

## **Arnab, *et al!* There are many more vital things other than Sushma bashing – *Jago Grahak Jago.***

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The media, especially the electronic one, is doing an excellent job in exposing the politicians and their wrong doings. But are they doing the same justice to unknown entities like our Council, which meticulously did its homework and saved crores of unsuspecting housewives from across the country, who were being taken for a ride by the OMCs (Oil Marketing Companies: IOCL, HP & BP) by supplying under-weighted LPG refills? The firm answer is a big NO.

Arnab and their ilk would probably consider the Balance Sheet of the story they are going to carry. Politicians are bashed by everyone and they enjoy not so good esteem among the common man and their TV viewers. So, they will readily gobble it up as a valour which entails all commendation. TRP will go up! All this on the Assets side. While on the Liability side, there is hardly any. Politicians hardly have the time nor the scruples nor the authority to pull up such adventurers, even if they are found to be wrong. Further, the garb of “Freedom of Press” gives them the utmost protection, even when they do not deserve in some cases. At the same time, this same Press or Media, do they exhibit the same enthusiasm and courage to highlight the shortcomings of the judiciary? Our experience shows that even in genuine cases, as in ours, the media prefers to remain silent rather than speak the truth and run the risk of earning the displeasure of all powerful judiciary. This is not a good omen for a healthy democracy to flourish.

On 20<sup>th</sup> July 2013, this author participated in the ‘OPEN HOUSE’ organised by ‘The Hindu’, rightfully the leader among all the English newspapers, at its headquarters in Chennai, with the noble idea of getting to know the feedback from the readers. During this interaction, this author pointed out the big flaw in the Supreme Court judgement in the LPG (Indane) case had not been published, in spite of the wider ramifications of this case, which involved an estimated loss of over Rs. 65,000 crores to the unsuspecting housewives across the country. Though, the Act provided for imposing a penalty of a minimum of Rs. 3,250 crores on the erring Oil Company (IOCL), Supreme Court preferred not to examine the issues for which the Appeal was preferred by the Council, a voluntary organisation sustaining on meagre resources. Pat came the explanation from the then Editor that even on that date they had published an Editorial against the verdict of the Supreme Court, in the LGBT Case (Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals and Trans-genders), meaning to say that they are indeed having the gumption and courage to differ from the Supreme Court and are not hesitant to publish the same. Obviously, the newspaper or the media feels comfortable to handle only such legal issues with alacrity which are already highlighted and in the public domain or which helps in

garnering more market-share, with least risk. Incidentally, our case story is yet to see the light of the day through this great newspaper, though this author as per the suggestion of the then Editor gave an article for publishing in the “*Open Page*” of the paper, the next day of the event itself.

Arnab and their ilk, after enjoying the distinction of being one of the pillars of the Indian democracy, do not appear to be too keen to take that role seriously. But they all stand for a new breed of journalism, which is dictated by convenience rather than principles. In our LPG case, to highlight the shortcomings in the Supreme Court verdict, Press was briefed through the Press Clubs at Chennai, Delhi and Rourkela. In addition, efforts were taken and journalists of important TV channels, Newspapers, including Times Now, NDTV, etc. were contacted in person and information shared, with hardly any outcome from such initiatives. It is pertinent to note that we had relentlessly gone up to filing the Curative Petition, to cure the obvious flaws in the SC judgement, but without any tangible results.

When one comes out with “*Lalitgate*”, other one comes out with “*Vyapam*” to keep the political soap going, so that their TRPs may not falter and their market-share is retained. Such telecasts are continued for weeks, non-stop, to garner public applause. But why not an “*Indanegate*” or a “*consumergate*” to make a positive contribution to the society. I do not think anybody cares. They also may not have an inkling that such voluntary efforts unless they are patronised or rewarded appropriately, will meet with a natural death and all the so called special efforts made from time to time by the government and their agencies for invigorating the voluntary movement will tantamount to growing the plantain trees in the desert.

“*Jago Grahak Jago*” can be meaningful only when such slogans have a real meaning. After waking up where he will go? To an indifferent government machinery? Or to a casual and whimsical judiciary? Or to an unprincipled media? While all the public ire and media scrutiny is limited to the Legislature, other three enjoy at the cost of a silent society. This does not bode well for a nation seeking to become a super economic power. ■

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