok Sabha by-poll took the party completely by surprise and bewilderment. This is evident from the fact that the Congress chose to over-react to Anna's anti-Congressism. From Team Anna's perspective, the move was designed to test the possible outcome of the civil society taking on the political society on corruption and Jan Lokpal in the larger arena of political contestations in five States next year, but from the Congress perspective, the party's move appears like an unnecessary 'double-fault'; the first fault was committed during Anna's 13-day fast in August last at Ramlila Maidan in Delhi, when the Congress managers made Rahul lose an opportunity to get connected to the youth which formed the backbone of the movement, and the second was made by over-reacting to team Anna's anti-Congressism in Hisar, little realising that Anna gave the Congress a very easy handle to hijack Team Anna's opposition into a massive support by committing to bring the Jan Lokpal Bill in the winter session of Parliament for which all parties, including the Congress, are committed through a unanimous parliamentary resolution.

The Congress probably did not look carefully at the contents of Anna's press briefing of October 4, 2011. In that brief, Anna had categorically stated that he would not oppose the Congress if the latter brought a Jan Lokpal Bill in the winter session of Parliament; in fact he promised to ask the people to vote for the good candidates of the Congress too. The conditionality imposed by Anna for not opposing the Congress was so minimal that the party could easily change the character of Anna's drive from anti-Congressism to pro-Congressism. The Congress could have, in fact, claimed the people's support by honouring the parliamentary resolution on the Jan Lokpal Bill. And, as Anna had said in his press brief, in the event of the Jan Lokpal Bill brought in Parliament in the winter session, he would ask the people to vote for the good candidates of all parties, including the Congress. That clearly showed that the Congress could have put other parties on the defensive on this as Team Anna would have popularised the criminal profile of all party candidates, probably giving the Congress an advantage.

•

THE Congress had already faced embarrassment by levelling allegations against Anna through the likes of Manish Tewari who had to eat his words and apologise to Anna; the same mistake was replicated by Digvijay Singh. If the doings of Anna are going against the Congress, the BJP as the only credible competitive national party may benefit; but calling Anna a BJP agent or an RSS crony may be utterly counter-productive. If the RSS chief, Mohan Bhagwat, claims that his volunteers were backing the Anna movement, then that was his choice. What about the people from the Communist and Socialist Parties? Were they not supporting the Anna movement? Do we mean to suggest that they were supporting corruption? The same tirade was spread about Muslims, but we know that in spite of Ramzan, the Muslims were firmly backing Anna. Actually whenever a people's movement gets success, there are many who venture to take credit for the same; Mohan Bhagwat is perhaps the first to take the lead in this matter. But the fact remains that Anna's movement was nobody's movement; it was a people's movement, and the people include all segments of society—the Left, the Right and the Centre.

The Congress' worry about the anti-Congressism of Team Anna may end with the winter session of Parliament, but that is largely the Congress' choice. Should that happen, then it may leave other parties, the BJP, BSP and SP, jittery in UP. The greatest worry can be for the BSP which is in power and on the defensive for various acts of omission and commission during its full tenure. A new unfortunate trend has started in our parliamentary democracy where the political boss refuses to own responsibility for the wrong-doings of her/his team and, instead of resigning, sacrifices individual Ministers. Many Ministers of Mayawati have been removed in the dying hours of the government on serious charges, and some Ministers of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's Cabinet have been sent to the Tihar Jail.

It is very surprising that the Congress has chosen to fight Anna and not corruption—an issue on which the Congress claims to stand with Anna. It is certainly true that there are limitations of fighting corruption through legal instruments and judicial institutions, but that does not mean that we should not have a strong anti-corruption mechanism.

Anna and his team have shown a difficult, though welcome, transition from the arena of civil society to the domain of political contestations. And, they must be prepared for tougher and dirtier things. The thrashing of Prashant Bhushan in his chamber by a few men claiming to belong to some organisation, giving flimsy and dubious reasons for their action, may be a signal of the things to come. The people are watching. The anti-Congressism of Team Anna may end after the winter session of Parliament. But, will the Congress transcend the Anna syndrome and care about doing away with the anti-Congressism of the people of Uttar Pradesh, and winning their confidence that has been denied it since 1989?

The author teaches Politics at Christ Church College, Kanpur.