

Of corruption

by Suchita Malik

WE Indians are always fond of basking in the glory of our ancient civilisation and our so-called "moral values". But corruption has totally changed our set of values itself. Corrupt public servants were social outcasts till the sixties; they started gaining acceptance during the seventies and acquired respectability after mid-eighties. Corruption has become a part of our life now and a daughter's father is occasionally seen to be searching a son-in-law in a post carrying high potential for *upar ki kamai*. The irony is that the receiver of illegal gratification is the most aggrieved one when it's his turn to give. A friend once casually remarked that corruption received acceptability at the national level when Mrs Indira Gandhi once remarked that it was a global phenomenon. It has got institutionalised now.

But the question is if it is "available" only in India. We heard a lot of NRIs grumbling about it when they come here. Those coming from the developed world say that it doesn't affect the common man's life there. You don't have to pay for getting a ration card or a social security card, certainly not for getting your electricity bill corrected, getting your driving licence, for keeping your telephone line working or buy a cinema ticket. I would have gladly accepted their version but for my last day's experience, while leaving Scotland after a year's stay, which I am itching to share with the readers.

It so happened that we were on our way back to India after our year-long sojourn in Glasgow, the cultural capital of Scotland. We had gathered memorable sweet experiences with the Scottish

people. Having packed our luggage (some 12 odd voluminous boxes for four of us), we reached the bus-terminus with a heavy heart. The coach at Buchanan bus-station was to leave at 11 p.m. so as to reach the Manchester International Airport at 4 a.m. where we had to check in at 4.40 a.m. for our flight to India. The whole arrangement was cutting it a bit too fine but we had taken the risk keeping their assured time-delivery systems.

The coach arrived 10 minutes earlier than the scheduled time and the driver's assistant started checking the passengers in. The driver started keeping the luggage of the passengers in the huge panels on both sides of the coach. Those coaches have enough space to accommodate substantial volume and quantities of luggage boxes. The drivers have an equally wonderful memory of remembering each passenger's luggage. We patiently waited for our turn and were a little apprehensive since our luggage was a little excessive on account of our leaving that country forever. The driver looked at our boxes, gave us a dirty glance and refused point-blank to accommodate it. We tried very hard to reason it out with him. "No way! This is cargo, not baggage. This will not go in my coach at any cost", he declared non-chalantly. All our repeated entreaties that "we will miss our flight at Manchester" fell on deaf ears. Even the intervention from National Express Inspector failed to work.

In a bid to make peace, my husband offered to buy another ticket for the excess baggage but the man won't budge. We were almost on the verge of

a breakdown when our "Punjabi-turned-Glaswegian" landlord, who had come to bid us farewell, consoled us to relax. He assured us that the driver was just throwing tantrums and couldn't afford to leave us behind. Meanwhile, the driver busied himself with other passengers and pretended a stiff upper-lip. He even delayed the coach departure by 10 minutes. Suddenly, he went behind the coach and beckoned my husband from there. Still in a pensive mood, my husband went to him and lo! the driver told him to get the luggage from the back side. Beaming with joy, my husband thanked him profusely. But the driver said with a malicious glint, "Hey, man! you are going to pay me for that!". "Of course! yes", said my better-half, still thinking that he had to buy an extra ticket.

The baggage was properly stacked by the driver himself and then he looked expectantly at us. My husband took out a twenty pound note and was about to hand it over to him asking for a ticket when our landlord intervened, "Veer ji, what are you doing? Let me handle." Our friend took out a five-pounder, quietly sneaked it into the driver's hand, gave him a hug and told him to have a drink and enjoy himself. The driver accepted gratefully, gave us all a broad grin, thanked us, took his seat and started the coach. My husband only said: "He did not know his full worth at this juncture". Throughout the journey his behaviour was excellent. Reclining on my cushioned seat, I couldn't help thinking be it Delhi or Glasgow, "Frailty, thy name iser, God knows!".