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Problem of Corruption: A Fearological Approach

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Abstract

Corruption is one of the maladies plaguing the human society. The reasons for corruption are many, ranging from ignorance to greed; wrong policies to moral degradation and from voluminous bureaucracy to contagion from other countries. Irrespective of the multiplicity of causative factors and subsequent intervention measures, there seems to be no headway in the near future in containing the problem despite resolute good-natured intentions on the part of national governments. It has since long been the subject of searching for the truth as to whether the conventional thinking on causation and proliferation of corruption monster as well as the remedial steps will yield the desired outcome or any divergent rumination is required to deal with the problem anew. As part of the cerebral exercise under the latter proposition, an attempt has been made in this paper to associate the origination of corruption with the feelings of uncertainty and insecurity which in turn are linked to fear. Uncertainty acts as a catalyst for irrational curiosity that tends to trigger action resulting in corrupt practices in the absence of goodness check. This paper also analyses the means and mechanisms by which uncertainty and miscalculated curiosity are resolved through the fearological approach.

Keywords: Corruption, Fear, Pandora's box, Fearology, Government

Uncertainty, Insecurity and Curiosity

According to the Bible, God created Adam and Eve and put them in the Garden of Eden, where they used to live happily. God asked them to enjoy everything in the Garden except eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge. Eve was not knowing (uncertain) about what would happen if the fruit was eaten. She developed curiosity. She knew that her curiosity would attract the wrath of God. Even then, she ate the fruit at the behest of the serpent's temptation, thereby leading to 'fall of man'.

Thus, there is the possibility that uncertainty or insecurity gives rise to curiosity, which acts as a powerful motivator in humans' decision-making processes. In tune with the biblical incident, a new study says, "Curiosity is sometimes so strong that it makes people choose potentially painful and unpleasant outcomes that have no apparent benefits though they have the ability to avoid these outcomes altogether."

Pandora's Box

To explain the findings of the study, the research author Bowen Ruan of the University of Wisconsin–Madison in the US referred to Pandora's box episode. In Greek mythology, Pandora was the first woman, gifted by Zeus to Epimetheus. Zeus gave one box to Epimetheus saying that it was meant to be securely kept and not to be opened. Despite Epimetheus' warning, Pandora became curious and opened the box one day, releasing vengeance, aggressiveness and many other evils into the world.

Ruan infers that curiosity stems from people's deep-seated desire to resolve uncertainty regardless of the harm it may bring. A Swedish psychologist Arne Ohman opined in his research findings that fear has been shaped by evolution as the animals used to feel threatened always by the environmental dangers in prehistoric times. In the modern-day world, fear of the unknown shows up various manifestations in terms of –

- Physical;
- Emotional;
- Social;
- Financial; and
- Spiritual aspects.

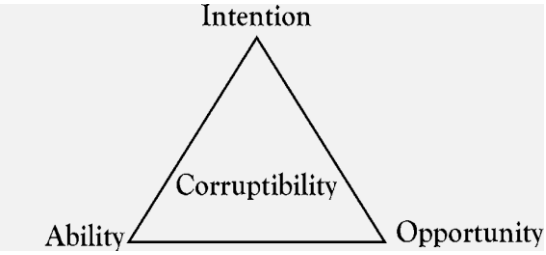
Fear of the Unknown

Fear of the unknown tends to take away self–confidence. It goes hand in hand with the fear of loss of power over survival mechanisms like food, money, safety, security, sex, reputation, status, ego etc. That is the power to control such things or relations that the persons of unethical nature yearn and often succeed to achieve or possess by exploiting all the available means. Such exploitation includes not only illicit financial gains but also intellectual, moral, spiritual and cultural transgressions. And this power tends to corrupt, by misusing itself for personal advantage.

The 19th century English historian Lord Acton is quite popular for his most famous quote – "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power tends to corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men." The 1991 Nobel peace prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi of Myanmar said, “It is not power that corrupts but fear.” Here what Lord Acton and Suu Kyi said about corruption was the same – similar in philosophy but seemingly in two different perspectives like Mobius strip that initially looks as if it has two sides but is one-sided. It is the acquisition of power that leads to fear of loss of power that sets the wheel of corruption into motion.

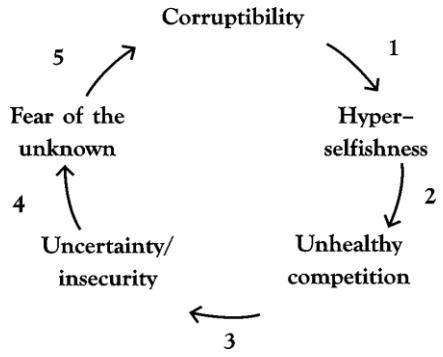
Corruptibility Triangle

Like any event or occurrence, corruptibility also requires three prerequisites for it to happen.



Fear of loss of power to control becomes ‘intention', an intention to execute by any means. Power or authority or strength associated with the perpetrator becomes ‘ability'. Convenience or suitability of circumstances turns into ‘opportunity' for the execution of the intended task. Corruptibility, being in direct proportionality with hyper–selfishness; unhealthy competition, uncertainty/insecurity and fear of the unknown, form a vicious cycle.

The Corruptibility Vicious Cycle

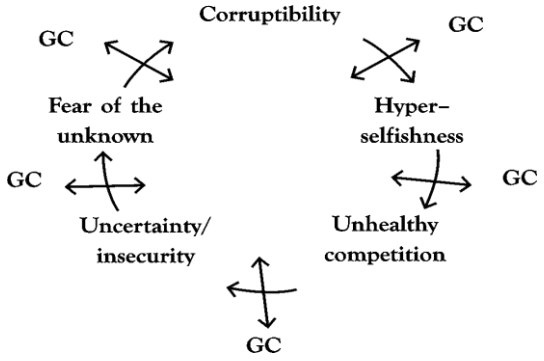


There are five crescents in the cycle. The cycle can be broken at any of the crescents.

American mathematician John Allen Paulos said, “Uncertainty is the only certainty there is, and knowing how to live with insecurity is the only security.” As long as this realisation in positive terms is not attained, corruptibility is directly proportional to uncertainty and insecurity.

Goodness Check

As a diamond is used to cut diamond, the nexus amongst the linking factors needs to be dealt with similarly. Since all the factors are socio–psycho-spiritual in nature, rectification shall be sought from that of the same nature – that is goodness check (GC), which can break the vicious cycle.



The aim of goodness check is to turn the feeling of uncertainty into a simple altruistic assurance, whereby curiosity itself loses its reality. When the signs of uncertainty and curiosity are no longer existent, their manifested form known as fear is automatically resolved, paving the way for annulment of corruptibility. Goodness check is a ‘three–in–one' construct, trinitarianising the following checks –

1. Belief check
2. Reality check
3. Ethics check

Belief Check

Long back, one famous writer said that he had no belief in belief. Belief should always conform to positivity. If somebody says that something should not be done, we need not believe blindly; traditions and customs figure in this category, which are area and time–specific. Also, individual specific, the old expression ‘an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth’ might be a justifiable proposition in ancient times. Because such was the belief, if there was a grave wound inflicted upon somebody, it was justified for the victim to cause injury in the same manner like hand for hand or foot for foot or burn for burn or even life for life. This form of ‘justice' was accepted in certain societies in olden days, but in the current world, such traditions or customs are not acceptable as they do not conform to present democratic laws. Only

those belief systems which are in congruence with modern law can continue to exist. Here are two quotes:

- The world we see that seems so insane is the result of a belief system that is not working. To perceive the world differently, we must be willing to change our belief system, let the past slip away, expand our sense of now, and dissolve the fear in our minds.**– William James** Father of American Psychology

- Any man who stands for progress has to criticise, disbelieve and challenge every item of the old faith. **- Shaheed Bhagat Singh** An Indian Patriot

In Gita, Lord Krishna says to Arjuna, "Don't believe anything blindly, but reflect on it and use your discretion. And then you make your choice." So a belief, in order to be true, must stand the test of verification and proof. Otherwise, decisions being taken based on unconfirmed beliefs will go wrong and cause damage.

Wikipedia makes clarification between belief and knowledge as, "a belief is an internal thought or memory which exists in one's mind. Most people accept that for a belief to be 'knowledge', it must be at least true and justified." In this context, the following character types will emerge depending upon the people and to what they profess – belief or knowledge:

	Belief	**Knowledge**
Profess	Procrustes	Socrates
Unconcerned	Dhritarashtra	Pilate

- Procrustes: A ruthless robber in Greek mythology, who used to stretch or cut his victims to make them fit his inflexible iron bed.

- Socrates: The ancient Greek thinker and one of the founders of Western philosophy, who was known for infusing the people vociferously with considerations of justice and the pursuit of goodness.
- Dhritarashtra: The blind king of Hastinapur in the epic Mahabharata, who was silent and indifferent to the misdeeds of his son Duryodhana.
- Pilate: The Roman governor of Judaea, who sought to avoid personal responsibility for the crucifixion of Jesus by washing his hands in front of the crowd.

Reality Check

Reality check enables one to appreciate the situation in the right perspective. Qualities of a thing or situation do not remain constant at all times, at all places or with all individuals. In the 12th century England, Robin Hood used to plunder the localities inhabited by rich people. He used to rob them mercilessly and distributed the booty to the poor. He also led an uprising, causing chaos in the society. Such notoriety made him a hero amongst the masses. But the same act, if done now – the era of rule of law, will not stand the test of mainstream standards. So any action, proposed or initiated, should adhere to the reality perspective – that is whether appropriate in real terms. The highway man turned sage Valmiki in an ancient Indian legend was a good example. Enlightened by the divine Narada, he realised that his criminal behaviour was neither befitting nor benefitting his real life and he reformed himself to be a good and useful man.

Ethics Check

Whenever we find ourselves in a dilemma, ethics check will come to our rescue. Some circumstances at times arise when we are unable to decide upon the course of action. Then consideration needs to be given to various alternatives available, legalities and moralities. Here is a scenario:

- You are a newly appointed CEO, on a visit to the capital. You ask the local officer friend to take you for a drive in the evening. The local officer takes you to a hotel and tells you that the owner likes to have business executives around, especially during dinner time to show his proximity to the rich and famous. You enter the hotel with your friend and the manager warmly welcomes both of you. After the exchange of pleasantries, the manager asks for your preference. Your

friend orders expensive dishes and all the trimmings and informs you that the hotel owner does not accept any charge from the ‘big' people for meals etc. What are you going to do?

So, in this context, one should apply an ethics check in the following manner:

- Whether the action contemplated will be in public interest?
- Whether it will make one feel happy?
- Whether it will make the larger public happy?
- Whether it is legally and morally correct?