

Moral interventions

Home / Today's Paper / Opinion / Moral interventions

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Print : [Opinion](#)

A cursory look at the cases of corruption of those in power draws similar conclusions, though each story might have more than one moral. Ms Jayalalitha, called 'Mama' by her loyalists, has been in and out (mostly in) as chief minister of the Indian state of Tamil Nadu for the past 25 years. She returned to power even after her disqualification in 2014 by a court under allegations of 'disproportionate assets'. The stories in the media about her accumulated wealth and countless saris were similar to those of Imelda Marcos' sandals. Thaksin Shinawatra, initially a partisan of the crown and later elected as prime minister of Thailand, was accused of maintaining 'hidden assets'. He was unseated while in exile after a coup in 2006. His party won the elections by a wide margin and his sister, Yingluck Shinawatra, formed the government in 2011. A constitutional court verdict cut her time short, on charges of misuse of power. This exacerbated the political crisis that stands unresolved to date. The electorate in South Korea elected Park Geun-hye as president of the country despite the fact that her father, Park Chung-hee, a military dictator, ruled the country with an iron fist (1961-1979). Sri Lankan voters unseated the country's president, Mahindra Rajapaksa, in 2015 in a surprise defeat after 10 years in power. Rajapaksa, along with his family members, is facing charges of amassing illegal wealth. Freedom House alleged in a report that Rajapaksa and his family controlled 70 percent of Sri Lanka's wealth while he was in power. The cases mentioned here offer the following general deductions. First, that mega financial corruption is an international issue, even though it thrives in environments of political instability, unsettled power equations, oppression, impunity and armed conflicts – in other words, conditions opposite to rule of law. Second, corruption is usually accompanied by other crimes and discovered either after the powerful lose their power or by other stakeholders who hope to be dispensed with similar accountability. And third, that dealing with corruption may create instability, especially if the accountability process happens to be partial. The examples given above show that the popular politician returning to power by votes, after trials for corruption, does not depend merely on an ability to manoeuvre public opinion but hugely on the people's choice. The common citizen wants to keep the power of verdict (vote) to him/herself. The people made a choice in Tamil Nadu, Thailand, and South Korea that apparently favoured tainted characters. The expression of the people's will was the opposite in Sri Lanka. The people waited for the right moment and dislodged the government, which they thought was not governing the country according to their will. In Tunisia, the people did this through a mass agitation in 2011. Whereas in post-colonial democracies and agrarian societies the electorate and the elected maintain a feudalistic relationship, the people in these societies want to decide for themselves, even if their loyalty is misplaced, and ultimately punish their leaders in their own way. Hence, the moral interventions meant to hold those in power accountable might not succeed in a climate of suspicion about the process and the intentions thereof. Moral questions about financial corruption have been worked out in starkly different ways in various socio-political contexts, presenting a range of solutions. The interim solutions after the Panama leaks must seek to resolve the broader issue of corruption and not merely that of the government. A broader arrangement is necessary, though the probe may begin with the

prime minister's family – as he has himself offered. Societies in the past and present have succeeded in addressing these moral questions when they sought solutions beyond legal procedures. It is hardly surprising that societies deprived of free thinking, expression, intellectual discourse, art and culture find it difficult to fight such challenges. Pakistan can align itself with an international movement for accountability, along with internal accountability according to international norms. If international morality was not delivering, becoming party to the International Convention Against Corruption (2007) was an exercise in futility.

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